



THE DUKES COUNTY INTELLIGENCER

VOL. 49, No. 3

FEBRUARY 2008

THUNDERBIRD



SLANTING WINTER LIGHT caught the cover of a 1780 shopkeeper's daybook just so, revealing the image of an ancient American Indian icon — and a voyage of discovery was begun. Authors Jill Bouck and Jim Richardson recount an adventure into 'the archaeology of museum collections.'



Katharine Cornell, the Chip-Chop Years
Thomas Goethals Recalls Craig Kingsbury

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The *Intelligencer* welcomes contributions. Story ideas, outlines or manuscripts may be sent by post office or e-mail; we do respond to correspondence. Letters to the editor intended for publication are also welcome.

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Enduring Icon: Thunderbird Rises From Cover of a Merchant's Book

An Image, Impressed on the Hide,
Represents Sky Deity of Many Tribes

by JILL BOUCK
and JIM RICHARDSON

IN A RECENT ARTICLE in the magazine of the American Association of Museums, Steven H. Miller, executive director of the Morris Museum in Morristown, N.J. discussed what he called the "mystique" of what museums own but do not have on exhibit:

The public thinks we have secret treasures, hidden away. How often do we hear: "What a shame the museum can't show all its collections?" Or, "What a waste to have so much out of sight" or, "Why do they keep taking stuff when they can't put it on exhibit?" Collections held in storage are equated with collections lost.

Because exhibitions are the most obvious aspect of museums, it is natural to assume that collections exist to be shown. Storage is seen as contradicting this practice. The confusion frequently arises in talks with potential collection donors. Often you hear, "I don't want to give anything to the museum if it will just be put in storage." Some donors

JILL BOUCK is curator of the Martha's Vineyard Museum. JIM RICHARDSON is an anthropology professor at the University of Pittsburgh, curator emeritus of anthropology at the Carnegie Museum of Natural History and an MVM board member. This article is based on a paper they presented at a meeting of the Eastern States Archaeological Federation in Fitchburg, Mass., in 2006 and was published in *Archaeology of Eastern North America* 2007, Volume 25: 11-20. See this publication for the full bibliography that was used in writing this article. The authors would like to acknowledge the fact that this discovery might not have been made had it not been for the National Endowment for the Humanities Preservation and Access grant funding that made the initial survey project possible. They would also like to thank the Mudge Foundation for a grant that has made the testing on the hide possible as well as additional paper testing, conservation work and consultation with numerous scholars.

are so adamant about this they create their own museums instead of seeing their collections "languish in a museum basement." But this opinion allows the museum staff to extol the value and necessity of collections storage. It is an opportunity to explain conservation.

Museum storage is profound and wonderful. The full character of an institution is understood through the totality of what it has acquired and preserved. Collections are the materials upon which museums justify their existence and build their programs. Good storage provides a place for current and future collections to be safely held, seen, consulted, and applied to a myriad of uses. Good storage helps us understand an institution's collecting strengths and weaknesses. Good storage represents the breadth and depth of a museum's soul.¹

The object and library collections of the Martha's Vineyard Museum are used constantly, not only for exhibits and educational programs on the museum's campus — but in the schools and many other island organizations and businesses. These resources are also extensively mined by scholars and genealogists, authors, journalists and filmmakers. As a result, the rich collections of MVM have been published widely to a vast public and academic audience. In any given year, the MVM records a long list of publications and projects that drew from the museum's collections.

There is a new field of scholarship, not identified precisely, that could be called the archaeology of museum collections. As so many museums have collections that have been accumulating for decades, exciting finds occur with relative frequency throughout the United States when a particular research investigation delves into the objects or documents in museum storage areas.

And as new scientific technologies evolve and new fields of scholarship unfold, collections can be re-examined for new discoveries. Re-examining museum collections is a field that will continue well into the future for a variety of investigators in the benign environment of a storage facility or library archive.

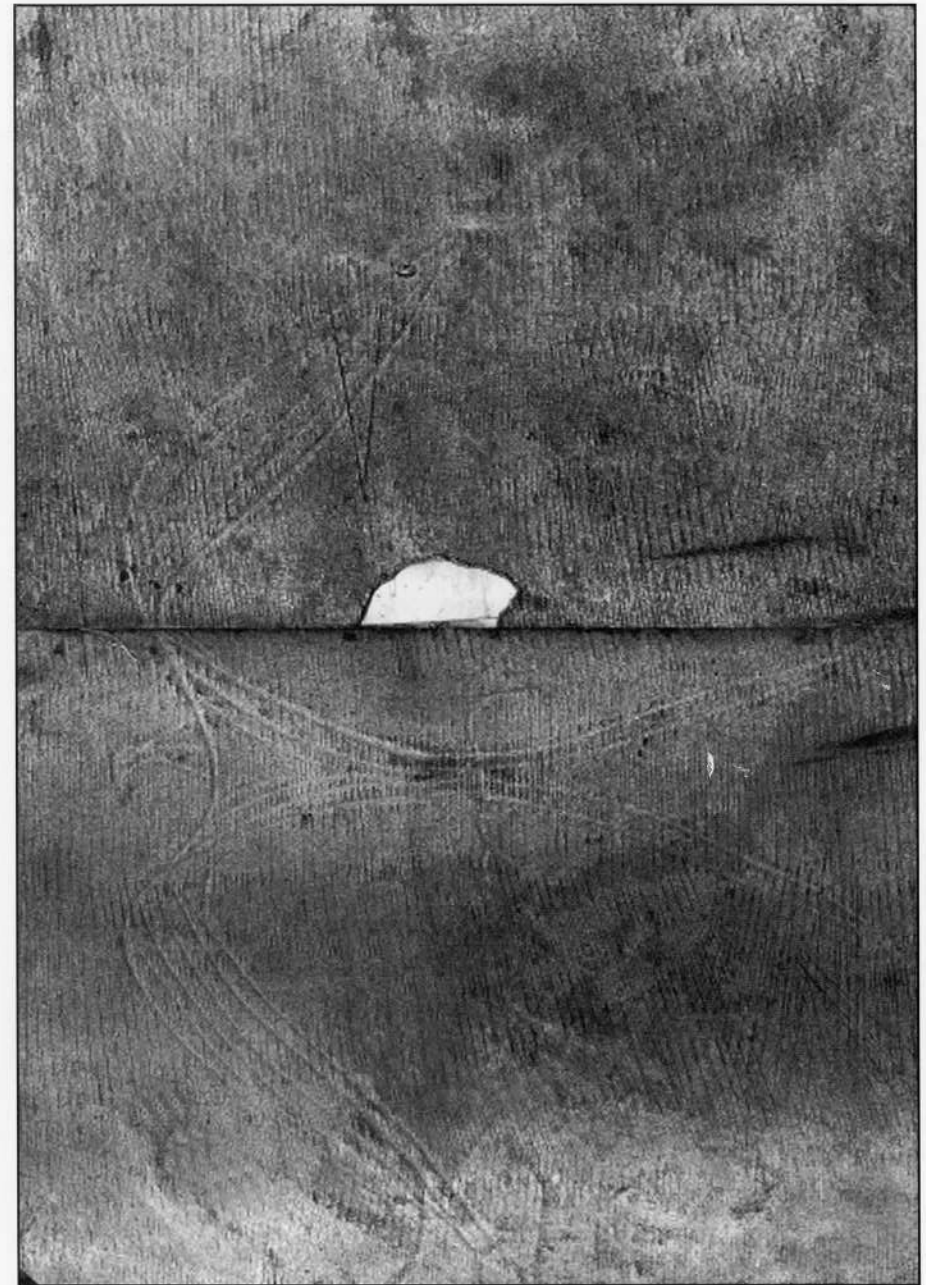
Book Number 65 Yields a Surprise

A new discovery among old documents is the basis of current study at the Martha's Vineyard Museum.

For authors and scholars, a frequently used resource at the museum is a collection of early daybooks — store account ledgers — owned by various Vineyard businesses or provisioners from the 18th through the early 20th centuries.

These daybooks — there are some 165 of them in all — record the out-right purchase or frequent bartering of goods and services for store items. Entries contain the date, name of customer, place of residence, items purchased and the amount charged.

¹ "Museum Storage: Out of Sight, Out of Mind," Steven Miller, *Museum News*, February 2006.



This composite photo shows the Thunderbird image as it wraps around the back and front covers of the Matthew Mayhew daybook.

Many client accounts in these books continue through time, sometimes for years.

The books are fascinating on many levels.

For one, they record the cost of doing business. Some of the services required in return for items purchased were nothing short of indenture for the Island's Wampanoag — echoes of "I owe my soul to the company store." Patrons often were asked to work at clearing fields or cutting wood, or to perform other manual labor jobs for days or even weeks to pay for simple store purchases. John Joel Jr. of Chappaquiddick, a Wampanoag, had to pledge two-thirds of his wages from a whaling voyage, as well as other items of barter, for his store-bought goods.

On another level, the daybooks contain details of the patron's family, particular skills and employment history. They suggest what the purchasers liked to eat, drink and wear. They show when they needed a burial shroud in which to bury their mother.

The daybooks of earlier centuries are like the web-cams of today, offering a glimpse of daily life in the kind of detail missing from more formal public outlets of information such as newspapers or legal documents. Vineyard populations underrepresented in the public records of the 18th and early 19th centuries — the Wampanoag, Portuguese and African-Americans — find a confirmation of their very existence in a daybook entry.

Six years ago curator Jill Bouck applied for and received a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities for an important archival project: to upgrade the management, access and environmental storage conditions of these volumes. The grant paid for the materials needed and the services of professional paper conservator Paul Messier to assess each volume, and to direct the staff and volunteers in creating individual storage boxes for each book, cataloging and properly storing each volume.

As work neared its end in the spring of 2003, Jill returned to two or three of the earliest and most interesting volumes to more completely catalog their contents. Book Number 65, kept between the years of 1780 and 1785 by Matthew Mayhew of South Water Street in Edgartown, has been in the museum's collections for at least 50 years. Many scholars, authors and museum staff have handled the volume; its contents quoted in numerous publications.

The volume differs from the other daybooks in the collection in one aspect — it is the only volume with a hide cover. And on a late March afternoon, in the slanting light of a basement storage room, Jill for the first time noticed what appeared to be a slight leaf impression in the upper left corner of the front cover of the book. Turning the book over, she found that the leaf was not a leaf at all, but the right-hand portion of a larger



Daybook 65, kept by Matthew Mayhew of Edgartown between 1780 and 1785 and shown here in an edge view, is the only volume in the Museum's collection of daybooks to have a hide cover.

image: There on the back, impressed into the hide and perfectly rendered, was the image of an ancient American Indian icon, the Thunderbird.

Thunderbird representations are found throughout native North America; the mythical Thunderbird is a sky deity of many tribes, past and present. It is thought to be a depiction of a raptor, such as an eagle or hawk.

The Thunderbird holds sway over the upper world while the underwater panther or serpent rules the underworld. In this world view, the sky (Thunderbird) and lower or underwater deity (panther or serpent) vie with each other for control of the spiritual world. The Thunderbird causes thunder by flapping its wings and throwing lightning bolts from its eyes to combat the underwater creatures. Thunderbirds also are associated with death; they aid the souls of the deceased to find an appropriate village in the sky to spend their eternity. In the social systems of many Indian tribes, there are Thunderbird clans and other kinship groups that identify with this deity.

Stories about Thunderbirds, of ancient origin, indicate they were important to many tribes across North America. At this time, our research indicates that this Thunderbird is one of the most elaborate yet traditional historic examples of such a bird from New England. We are calling it "the Michelangelo" of Thunderbird motifs.

The Matthew Mayhew Daybook

Matthew Mayhew (1723-1799) was a boat builder, the great-great-great grandson of Thomas Mayhew Sr. (1592-1682), who obtained settlement rights to Martha's Vineyard in October of 1641.



The Mayhew house in Edgartown, circa 1890, about 100 years after Matthew Mayhew kept his books there. Photo from the MVM Coffin Collection.

Thomas Mayhew Jr. (1620/21-1657) was sent to settle in Edgartown, the Vineyard's first European town, becoming the first missionary to bring Christianity to the Vineyard Wampanoag. Upon his death at sea, his father and his son Matthew (1647-1720) carried on the mission work, and grandson Micajah (1697-1760) was a farmer and owner of a store and tavern on South Water Street.

The owner of the daybook, Micajah's son Matthew, took over his father's store in 1760. The store sold liquor, general merchandise and lumber, both through purchase and barter.²

The daybook is largely a record of 1780-1785, but there are sporadic single accounts beginning as early as 1766; these are apparently carryovers from an earlier book.

The book consists of 10½ paper sheets, 15.5 inches in width and 12.75 inches tall, folded to make 20 pages with account entries on both sides. (There were originally 11 sheets, but at some point one-half sheet was torn out.) The pages are hand sewn into the hide cover.

Each of the sheets has a distinctive watermark, a Britannia figure in an oval with the letters TB at the oval's base, and, on the reverse, a crown with GR (Georges Rex) under it. TB are the initials of Thomas Budgen, a papermaker in Kent, England, in the last quarter of the 18th century.³

2 *The History of Martha's Vineyard Dukes County Massachusetts*, Charles E. Banks, Dukes County Historical Society 1911, Volume 2:180.

3 *A Catalogue of Foreign Watermarks Found on Paper Used in America 1700-1835*; Thomas Gravell and George Miller, Garland Publishing, 1983.

The daybook consists of two sections, the first of 18 double-sided pages listing 73 English surname accounts and six Wampanoag accounts. The second section has accounts written upside-down in relation to the first section, and consists of four Wampanoag accounts on two double-sided pages. The practice of listing Wampanoag entries upside-down in relation to English customers is found in other Vineyard daybooks.

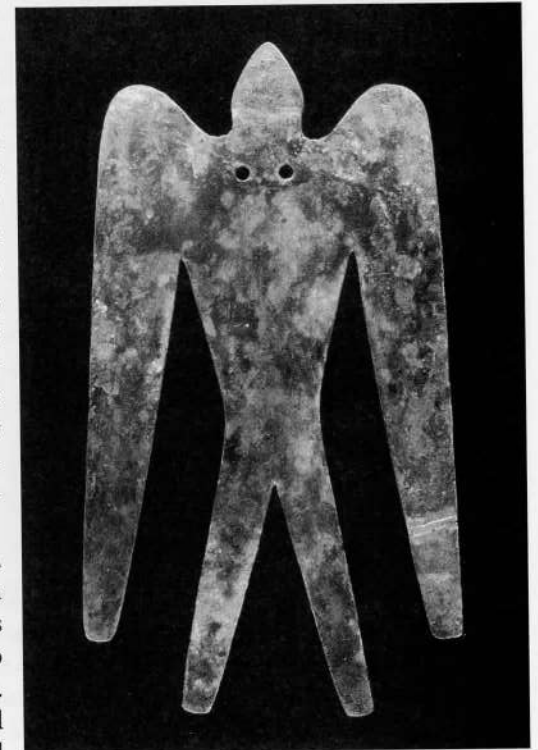
The Wampanoag and Christianity

From the English viewpoint, the Indian Christian missions of eastern and southeastern Massachusetts were most successful on Martha's Vineyard. By 1674, only one family of 300 or so Wampanoag families was not practicing the Christian religion and the 1,500 Christian Wampanoags on the Vineyard surpassed the number of converts on the mainland.⁴ As David Silverman relates, this was due to close interaction between the English and Wampanoag on the Island, and reflected the cautious respect the Mayhews had for Wampanoag land rights, knowledge of the traditional culture, their fluency in Wampanoag, and their training and use of Wampanoag missionaries.

The Wampanoag population, estimated to be at least 3,000 in 1642, was decimated by diseases soon after and had dropped to below 1,000 by the mid-1700s. The English missionaries targeted traditional Wampanoag spiritual and cultural beliefs as Christianity gained a strong foothold here. Zachariah Howwoswee (1736-1821) was the last Wampanoag preacher to give sermons in his own language.

With English cultural systems established in 18th century Vineyard life, the Wampanoag entered the cash-based economy and bought ever-

4 Material in this section is reported in *Faith and Boundaries: Colonists, Christianity, and Community among the Wampanoag Indians of Martha's Vineyard 1600-1871*, David J. Silverman, Cambridge University Press, 2005.



Copper thunderbird from Smyth Site in Amoskeag Falls, N.H. Photo © Peabody Museum, Harvard University.

increasing amounts of food and goods including cloth and clothing from the local stores. With English land purchases from them and introduced European agriculture and herding, the Wampanoag changed their traditional subsistence practices, not only adopting English ones, but serving as laborers, much of this as debt servitude.

Still, while the Island's Wampanoag publicly embraced English values and culture, it was highly unlikely that centuries of their own rich culture and beliefs would be discarded.

Wampanoags in the Daybook

Only 10 Wampanoag transactions are listed by name in the Mayhew daybook; all of these customers were from Chappaquidick. For example, John Joel Jr. purchased corn, beans, molasses, pork, a great coat and handkerchief from the store in 1781 and 1782 and settled his account with a pig, a barrel of whale oil and two-thirds share of his wages from a whaling voyage. John Joel Jr. died sometime before August 1783.⁵

Another Wampanoag customer, Israel Cagnahew, lived near Joel on Chappaquidick; his name appears in contemporary documents from 1773-1784 and in the daybook in 1783. Items purchased by Cagnahew or his wife include: candles, sugar, flour, tea, tobacco, shoes, a silk handkerchief and cloth for an apron. The accounts were settled by Captain James Whipple, John Pease and William Roche and Son, possibly related to Cagnahew's employment on whaleships. Israel Cagnahew was the only surviving male heir (a grandson) to Jacob Seiknout, a sachem of Chappaquidick. His mother was Hepzibah (Seiknout) Cagnahew, "Queen Sachim of Chapoquidick and Mosskeekett and right heir unto Jacob Secknout." His father was Samuel Cagnahew Jr. (Cackenehue), who was paid as a minister in 1764. He died in late 1784.

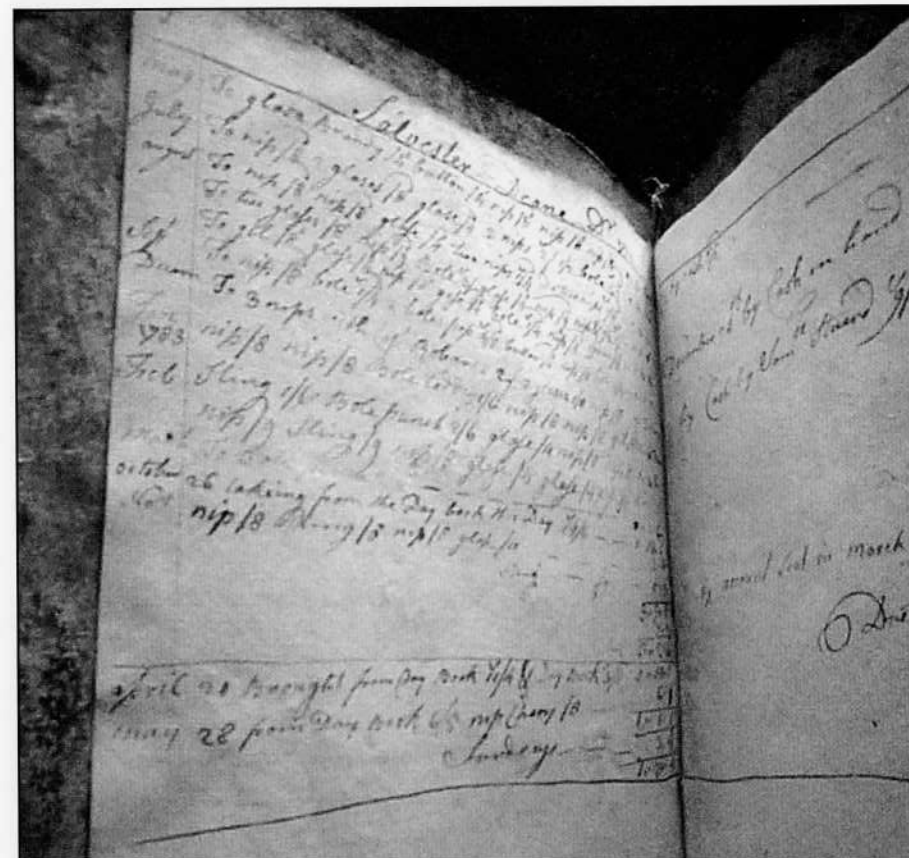
The Mayhew Thunderbird

The Mayhew Thunderbird covers most of the back of the daybook cover. The bird is 12 ½ inches from wing tip to wing tip and 9 inches from head to tip of the tail feathers. The head is turned left with a recognizable beak, and the wings and body are of stylized feathers. There are two talons projecting at the juncture of the body and tail feathers.

The daybook cover is of stiff animal hide. Its raw interior still shows signs of blood stains from its preparation. After the Thunderbird was impressed, a tool, with multiple cutting "teeth" was used to make parallel incised marks over it.

The cover may have been cut down from a larger hide, and, if so, great

⁵ Information on the Wampanoag individuals named in this section is generally from *The Wampanoag Genealogical History of Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts*, Jerome D. Segel and R. Andrew Pierce, Genealogical Publishing Co., 2003.



Inside the daybook, records of shop transactions from between 1780 and 1785, kept by shopkeeper Matthew Mayhew of South Water Street, Edgartown.

care was taken to ensure that the Thunderbird remained intact; most of the bird impression is on the back cover, which is the only way, after the folding of the hide, that the design could be preserved as a whole.

The questions of when and how the hide came into the possession of Matthew Mayhew are unknown; we also do not know when the Thunderbird image was impressed. Dating and resin tests are now underway on the hide to determine its date and animal species.

Thunderbird Time Depth

The Thunderbird is usually portrayed as a bird with a head, wings, two feet and tail, as it is in this example, or as a figure X. Its depictions range from headless triangular figures to recognizable birds or humans dressed as birds, reflecting shamanistic practices.

Such images date back thousands of years, and continue up to the pres-

ent day: Over the last 500 years, Thunderbird symbolism has been and still is portrayed on American Indian bags, clothing and art forms.

Both the Thunderbird and the underwater panther and serpent images are found in ancient rock art and artifacts. Underwater serpents are usually portrayed as recognizable snakes; one of these, covered in red ochre and found at the Titticut site in Bridgewater, Massachusetts, is considered to be 3,000 to 5,000 years old.

One of the earliest known examples of the depiction of the X figure Thunderbird is from the Adena culture Cresup burial mound in West Virginia, where a stone gorget is dated 2,000 years old. Also a recently discovered petroglyph site in Ohio is replete with Thunderbirds, but it is undated. There is also an Adena blocked-end tube smoking pipe with a Thunderbird with three undecipherable letters or marks beneath it from Swanton, Vt.; the bird and marks may have been added later.

At the Wapanucket site on Assawompsett Lake, Middleborough, Mass., there are two pebbles with incised Thunderbird motifs, one of which is 4,300 years old.

On Martha's Vineyard, the X figure appears on a gorget fragment from West Tisbury and a hammer stone from Vineyard Haven. The hammer stone has two complete X figures on one side, and on the other a partial figure. In an archaeological survey and excavations by Samuel Guernsey of Harvard University in 1912 and 1913 on the east shore of Menemsha Pond, the trench in Site 2 produced a pottery piece with a headless V-shaped Thunderbird or human-like figure with arms that Dr. James B. Petersen of the University of Vermont dated to between A.D. 800 and 1300.

A pottery fragment from the Sebonac Creek site on Long Island was excavated by Mark Harrington in 1902, and its design was interpreted by Harrington as a Thunderbird, although it is similar to a famous Hopewell culture (A.D. 0-500) pipe from Revere Beach, Mass., that has human-like figures, possibly representing shamans, with similarities to some found at Machias Bay, Me.

Historic period Thunderbirds include a copper Thunderbird from the Smyth site, located on the east side of the Merrimack River overlooking Amoskeag Falls, Manchester, N.H., dating to circa A.D. 1700.

It is clear such images of the Thunderbird, a critical part of Wampanoag religion, have considerable time depth, dating to at least 5,000 years ago — and possibly earlier.

Conclusions

The dating of the Mayhew Thunderbird is uncertain, but it dates to at least 1780. It is tempting to suggest that the image was placed on the daybook hide much earlier, that the hide might have been an early possession

of either Thomas Sr. or Jr. that Matthew Mayhew found it in the ancestral home in Edgartown.

There is another possibility. Matthew married Phoebe Manning of Nantucket and lived on that island as a boat builder for 16 years, producing six children. He and his family only returned to Edgartown on the death of his father in 1760 to take over the homestead and family business, where he continued his profession as a boat builder. Thus the hide that became the daybook cover may have come from the Wampanoag of Nantucket.

The testing underway may answer a couple of our questions, but the primary question remains — how did a sensational piece of traditional Wampanoag artwork end up on a Mayhew possession? Is it as simple as a store transaction barter? But if that is the case, then why is this the only manuscript in the MVM collection to have such an image?

What we do know is that this is yet another case of a sensational artifact lying undiscovered but preserved for decades in a museum collection. One wonders what other discoveries will be made at the Martha's Vineyard Museum as the collections are completely catalogued and inventoried in anticipation of a new museum in West Tisbury.

The View from Aquinnah: 'A Beautiful Example'

AS A MEMBER of the Aquinnah Wampanoag Tribe, I feel that the Matthew Mayhew daybook is a very important piece of history. The Thunderbird on the daybook is a testament to the continued use of Wampanoag traditional art and knowledge thought by many to have been lost to our people long ago. In truth, this traditional knowledge has survived in our community through our oral tradition and cultural practices. According to Wampanoag tradition, Thunderbird wields lightning and thunder generated from the movement of its wings. The Thunderbird represents great power and is a being that exists for the protection of our people from the malevolent beings of the underworld and maintains balance between the two worlds. When I first saw the daybook, I was extremely excited to see such fine traditional artwork from this time period, a rarity to say the least. It is a beautiful example of our artwork, and we are very fortunate to have it today.

Tobias J. Vanderhoop
Aquinnah Wampanoag

‘The First Lady of Off-Islanders,’ And The Making of Chip-Chop

Katharine Cornell Fell in Love with Tashmoo,
And Stayed On to Become a Good Neighbor

by JOHN WALTER

SHE NEVER FORGOT her first visit to the Vineyard: “The memory,” she wrote, “is almost tangible.” It was at the dawn of the 20th century, and she was perhaps eight years old. They arrived on the old sidewheeler, the *Uncatena*.

She traveled with her Grandmother Plimpton, a music lover and a tall, imposing personage, “a grand woman, large in every way. She was a religious woman — at that time family prayers were held morning and evening in that branch of my family. She was a good Presbyterian, and very firm about it.” Grandmother Plimpton was a widow, and wore the crepe veil and black gloves of mourning. Her knees were bad; she had been thrown from a carriage. Her granddaughter, walking with her hand in hand, limped in sympathy, and trusted Grandmother Plimpton implicitly, more than her own parents — “she saw me more clearly.” As a child at prayer, “I kneeled at her knees with my head in her lap, which implanted the smell of black so deeply in my mind and nose.”

She remembered sitting, surrounded by straw, in ox-carts, being pulled up from the bluffs, and “the wheel tracks of the road with the long grass in the center, and roads that branched off to small cabins and shacks, and then ran down to the blue lagoon.”

They stayed at Innisfail, the hotel in the section of Tisbury then called Oklahoma, run by Tom Karl, a professional singer of light opera. Rocking chairs sat on the long verandas, and the public rooms were decorated with props from Karl’s shows. Upstairs, ropes hung from the windows served

JOHN WALTER, editor of this journal, was raised in Cleveland, where Katharine Cornell performed at the Hanna Theatre in Playhouse Square, constructed in 1921, still in operation.



Katharine Cornell with Illo, the favorite dachshund, in her arms, Sonia at her feet, at Chip-Chop (1939).

as fire escapes. At the dinner hour, musicians or actors put on impromptu performances; as a child, she was too young to be at dinner, but she listened, longingly, from the upstairs room to the music floating up from below.

And there were other sensory memories from the visit: the feel of the hot sun on the sand, and a particular outdoor aroma. Years later, encountering the scent in a city flower shop or on a rural road, she would think of the Vineyard. And when in 1936, as an adult, Katharine Cornell came back here for the first time, she drove around the Lagoon until she found it again; it was the smell of sweet fern and bayberry.¹



By 1936, she was a star. Katharine Cornell, Helen Hayes, Lynn Fontaine — the three were, by general agreement, the best actresses in America.

Cornell had planned to spend that summer in Majorca, but events — the war in Spain — intervened. Instead, on a friend's suggestion, she came to a rented camp at Tashmoo — and spotted the place she wanted to build a house, an 18-acre peninsula with the lake on one side, Vineyard Sound on the other.

Across a half mile of dunes, over a tired bridge, down “an uncertain road with sand and pine needles beneath and tree boughs meeting overhead” was the way to town.² With the headlands of East and West Chop in sight, she would call the place “Chip-Chop.”

And thus began a run of extraordinary summers, a show that lasted 30 years.

Katharine Cornell's Chip-Chop had a semi-permanent set of regulars, an extended, unorthodox family: Cornell and her wayward husband, Guthrie McClintic; her longtime business manager, Gertrude Macy; the writer/lyricist Nancy Hamilton; Hamilton's writing partner, Morgan (Budd) Lewis; the actress Brenda Forbes and actor Brian Ahearne; various cooks and maids; and, until her death in 1940, Laura Elliot, a teacher and longtime confidante.³

But it was the rotating list of other guests over the years that really rounded out the cast: Lillian Gish, Noel Coward, Rex Harrison, Laurence Olivier, Vivian Leigh, Martha Graham, Helen Keller, Eleanor Roosevelt.

1 These recollections Cornell scrawled, in the almost indecipherable handwriting that had been the cause of amusement all her life, on a small notepad, as she was preparing material for a documentary about the Vineyard in 1971. The reminiscences share the page with her notes on a recipe for veal rump roast. These and other papers relating to the documentary are part of the collection at the Martha's Vineyard Museum.

2 Ruth Woodbury Sedgwick, in the introduction to *I Wanted to Be an Actress: The Autobiography of Katharine Cornell*, Random House, 1938.

3 In death, Elliot stayed at Chip-Chop, too. Cornell buried her ashes under a juniper tree outside the front door.

Supporting roles were played by various animals — a cow, and a horse, innumerable chickens, at least three pigs. Underfoot were a variety of dachshunds.

There were clambakes on the beach, and agreeable summer afternoons at tables under a courtyard arbor, and nights gathered around the stone fireplace. There was swimming, and ping pong, and bridge. There were books read aloud, and cocktails served. Informality was prized, as was spending time outdoors, and the ability, as Chip-Chop evolved into a rambling series of connected but separate structures and porches, to get away by oneself.

And always — in every one of the black-and-white snapshots that recorded the visitors and events of these passing days, from 1937 to 1966 — there was the endless Island sand and sky.

Katharine Cornell was not the Vineyard's first famous seasonal resident,⁴ and Chip-Chop had neither the intellectual heft nor the free-spirited reputation found in the '20s and '30s at such Up-Island

enclaves as Seven Gates, Windy Gates and Barnhouse. But she left a more lasting mark: Katharine Cornell became a neighbor. She is the model for many notables who have graced Vineyard summers since — those who have found welcome and acceptance here, and who have responded with interest and investment in Island affairs. In the ongoing drama of how the Vineyard absorbs its Celebrity Summer Crowd, the mistress of Chip-Chop was an extended, memorable, classy first act.

4 Who was? Arthur Railton nominates Sol Smith Russell, an actor who toured the country in stage productions of the 1880s and 1890s, and built himself a summer home on Tower Hill, Edgartown; he appeared at Town Hall for a benefit for the Congregational Church. Another actor of the period, Marie Burroughs, also had a home on Summer Hill; she, like Katharine Cornell, played a celebrated Juliet.



Guthrie McClintic, Noel Coward and Cleo (1947).



Katharine Cornell (1937). McClintic described her 'mystic aura . . . a curious haunting luminosity.'

Actress and Manager

Brooks Atkinson, the *New York Times* critic, called her "an actress of the first order," and there was no denying Cornell's hold on audiences in such dramas as *The Barretts of Wimpole Street* (1931-32), where she played English poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and *Romeo and Juliet* (1934-35).

Born in 1893, raised in Buffalo, "Kit" Cornell began acting at boarding school, premiered professionally with the Washington Square Players in New York in 1916 (she had a single line in *Bushido*), and gained experience in stock companies in Buffalo and Detroit. In 1918-19, she had her first notable role, in the touring company of a melodrama; and by 1919 was cast (as Jo) in *Little Women* in London.

She was slim and fit, with ginger colored eyes, prominent eyebrows arched over high cheekbones, dark brown hair. George Bernard Shaw saw something in a photo of her that captivated him: "a gorgeous dark lady from the cradle of the human race — wherever that was — Ceylon, Sumatra, Hilo, or the southernmost corner of the Garden of Eden!"⁵

She captivated a young casting director, too: Guthrie McClintic. They were married in the fall of 1921 and in the years to come he directed all her plays and helped shape her career.

By 1931, they had created a producing association, Katharine Cornell Presents, and through that association undertook a strategy that spread her fame across the country: The company played "Barretts" for a year on Broadway and then loaded the full, original cast on trains for a 20,000-

5 *The New York Times*, June 10, 1974.

mile cross-country barnstorming tour, performing *Barretts* in rotation with *Romeo and Juliet* and Shaw's *Candida*, in 77 cities and towns. It set their pattern for the next decade, the company alternating Broadway runs with road tours.

Through these appearances, thousands of what we would later call Middle Americans saw her work first-hand.

And through Katharine Cornell Presents, she and McClintic had a role in giving the careers of many young actors a professional boost: Orson Welles, Charlton Heston, Kirk Douglas, Tony Curtis, Eli Wallach, Christopher Plummer and Marlon Brando all appeared in her shows before they became household names.

In the spring of 1936, the year she came back to the Vineyard, Cornell was at the peak of her powers: She was on Broadway with the title role in Bernard Shaw's *Saint Joan*. Eleven years later, at the age of 54, she had a remarkable run in *Antony and Cleopatra*. With one exception, Cornell made no movies,⁶ and appeared, toward the end of her career, only a few times on television. In the 1950s, the choice of roles and opportunities dwindled,

6 The single film was *Stage Door Canteen* (1943), in which she and a score of other stars appeared to promote the war effort and chronicle their real-life volunteer work at a serviceman's social center in New York. In the film, a serviceman discovers Cornell serving food, and recognizes her: "Our drama coach at school has your picture; he says we haven't lived until we've seen you play Juliet." He feeds her Romeo's line from the orchard scene — "Lady, by yonder blessed moon I swear" — and she responds, 14 lines of dialogue, ending with "Parting is such sweet sorrow," and tossing off a throwaway line: "A little unrationed ham being served!" It lasts less than two minutes, and — viewed 65 years later on a badly-produced DVD — is as irresistible as the day it was filmed.



Guthrie McClintic (1943). 'We talk everything over,' Cornell said, of their professional lives. 'He decides.'



Chip-Chop begins: The shingled main house, constructed in 1937.

and by the time McClintic died, in 1961, she retired.

In New York, they lived in a brownstone in Beekman Place, and, later, at Sneden's Landing, a Palisades community on the west side of the Hudson River.

In their work, the McClintics were inseparable, trusting in and advising each other; in private life, they often went separate ways.

He was garrulous, a storyteller in the late hours, a man with an explosive temper, volatile, and — according to biographer Ted Mosel — a constantly changing cast of male lovers. He was superstitious, and carried a good-luck penny in his left shoe. He was unathletic.

She was a golfer and swimmer and "spectacular tennis player — the kind that has a rather violent service and hard drives and loses games."⁷ Reserved in manner, quiet in a party crowd, she often retired early to bed in order to read. She suffered from stage fright, and was reliant on a small crew of assistants, never too far away. As a professional, she shared some of the theatrical world's idiosyncrasies (her age was mysteriously, consistently underreported — by five years — for all her working life). But she was absolutely rigorous about the work; demanding of herself and others, meticulous about arriving on time for meetings, rehearsals and performances. She avoided confrontation at all costs, Mosel says, and "found rapport and spiritual affinity more important than physical gratification.... Her closest relationships, more often with women as the years went by, might aptly be called 'passionate friendships.'"⁸

7 Gilbert Seldes, "Actress-Manager," *New Yorker*, Feb. 14, 1931, page 25.

8 Tad Mosel, *Leading Lady: The World and Theatre of Katharine Cornell*,

Yet the director and the actress remained married, and close, for 40 years. And, after initial reservations about its remoteness from the turmoil and hubbub of the city life upon which he thrived, McClintic came to love Chip-Chop, too, as she did from the start.

How the Compound Grew

Unobtrusively set among the scrub oak and dunes, as close to the water's edge as the builder could place it, Chip-Chop was, first, a small, shingled main house, with living room, bedroom and bath, a small kitchen, a maid's room and lavatory, and a dining porch. Nearby was a boathouse with bedroom and bath.

Designed by the architect Eric Gugler (who also designed the home in Sneden's Landing, and who consulted on a redesign of the West Wing of the White House for President Franklin Roosevelt), the place was christened in early spring 1937; a neighbor brought champagne and fried chicken, and it was eaten over a makeshift table of carpenter's horses and planks.

The building of the place never really stopped.⁹

By the second summer, there were two adjoining guest cottages, with white stone chimneys, connected by a flagstone terrace and covered passageways.

Also added was a famous giant room (the Great Room, the Picnic Room, the Ping-Pong Room), so large (40 feet by 75 feet) that it held a grand piano, two Gothic fireplaces, a ping-pong table and a Bavarian tile stove. It

Little, Brown & Company, 1978, page 386.

⁹ A chronology of the building at Chip-Chop, and a record of its social life, including a long list of Cornell's Island friendships, was laid out in notes made by Nancy Hamilton in 1955. She was preparing a birthday present for McClintic: an elaborate wooden folding screen, four panels wide, six feet tall, on which she pasted scores of newspaper clippings, photographs and text blocks — the history of Chip-Chop. The screen, still intact but in need of restoration, is now in the collection of the Museum, and the photographs accompanying this article are part of this unique artifact.



Cornell and Nancy Hamilton playing bezique (1944).

had redwood beams, brought in from the West Coast, and long windows on each side that looked out, toward the lake on one side and the Sound on the other. A sculptor created wooden sculptures of the Zodiac (Aquarius, for Cornell; Leo, for McClintic) that hung at either end of the room.

The Great Room was connected at one end with the original house by a screened-in dining porch, and a kitchen with a skylight was added on the other side of the original house.

There was a large outdoor fireplace for barbecue-style dinners, and brackish well water to drink. What there was not, in the early years, was a telephone. (A phone was placed in the outlying barn in 1944, a house phone



Cornell and actor Clifton Webb take the carbon-neutral route to town (1943).

added in 1950. That same year, town electric replaced generator power. Never while Cornell lived there was the place weather-proofed; it had no furnace.)

Walls, floors and furniture were old pine, but there were also woods from around the world in paneling, doors and ceilings; ceiling boards in the living room were 24 inches wide and imported from Brazil.

A Gathering Place for Friends

On the sunny days of July and August, other summer Vineyarders dropped by Chip-Chop to visit: James Cagney, Pearl Buck, Lillian Hellman.

The overnight guests, up from New York or Hollywood, were headliners of a literary and dramatic world: Burgess Meredith and Gish (1938); Mildred Natwick, Lynne Fontaine and Alfred Lunt (1941); Ethel Barrymore, Somerset Maugham, Eva LeGallienne (1943); Tennessee Williams (1945-1946); Carson McCullers (1946); Cedric Hardwicke (1949). In 1950, he re-

turned, on a private plane chartered for him by Cornell, to their mutual delight); Julie Harris, Nedda and Josh Logan, Gertrude Lawrence (1952).

They scrawled their autographs on the bathroom walls.

And they joined, eagerly, in whatever projects and plans were current that year. There was always a Project.

Cornell took up refinishing old furniture as a hobby.

In the war years, there was an emphasis on gardening. The horse was brought in as a means of transportation in the gas shortages of those years (but they overfed him; he collapsed and died).

The cow provided milk; the pigs were slaughtered, and one time of that was enough. ("Pickles and Peanuts killed, cured and joylessly eaten," Nancy Hamilton reported.)

The garage and tool shed gave way to a workroom, where Cornell would practice marquetry; on a loom, she wove fabrics for McClintic's sports jackets.

And as each summer arrived, the rituals of Chip-Chop days fell quickly into place.

The hostess, up before everybody else, would go for an 8:30 swim and breakfast alone. She would be waiting for her guests, bread and toaster at hand, when they arose.

At 11 o'clock, Cornell would take the car to Vineyard Haven, to visit the market and pick up the morning mail.

At noon, everyone would go for a swim. McClintic preferred skinny dipping, and the subject became a running joke. It was said — perhaps an apocryphal story — that the kitchen was built without windows so any bather could strip down without worrying about what the servants might see.¹⁰

Dinner was served at 1:30, Cornell doing the broiling (lobster, steak, chicken or chops) on the outdoor grill. There followed naptime (Cornell would read a book or script).

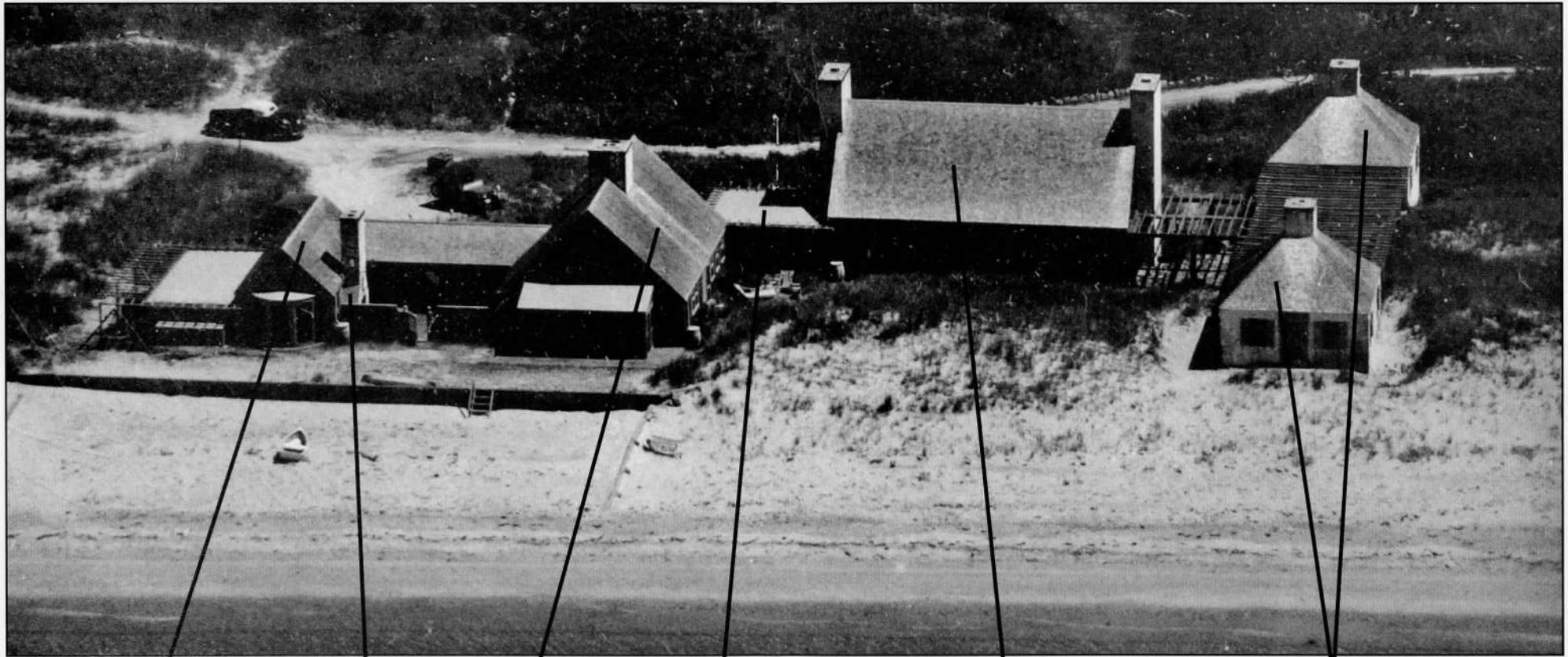
At 4 o'clock, a second trip into town. This time Cornell walked, or pad-

¹⁰ Reported in an article in *The New York Times*, August 31, 1987.



Classic Cornell, on a sunny day in town. Her hair is pulled back, the morning mail in her hand, as she runs her errands (1940).

Aerial View of Chip-Chop, 1945



Kitchen

Outdoor fireplace

Main house

Dining porch

'Great Room'

Guest cottages

dled to the head of the lake and walked the last mile from there.

Next came dinner, games in the Great Room, and reading. "Very few nights find the inhabitants of Chip-Chop up past 11 o'clock," a reporter said in the *New York Sun*.

And then it would start all over again:

In the dawn's early light of all next mornings at Chip-Chop, heavy-headed guests were only dimly aware of cottage doors being quietly opened by the First Lady of the American Theatre on all fours pushing a coffee tray as far as possible into the room without making noise, then slipping silently away.¹¹

¹¹ Mosel, page 416.

Clambakes and Hurricanes

Cornell took endless walks along the beach, accompanied by as many as seven dachshunds.¹² She went down to the jetty to watch the fishermen and, occasionally, to fish for herself. Bottom fishing from her rowboat, "I was out for flounder and scup, which I loved. I didn't care much what I caught," she said.¹³ In September 1955, using a rod and reel and squid on a baited hook, fishing for scup, she landed a prize bluefish.

¹² The favorite dog, Illo, is, like Laura Elliot, spending eternity on the premises. His ashes, too, were buried by the juniper tree.

¹³ On this, and clamming, Cornell is quoted from the transcript prepared for Nancy Hamilton's Vineyard documentary.

There were clambakes on the beach, right in front of the house:

We dug the clams — we gathered the seaweed, that beautiful seaweed that clings to the rocks; it's lacy, it has bubbles; it's really a lovely thing, people made a pudding of it, they say it's very healthy.

We dug our own pit — and lined it with stones — then we built a fire on the stones to get them red-hot — then we burned ourselves, scraping out the logs and embers.

And while the stones were bright red we tossed on the wet seaweed — then a frantic rush to put everything in reverse order, so that it would come out right-side first — so that when we opened up the tarpaulin, clams first, then lobsters, and potatoes and chicken and corn ... the little tiny, new potatoes farmers used to throw away — and now they're so expensive — everyone wants them, you can hardly get them.

Once we had a clambake that — well, unfortunately one afternoon, when a quite well-known author was there, it just wouldn't cook. It just — hour after hour we watched it, we urged it and we coaxed it — nothing happened. Finally we were exhausted — we had to eat the clambake not quite cooked. Everybody was terribly polite — they didn't want to be rude, I imagine, and they were terribly hungry. Everybody ate. But — oh, dear!

At Chip-Chop, it seemed, there was always something brewing.

Sometimes, that something was a storm: Hurricanes or the threat of big blows came and went with regularity in those years. In 1938, Cornell was in the Great Room with Miss Pratt and Miss Murrat, of Chilmark and New York, "both over eighty,"¹⁴ when the hurricane struck; Cornell threw open all the windows to allow the waves to roll through instead of tearing the house apart. As the water rose, she got her two companions up on the piano, and she stood on the piano stool, with her dogs. At that moment, the Coast Guard arrived.

Hurricanes threatened again in 1940, 1941 and 1950, and sometimes the residents of Chip-Chop evacuated, and other times they waited it out. Cornell was away in 1944, when the September hurricane came, but she was home in 1954 for Hurricane Carol. She and others evacuated at 10:45 a.m. on August 31, as a tidal wave, several feet high, washed into the house. The water was up to their waists as they pushed along the beach to higher ground. The porch was blown away, furniture in every room but the Big Room was smashed, mud caked everywhere.

'The Intimacies of Small Talk'

But if the summer doings at Chip-Chop were colorful, the thing that set Katharine Cornell apart, and that assured her place in Vineyard history, was her personal relationship with the year-rounders.

¹⁴ Hamilton's notes.

Early on in Chip-Chop's history, a writer for a Boston paper sized up the situation:

When she went first to the Island three or four years ago, Miss Cornell knew enough of the New England temperament to realize that her professional fame would impress the Islanders not at all. She knew that her presence would evoke little curiosity and no display of curiosity. She knew she could walk or ride about freely with no stares. She knew and was grateful.

She also knew very well that if she were to be accepted by her quiet, modest neighbors, that acceptance would be based on her own personal qualities and nothing else.

Those who know New England well know that Martha's Vineyard has made no proclamation, private or public, and will make none. There will be no speeches and no drum-thumping. For an outsider to be accepted as "one of the folks" in such a community is a much subtler thing. It consists mostly in being allowed to share in the intimacies of small talk, to be consulted as a neighbor.¹⁵

This dark-haired neighbor small-talked with the best of them, beginning with her builder, Herbert Hancock, who planted *Rosa rugosa* that bloomed for three decades outside her living room windows, and continuing through the chief of police and Mac Welch at the post office and artist Stanley Murphy, whose work she early encouraged.¹⁶ She supported local fundraisers, and, near the end of her life, gave as a gift to the community the funds to restore its historic Town Hall.

A writer for *National Geographic* called her the "first lady of off-Islanders."¹⁷

¹⁵ Quoted in the *Vineyard Gazette*, Dec. 19, 1941.

¹⁶ At Hamilton's urging, Stanley Murphy was commissioned to paint Chip-Chop. It was the beginning of a long relationship.

¹⁷ William P.E. Graves, *National Geographic*, June 1961.



At USO Jamboree, Brenda Forbes looks on as Cornell sings, "Lovely, Lazy Kind of Day" (1942).



Eleanor Roosevelt, Helen Keller and Cornell (1954).

On Main Street, Vineyard Haven, in blue denim slacks and a battered khaki hat, she was famously approachable, always at ease. She was a regular at Paul Bangs' market; it was in the spot where Martha's Vineyard Savings Bank is now, next to Leslie's Drugstore. She'd bring in her guest *d'jour* — Mary Martin or Julia Child — and say, "You've got to see my grocer."

Once, Stuart Bangs recalled, Cornell "was in the store and somebody called up and my father had to do something right away, and he was alone. He handed her a pad and a pencil and said, 'You're in charge. If the phone rings, answer it.' So she did! She took down two or three orders ... She measured up to the job in a hurry."¹⁸

In just a few short years, she established a pattern of involvement in community activities:

— In 1940 and 1941, Islanders gathered in Chilmark for the Cavalcade, a benefit for Martha's Vineyard Hospital. Cornell was captain and pitcher of a softball team including Thomas Hart Benton and Denys Wortman.

— The Martha's Vineyard Art Workers Guild sponsored a tour of homes, and Cornell opened Chip-Chop for the occasion.

— In 1942, Cornell produced a USO show at Tisbury High School. "Kit Cornell's Jamboree" was held on Saturday night, August 8, and advertised as "Singing, Dancing and Heaven Knows What." It included a quiz contest, a spelling bee, and a clam-eating contest and (in an unbilled appearance) Gregory Peck in the chorus. Cornell, for the first time in her stage career, sang a solo; it was one of Nancy Hamilton's songs, "Lovely, Lazy Kind of Day." Admission was 75 cents for the rafters to \$3 up front, and afterward Cornell passed the hat. The evening's take: \$2,300.¹⁹

18 Linsey Lee, *More Vineyard Voices*, Martha's Vineyard Historical Society, page 12. A contemporary *Gazette* clipping, perhaps of the same incident, describes Cornell as pinch-hitting for a store clerk, sacking "vegetables and fruit like a veteran grocer, only occasionally tossing a query as to prices over her shoulder as she worked. 'One of the best clerks that ever tied a bundle in my market!' declared Paul B. Bangs.

19 Gregory Peck treasured the memory. He kept, as a souvenir, a photograph of himself and Cornell together on stage at the high school.

In 1943, she bought an acre of farmland at Tashmoo, but the U.S. Army took it over to billet troops, training for the invasion of Sicily. The next year, she left Chip-Chop in early August to begin a road tour of *Barretts* for the American Theatre Wing, performing for G.I.s overseas. There, she met men who told her they had trained on her beach, and she saw Vineyard men, too: "I ran into boys from the Island (and) we naturally had an Island get-together and homesick talk."²⁰

Back at home, she might turn up anywhere. She brought Island schoolkids to Chip-Chop to meet Helen Keller. She served as volunteer president of the Vineyard Animal Rescue League, forerunner to the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. She was sitting on the terrace one sunset when a tourist came to her for help; a companion had fallen on the rocks and broken his leg. Cornell, springing into action, rushed to the scene with splints and bandages, carting the victim off to the hospital in her station wagon.

Cornell was fond of telling stories about the Islanders she knew. She saw in the saga of the Cronig family a lesson for how industrious folks can make it in America. She liked that Hariph Hancock in Vineyard Haven (son of Herbert) took his first vacation in 30 years — and rented a cottage in Menemsha.

And Islanders told stories about her.

"I was Katharine Cornell's caddy," the late (William) Howard Andrews of Edgartown told Linsey Lee.

She always let me know what day she was going be there [at Mink Meadows]. She and Gert Macy, they'd come and I was always there when she told me she'd be there. She always had little dachshunds. She let them run all around the green. So one day she was putting, and when she putted, the dog walked right in front of her ball. Of course, a dachshund covers a lot of ground. So I'm holding the pin in one hand, and I reached out with my left foot, lifted the dog up, and the ball went right in the hole. She thought that was one of the most wonderful things that ever happened to her. I got the dog out of the way.

When I was in the service — I've still got the ticket stubs right in my desk — the Erlanger Theater in Chicago, I'd heard she had a play going there, so I called her and got a hold of her and she got two tickets for me for this one particular performance. She said, "After it's all over, I want you to come up to my dressing room." So after the play was over — I took a woman Marine with me. She thought she'd died and gone to heaven, you know. "We're going to meet Miss Cornell!" "Yeah, we're going to meet her." So we went out back and we exchanged pleasantries and she was a good friend of mine. I got a picture in here, "To my buddy, Billy."²¹

20 A letter to Betty Hough, quoted in Cornell's *Gazette* obituary, June 14, 1974.

21 Interview with Howard Andrews, *More Vineyard Voices*, page 98.

"Miss Cornell's trouble," said an unidentified Islander in the *National Geographic* piece, "is that she can't tell the captain of a boat from the lowest deckhand. It's a trouble more people ought to have."

In 1971, on the occasion of Tisbury's Tricentennial, Cornell financed a renovation of Association Hall, the 1844 church building used as town office space. She commissioned Vineyard artists and contractors for work on the building — among them, Stanley Murphy, whose murals now hang in the auditorium. And she provided the narration for a documentary film, *This Is Our Island*, produced by Nancy Hamilton, in conjunction with the celebration.

'Miss Cornell Has Arrived!'

In 1968, Katharine Cornell sold Chip-Chop to a friend, New York investment banker Milton Gordon, who had rented it out for two summers. She moved nearby, into Nancy Hamilton's place, The Barn, on Aunt Rhoda's Pond. There she died June 9, 1974. Her cremated remains were interred under a marble marker in the back of the village cemetery, under cedar trees and holly bushes, just behind Town Hall.

Today Chip-Chop is owned by another pair of notable summer residents, director Mike Nichols and television news anchor Diane Sawyer. Elsewhere on the Vineyard, over the years, people with names like Onassis, Buchwald and Cronkite have followed comfortably in the path she established, sliding into life here not just as drop-ins, but as participants, and good neighbors too.

The selectmen of Tisbury had the last word, voting just days after her death to name the Town Hall theater for her. And, in a letter to the editor, they bid Katharine Cornell farewell:

Every summer we would look forward to her arrival and her cheerful greetings to everyone on Main Street. We would hear up and down the street, "Miss Cornell has arrived!"...

We never thought about losing Miss Cornell. Somehow, we believed she would be with us always — and so she will. Memories of her will live on forever and ever, since time can never erase her gracious and friendly smile.

A famous actress she surely was, but in our hearts she will always be our friend.

Frederick W. Thifault
Manuel M. Maciel
Craig J. Kingsbury
Selectmen²²

22 *Gazette*, June 21, 1974.

Homage to Craig Kingsbury: An American Original

As World War II Darkened the Horizon, We Worked Summers on John Hoft's Farm

by THOMAS GOETHALS

I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. I did not wish to live what was not life, living is so dear; nor did I wish to practice resignation, unless it was quite necessary. I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life, to live so sturdily and Spartan-like as to put to rout all that was not life, to cut a broad swath and shave close, to drive life into a corner, and reduce it to its lowest terms....

WE ALL KNOW where that quotation comes from — Henry David Thoreau's *Walden*, published in 1854, a century and a half ago.¹ And all we have to do to make Thoreau's statement Craig Kingsbury's is to change "I went to the woods" (although of course Craig did that, too, on Martha's Vineyard) to "I went to the Vineyard" — that is, to the small New England fishing and farming community the Island was back then in the 1930s — and, presto, Thoreau's famous statement of purpose becomes Craig's record of achievement. For it summarizes quite accurately what Craig accomplished in the course of his long life, how he lived it, fully lived it, and not just for two years on a pond — nor as an ascetic, either, let me add — but for nearly 90 years on our beloved Island. He kept it simple, as

1 *The Writings of Henry David Thoreau* (Concord Edition), Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston and New York, 1893 and 1906, II.100-101.

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Craig Kingsbury with his oxen. (Photo courtesy of Kay Tweed)

Thoreau had advised; he learned to live “well and naturally,” as Montaigne had recommended,² and, as a result, he fulfilled himself in a rich, colorful and independent life.

I speak from some experience — and deep affection for Craig, my boyhood mentor. Seventy years ago — yes, back before Pearl Harbor, in 1938, *that* long ago — I went to work, for 25 cents an hour, as an itinerant farmhand for old John Hoft on his Lambert’s Cove farm.³ I was a summer

boy, as Craig had been before me, still in high-school; John Hoft was nearing his 70s, I think, and still scratching a meager living from the soil, from his vegetable gardens, his half-dozen or more milking cows, several pigs, dozens of hens and old Barnaby, his workhorse for all seasons, so old he could only plow downhill and barely pull a loaded wagon of hay to the barn. And there, one bright June morning, under the magnificent copper beech trees in front of John and Dora Hoft’s dilapidated farmhouse, I met Craig Kingsbury, then 26 years old, eight years older than I, and clearly, even to my innocent eyes, a grown, seasoned man of the world and, judging by tattoos on his arms and chest, a man of the sea as well. He had settled on the Vineyard by then, had his own farm of 20-plus acres on State Road and (though I did not know it until later) had already established himself, like a character from one of Eugene O’Neill’s one-act plays, as a heavy drinker and barroom brawler (not to mention as a rum-runner during Prohibition) well known to the local police and district judge, who often charged him with assault and battery and sentenced him to jail for

2 “Of Experience,” *The Complete Essays of Montaigne*, translated by Donald M. Frame, Stanford University Press, Stanford, Calif. 1958, p. 852.

3 Much of what follows about my several summers of working with Hoft and Kingsbury is based, unless other attributed, upon my boyhood journals, especially for the years 1940-1942. I began to keep a journal during my freshman year in college, and I still have them.

30 days at a time. That side of him, the “dark side” of him, however, I never really knew, for two or three times a week, in the early morning, he came walking through the woods from his farm to John Hoft’s to lend a hand with the daily chores, bringing in the hay during late June, hoeing long rows of peas and beans in July, picking corn in August, digging potatoes in September, slaughtering a hog in December. There in the open fields and cramped stalls of the old barn, the Craig I came to know proved friendly, strong, highly intelligent and thoughtful, and always sober, because, as I soon discovered, he admired and loved old John Hoft as much as I came to do. So for the next five summers, during those troubled years in which the war in Europe edged ever nearer our shores, and before I went into the Army, John Hoft and Craig taught me all I know about the mysteries and wonders and terrors of the natural world.

Craig taught me, among many other things, how to milk cows in the early morning; how to dig potatoes without spearing them on the tines of the fork; how to build and square-off a load of hay on the wagon before we headed for the barn; how to pocket a peach or plum each time we walked by the A&P fruit stands along Main Street; how to fish at midnight on Old House Pond without alerting the owner’s dogs; how sweet-tasting the raw green peas we shelled as we hoed or the corn we shucked during a break at noontime; how to identify small animals by their tracks, birds by their songs, berries, shrubs, and wild flowers too; and how to forecast the weather by the direction of the wind and the formation of clouds above. Yes, Craig became my mentor, as John Hoft, I suspect, may have been his during the early 1930s before I arrived. And both men instilled in me, not nearly as much by their words as by their actions and their daily work habits, a love of the natural world that eventually drew me back again to Martha’s Vineyard, as it had Craig long before — in my case, 25 years after World War II — to settle permanently. It was partly in tribute to my two Island mentors of natural history that I founded The Nathan Mayhew Seminars in 1974, began to develop a curriculum in Island Studies, and taught college-level courses in the literature of the sea. Like Craig, I had soldiers and whale men in my family; like Craig, I had been drawn to the sea — though I’d never gone to sea, as Craig had; and like Craig at an earlier age, the Vineyard had become home to me from the moment I first arrived, probably in my mother’s arms, less than three months old. Every human being is, after all, an island, John Donne to the contrary notwithstanding, and islands haunt us for that reason: the “boundedness” of an island, as the British novelist John Fowles has observed,⁴ makes it more similar to the human body than any other geographical configuration of

4 *Islands*. With photographs by Fay Godkin. Little, Brown and Co., Boston and Toronto, 1978, page 12.

land. So too, I think, Thoreau's sense of Walden Pond.

You should have seen those two men, John Hoft and Craig Kingsbury, together in those pre-war days: Though a generation apart, both were tall and lean, the elder in flannel shirt, overalls and boots, his face weathered by his many years spent working outdoors. He wore an old, stained fedora on his head, below the brim of which patches of gray hair straggled; he had a hawk-like nose, fierce and noble at once, dominating his neatly trimmed, peppered mustache and humorous mouth, in which a briar pipe seemed perpetually to reside. And the cracked lens of his wire-framed glasses, beneath thick, gray eyebrows, could not conceal the deep lights in his dark eyes, the most penetrating yet kindly eyes I have ever known: He was a strong man who loped across his fields, blue smoke curling off his shoulders, as if he were not moving himself at all but being moved by the earth, an Antaeus, a giant,

from Classical mythology, who drew his strength from the earth, from his mother Gaia, and could not possibly be defeated unless he were lifted from her bosom, as he eventually was by Heracles, to be drained of his strength, his life, and to die.

Old "Uncle John," as I came to call him behind his back, had lived on this farm all his life. He was the son of an immigrant, a cabin boy, from Hamburg, Germany, who had been wrecked off Pasque Island not long before the Civil War, rescued and brought, with other survivors, to the Vineyard. Once here, and having decided to remain, he bought a parcel of farmland in Lambert's Cove,

which eventually grew to 80 acres, and planted and nurtured a large and handsome fruit orchard of a thousand trees — peaches, pears, apples — until, by the Great Depression, Uncle John, his son, had inherited an aging orchard for whose fruit there was no longer a market.⁵ Yet he survived as a truck farmer, married Dora, fathered two children, and left the farm to

⁵ *Vineyard Gazette*, Aug. 26, 2002, a column on John Hoft's early history as the Island's "foremost fruit grower." It was compiled by Eulalie Regan, *Gazette* librarian, from another article on the family orchard dated January 1931.



Farmer John Hoft. (Photo courtesy Thomas Goethals)

his children, the third generation of Islanders.⁶

As I say, you should have seen John and Craig together, Craig a younger Heracles or maybe a young Apollo — so it struck a classically trained student attending the Roxbury Latin School at the time — for he was always naked to the waist, wearing only a pair of soiled jeans, blond, bronzed by the sun, and barefoot, his muscled chest, shoulders, and arms splattered with faded blue tattoos that matched his pale blue eyes — eyes that mirrored the sea, bespoke spring and summer, as John Hoft's mirrored the land, bespoke fall and winter, and a strong, arched nose, so like old John's, which confirmed in both men determination and commitment. And from Craig a drawl and an idiom I could not for the life of me place or identify: "Tawmee," he called me for the rest of his life, the only adult (except my father, of course) I permitted to do so. "Well, Tawmee, it's like this —" and off he would go in his quiet, modulated drawl to explain the world's idiosyncrasies to me. "If you can look back on yesterday and see what a damn fool you've been, mebbe there's hope for you." It became, I think, his definition of maturity, and I believe he learned from it, eventually came to live by it.



Craig had a "double" in Hollywood — so it struck me, an avid moviegoer, then — the actor Sterling Hayden, four years younger than Craig and four years older than I, who became a leading man in Hollywood films. Hayden was also blond, tall (at six-foot-five, taller than Craig by two inches) and billed by Paramount Pictures as "The Beautiful Blond Viking God." He too had gone to sea to become, at age 16, first a mate on schooners, then the captain, before becoming a model and actor to help finance the purchase of his own vessel.⁷

The two handsome look-alikes, the Vineyard farmer and the Hollywood actor, never met. But, through a remarkable coincidence, while both were in or nearing their early sixties, they very nearly did, and thereby hangs a tale, perhaps even a tall tale. In 1974 Universal Studios had decided to film Peter Benchley's best-selling novel *Jaws* on Martha's Vineyard. The cast included professional actors like Richard Dreyfuss, Roy Scheider and Robert Shaw, already known to the movie-going public and soon to be much better known; the film was to be directed by a young Steven Spielberg.

In the DVD Collector's Edition (2000) of *Jaws*, which contains both the film and extra features, Spielberg speaks about the actor he chose to play

⁶ And thanks to his daughter, Marguerite, and her husband Daniel Alisio, the Hoft Farm Preserve is now protected by the Nature Conservancy. It was indeed a proud moment when, after her father's funeral, Marguerite told me her father had looked upon the two of us, Craig and I, as his sons.

⁷ Ephraim Katz, *The Film Encyclopedia*, Harper Collins, New York, 1994, page 604.

the leading role of Quint, the bounty hunter who wins the dangerous job of searching out and killing the terrifying shark. "My first choice," he said, "was Lee Marvin, but he wasn't interested. My second choice was Sterling Hayden, who I thought would make an amazing Quint, but he couldn't do it either for — I forget actually what the reason was he couldn't do it." So the role went to Robert Shaw, a popular British actor, classically trained for Shakespearean roles. By the time Shaw arrived on the Vineyard, Craig Kingsbury, by then a selectman in Tisbury, had been hired to teach Quint to speak and act like — in Craig's own words — "a fish-pier low life, a filthy wharf rat."⁸

Craig had not immediately succumbed to the Island-wide call of the *Jaws* staff for local actors and extras. In fact, according to his daughter, he first called Universal's plan for the movie "a hellish project"; he told her, "I'll tell you what those blitherwits from Hollywood are like, they're like Persian cats. They're pretty to look at, but they've got as much fur growing on the inside of their heads as they have on the outside. No thanks!" But when a friend told him about the \$75 a day he was getting "just for standing around and looking stupid," Craig retorted he could not only do that but *be* stupid as well and immediately drove off in his battered pick-up truck to Edgartown, headquarters of the "hellish project," to sign up. The casting director, Shari Rhodes, said of his interview, "Speak no more. We have found our man." And indeed she had: Craig was soon teaching Shaw to talk like a tough old Yankee fisherman by spending time with him on and off the set — "every moment he can," Spielberg told Rhodes — and by making audiotapes of his colorful waterfront lingo and idiosyncratic speech patterns for Shaw to imitate and Carl Gottlieb, actor and principle screen writer, to weave into his shooting script.⁹

No question about it, the director, actors, and crew had indeed found the right man in this "legendary Martha's Vineyard local, a crusty, salty, blaspheming curmudgeon," as Gottlieb later described him in *The Jaws Log*.¹⁰ Craig's knowledge of the sea, of sharks, and of local fishermen and

8 Kristen Henshaw, "Craig Kingsbury Led Life to the Fullest," *Gazette*, Sept. 3, 2002, page 5.

9 Since my experience with Craig occurred before his children were born, I am indebted to his daughter, Kristen Kingsbury Henshaw, for her recent publication, *Craig Kingsbury Talkin': The Salty Model for Quint Speaks Out*, Tereski Presski, Wakefield, Mass., 2005, as an essential source for information about her father's post-war life and career. See pages 81-84 for her account of his role in the film *Jaws*, upon which I have drawn. (I was an extra, by the way, cast as an Amity policeman, for two or three days; I turned in my uniform and quit for lack of anything to do except lounge on the beach and wait for a call that did not come).

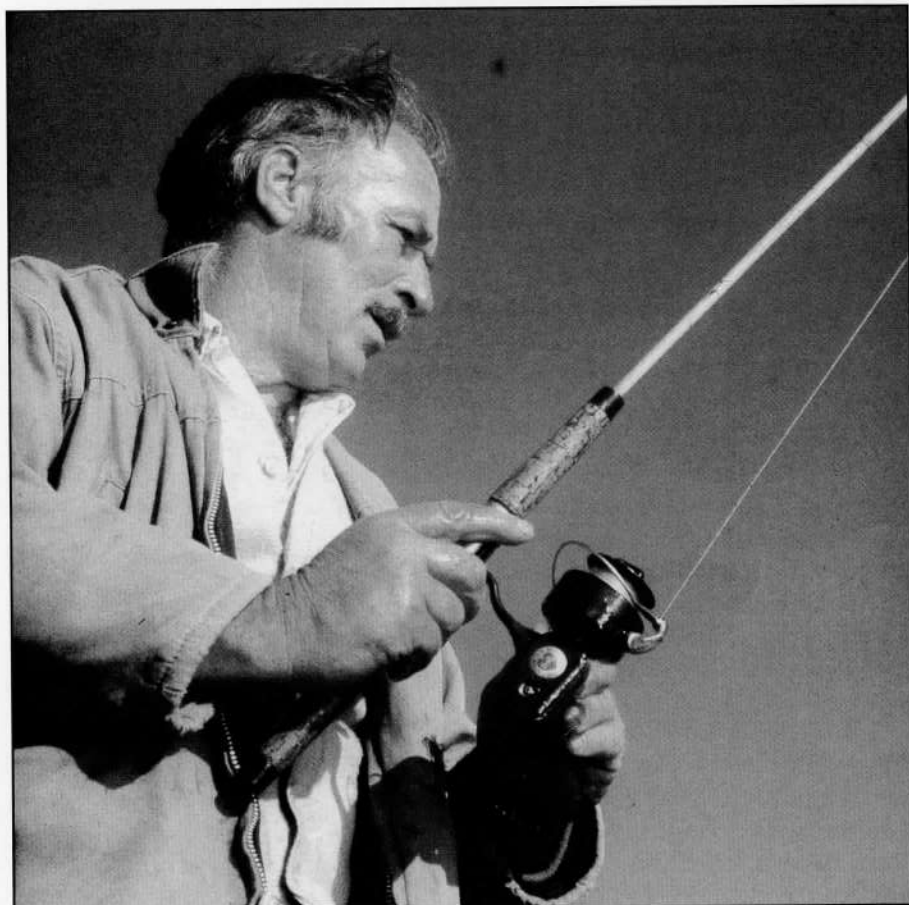
10 Carl Gottlieb, *The Jaws Log*, Dell, New York, 1975, page 204.

farmers, as well as his fund of stories about local characters (including himself, of course) proved such a hit on location that Spielberg also gave him a small role as a local fisherman named Ben Gardner. In the film, we glimpse him briefly exchanging greetings with the police chief Martin Brody (Scheider), then welcoming shark expert Matt Hooper (Dreyfuss), just arrived from the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute, with a warning: "I hope you're not going out with those nuts, are you?" — referring to the mass of small boats swarming aimlessly behind him in the harbor, preparing to hunt the shark down themselves. Of this small, hopelessly snarled armada, Gardner next says, while glancing down at the chaos below him and then back into the camera, "Wait'll we get them silly bastards down on that rock pile, there'll be *some* fun; they'll wish their fathers had never met their mothers when they start taking their bottoms out and slamming into them rocks, boy!" And finally, in one of the scariest scenes in the movie, we see Gardner's severed head (a life-like latex bust for which Craig had posed) roll out of the scuppers of his sunken vessel before the horrified faces of Chief Brody and Hooper in the dark of night at sea. Presumably, Gardner, as much an individualist in the film as Craig in life, had failed to take his own advice; but we do not see him attacked by the shark nor his fishing boat sunk. That gruesome scene is saved for us until the climax of the melodrama when the ferocious, mindless monster slowly devours Quint, legs first, on the stern of his sinking boat.

Spielberg may have been instinctively right in approaching Hayden before he did Shaw to play the role of Quint — not because Hayden was a better actor than Shaw, but because as an American actor Hayden would have been more familiar with American idiom, lingo and regional dialects. Hayden, like Shaw, was a veteran of World War II; as a marine he had served in the OSS behind enemy lines in Greece and Yugoslavia and had gradually matured into a talented character actor in such post-war films as John Huston's *The Asphalt Jungle* (1950) and Stanley Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove* (1963).¹¹ It may have been Hayden's performance as General Jack Ripper in the latter film that attracted Spielberg's attention. Although the deal fell through, it is interesting to speculate on what might have happened had Hayden played Quint.

My guess is that he and Craig would have gotten along well together, swapping tall tales of their adventures at sea; perhaps Hayden would even have shared Craig's life-long addiction to Copenhagen snuff (a pinch or two stuffed up under the upper lip and the tobacco juice spat out from time to time), as Shaw had not. Whatever tensions or jealousies might have arisen initially between the two would have been short-lived, I think, and they would have become as close as Craig and Shaw became — a relation-

11 Katz, page 604.



Kingsbury, about the time of *Jaws*: 'The purest version' of Quint, Spielberg said. (Photo by Kay Tweed)

ship of which Gottlieb said: "Craig Kingsbury's dialog and Robert Shaw's persona fused to make [that is, to create] this sinister yet sensitive, very intelligent shark hunter." There is little doubt that the two seamen would have gotten along for one very good reason: Craig was always himself, self-assured, knew perfectly well who he was, and could therefore get along with whatever dignitaries, celebrities, public officials, or "Hollywood blitherwits" crossed his path during his long life. My opinion only, of course, but that of one who knew and admired Craig, of one whose speculations on "what might have been" are immediately rendered irrelevant, by Steven Spielberg's final assessment of Craig: "He was the purest version of who in my mind Quint really was. In fact, if I had been more brave, I would have cast him in the role."

Craig also bore a resemblance to Ted Williams, another contemporary, another rebellious young man, blond, tall, and lean ("The Kid," the "Splendid Splinter," the sportswriters called him), who joined the Boston Red Sox as a rookie at age 21, in 1939, and immediately established himself, despite his early temper tantrums and feuds with both fans and sportswriters, as a dedicated and highly skilled player of the individualist's (hence, America's) favorite game of baseball. My interest in Williams had been whetted not simply by my boyish love of baseball — I had just organized a summer softball league on the Vineyard, made up of both year-round and summer boys of all ages — but by Williams' homer in the ninth inning of the All-Star game of 1941, while Joe DiMaggio was on his 56-game hitting streak; by his extraordinary feat of batting .406 for the season; and by his winning the Triple Crown for the first time in a career that ended with a home-run his final time at bat, age 42, in 1960.¹²

Both he and Craig had been deferred from military service after Pearl Harbor, Williams because he was the sole support of his mother, Craig because he was a farmer; but Williams, in the public eye, was hounded and harassed, unlike his contemporaries in professional baseball, into volunteering, deferment or no, for duty as a naval aviator in World War II and again, as a combat Marine pilot, in the Korean War. He was, in short, forced to grow up, to give up his "hour of splendor in the grass, of glory in the flower"¹³ — he lost nearly five full seasons of baseball at the height of his career while Craig, six years older, matured naturally and at his own pace.

During those two summers just before and after Pearl Harbor, as we all faced first the growing threat and then the brutal fact of world war, Ted Williams and Craig Kingsbury became, to my eyes, symbols of the choices I would have to make, should I survive the war, in the future: Williams as a specialist and Craig as a generalist, the former a scientist of hitting baseballs, as one sportswriter later described him, as dedicated to his sport as Craig was to his, the art of living well and naturally, which I wished to emulate and to make my own too.

There, on the one hand in Boston, Ted Williams, a public figure, playing professional baseball in the pastoral greensward of an enclosed Fenway Park usually jammed with cheering (and booing) fans; and here, on the other, on the Island, Craig Kingsbury, a private figure, working the open green fields

12 For recent studies of Ted Williams, on which my accounts are based, see David Halberstam, *The Teammates*, Hyperion, New York, 2003, and Leigh Montville, *Ted Williams, The Biography of an American Hero*, Doubleday, New York, 2004.

13 William Wordsworth, "Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood," *The Poetical Works of Wordsworth*, ed. Thomas Hutchinson, Oxford University Press, New York, 1913, page 590.

of a farm by the sea, often alone or accompanied by two or three. And each so busy and active, so committed to his science or art — so much more doers than thinkers — that neither really became aware, I suspect, of the maturation process they were undergoing, of the responsibilities they were as a result later to assume in service to country and community, or of the affection and respect they were eventually to elicit from fans, friends and neighbors: Craig, especially, I think, for his independence of convention and cant, his originality and his exemplary life as a natural man — like Thoreau, a man who'd sloughed off, like a snake, the outer skin of his civilized self to reveal the glistening skin of the natural self beneath, to identify that new self with the elemental rhythms of nature, the annual cycles of the seasons, of birth, growth, maturation and death.¹⁴

In September of 1941, to take a good example, the weekend after Labor Day, Craig and his team of oxen delivered a load of firewood to a house on West Chop where, unexpectedly, he found a cocktail party underway. He of course joined in, undoubtedly invited to do so by his hostess, and proceeded to get himself, as he admitted long afterwards, "drunker than a bloody piper." And then, on the way home to his farm — apparently because "the next thing you know, somebody's screaming to the cops that there's a madman with a couple of crazy bulls on the loose:" — he got himself arrested and tossed in the clink.¹⁵ And enough of a good story right there, drunken driving in an ox-cart, to make the front page of the *Boston Herald*:

Ox-Cart Driver Just Plain Tipsy

VINEYARD HAVEN, Sept. 7 — The local constabulary had to compromise with a prisoner today after he had been taken into custody for operating an ox-cart while under the influence of liquor.

The prisoner, a 35-year-old Tisbury farmer, finally was booked on a drunkenness charge, after officials discovered that the term "driving while under the influence" applied to motor vehicles only.¹⁶

14 See R.W.B. Lewis, *The American Adam*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, Ill. 1955, page 20-22, and Sherman Paul, "A Fable of the Renewal of Life," in *Thoreau: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Sherman Paul, Prentice-Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs, N.J. 1962, pages 100-116.

15 Versions of this hilarious event of course vary over the years — depending on Craig's retelling of the story and his instinctive love of, and skill at, exaggeration and embroidery. This version, his last significant one in 1994, more than half a century after the event, is the most dramatic of all; it comes from Linsey Lee's *Vineyard Voices*, Martha's Vineyard Historical Society, Edgartown, Mass. 1998, page 287. Details, however, differ, and understandably so, in the other significant account, Ms. Henshaw's *Kingsbury Talkin'*, pages 59-60 and 91.

16 *Boston Herald* of Sept. 8, 1941. It appeared, boxed as what newspaper people call a "bright," just below a banner headline announcing the death of President Roosevelt's mother. Craig's age was misreported; he was 28. The *Gazette* of Sept. 9 made no mention of the incident, then gave it short shrift in the edition of Sept. 12, burying it on the bottom of Page 7.

Trouble was, however, that when the police drove Craig off to jail in Edgartown, the oxen were left behind, and they were not about to let anyone other than their master tell them what to do. So the police had to let Craig out of jail to drive the team home. And when he did get back to his farm, with a police escort, of course, he found his sow delivering piglets — which appealed, I'm sure, to his sense of irony and perhaps of the macabre too. For he induced the officer to join him in the pigpen and assist him in delivering the piglets, hoping that maybe the boar hog might bite him.¹⁷

Although Craig told me a couple of days later, while we were digging potatoes at Uncle John's, that he didn't remember much about his escapade, he did remember enough about his day in court to tell Linsey Lee the following:

... and the judge, old Abner Braley, says, "Well, what's he done now?" "Well, your honor, he was drunk and creating a disturbance and an uproar, and blah, blah, blah. And very uncooperative." Old Abner listens. Now, he asks me, he says, "Well, what were you driving? Were you driving a horse or a car or a truck or what?" "No, your honor. Driving a team of oxen." And the old judge grabs a book and he's this way: I see his shoulders jumping, and he put the book down. "No law in the statutes against driving an ox cart as long as the oxen were sober." Case dismissed.¹⁸

In those days, still in his 20s, he could, after a good cleansing drunk and a few fisticuffs, especially if challenged in a bar, rise the next morning, clear-eyed and bushy-tailed, without a hangover. But it was to be one of the last of such episodes, for he was to be married that very year, just before the attack on Pearl Harbor, and curtail his carousing ways — oh, yes, despite a few lapses now and again — as he and Turk began raising a family of four children, three girls and a boy.

I do not believe Craig as I first knew him could have achieved such maturity, consciously or unconsciously, without his wife Turk. Gertrude Tereski, her full name, then a summer visitor from Quincy employed on-Island, was almost as tall, blond and good-looking as Craig himself. Lean and athletic, strong and attractive, were, to my mind, the better, more accurate and

17 Craig's accounts of his sow's piglets — to Linsey Lee (page 287) and his daughter Kristen (page 91) — do not vary much at all from one another in detail. Ms. Henshaw includes, as well (pages 53-63), a full account of her father's long history with — and knowledge of — oxen, three pairs of which he owned during his farming and landscaping career. See the *Gazette*, August 15, 1939, page 4, for an example of an early problem he often had with his oxen — the tendency of one or both to break loose and trespass on the property of another, for which he was taken to court, pleaded guilty and fined \$5.

18 *Vineyard Voices*, page 287. Although Judge Braley did dismiss the charge of drunken driving, as the *Herald* reported and his daughter confirmed (page 60), he did find Craig guilty of public drunkenness — but "no time, no fine, nothing else."

truthful adjectives to describe Turk; adjectives, however, that in no way at all detracted from her essential womanliness, a quality Turk seems to have passed on to her daughters. I liked Turk at once when I met her — I think Craig brought her over to the farm to meet the Hofts and maybe me, too — and I so told Craig another morning while we were hoeing beans. I was, you may be sure, flattered silly that she seemed to accept me, she an older and such an attractive woman; and I occasionally heard stories about their tumultuous courtship in various Oak Bluffs bars and underneath the drawbridge enroute to Oak Bluffs — evenings I was usually busy playing ball elsewhere — and I was told that Turk more than held her own, matched him drink for drink, blow for blow, and gave as good as she got.

The last time the three of us were together before I entered the Army occurred on a solemn occasion, the funeral of John Hoft in September of 1942¹⁹ — Craig and I had pretty much run the farm all summer during Uncle John's final illness. We sat together in a pew in Grace Church, Vineyard Haven, side by side, I in between Turk and Craig, and Hezekiah Madison there too, on Craig's right, farther inside. He was another neighbor of John Hoft's in Lambert's Cove, short, dark and rotund, a grown man too, half Wampanoag and half white, in his 40s, I think, who occasionally lent us a hand on the farm. But, even while we were out in the hot sun haying, Hezzy never stopped gabbling about any number of irrelevant, disconnected subjects, particularly that of the comic-strip character Flash Gordon: "If only that Flash Gordon fellow would get off that damn dung hill of his, fly down here and give us a hand, we could whup those damn Japs in no time." And each time he complained about Flash Gordon's lack of cooperation (and punctuated his disappointment with a squirt of tobacco, which he had more often than not bummed off Craig, anyway), Craig egged him on for the amusement of all of us.²⁰

19 My journal entries for the ten days following the death of John Hoft, Sept. 17, 1942, are filled with memories of the old farmer and his family and friends. His death was a great loss to me for Craig, Hoft and his farm had become a source of stability, an oasis of peace, in an ever more threatening world. At this very moment, German troops, which had invaded Russia back in June, were entering the outskirts of Stalingrad; U.S. marines, including classmates of mine who had enlisted right after Pearl Harbor, were landing on Guadalcanal; my father, already back in his second world war, was about to embark for North Africa as the commanding officer of the 6th General Hospital; and I was about to return to complete my college education and to become a soldier. John Hoft, I recognize now, served not only as a mentor but as a substitute father as well.

20 In my journal entry for Sept. 26, 1942, I note that Hezzy "is another delightful character" and "lots of fun." Like Craig and me, he was clearly drawn to Uncle John. And Craig used to regale us with Hezzy stories — for example, his pronunciation of the Japanese "hari-kari" as "hootchy-koochy." For more on Hezzy, see Ms. Henshaw's account, pages 155-157.

So I was not entirely surprised, as the funeral service droned on, when Craig nudged me, tilted his head toward Hezzy on the other side of him — well, sure enough, Hezzy still had a wad in his cheek, was desperately searching beneath our feet for a receptacle in which to spit — he probably thought any halfway respectable church should have provided spittoons as a courtesy — while Craig, Turk and I were barely containing our laughter. Finally, Craig — who later denied with a grin that he had set Hezzy up by giving him a chaw before we entered the church — told him in a loud whisper (hopefully drowned out by the hymn the congregation was then singing), "Swallow it, you idiot!" As indeed poor Hezzy was forced to do, managing to maintain his composure — and his stomach's — until, toward the end of the service, he stumbled out, apparently to no one's surprise, to puke in the nearby bushes. Later that afternoon, at a sort of wake we three held in Craig and Turk's house, we agreed that John Hoft had probably enjoyed Hezzy's discomfort as much as we did; he would have been standing nearby, we surmised, sucking on his long-stemmed briar pipe, blue smoke curling over his shoulder, his wise old eyes, like his mouth, gently smiling, compassionate and understanding of another's misery.



If Thoreau's *Walden* offers a philosophical key to — and an understanding of — Craig's life on the Vineyard, Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* offers another perspective, a double one, in fact.²¹ The runaway slave Jim, for instance, the adult in Twain's narrative, not only serves to teach Huck the secrets of the natural world during his and Huck's journey down the Mississippi River on a raft, but, during the journey, becomes Huck's mentor and spiritual father as well — just as, I've come to understand, John Hoft and Craig Kingsbury, in those troubled years of Hitler's military conquests in Europe, became, respectively, my spiritual father and admired older brother.

Equally important is the significance of the boy Huck's role as the narrator of Twain's story: His clarity of perception, his innate honesty and insistence upon telling the truth, traits we associate with the innocence of childhood and the ability to feel deeply, were Craig's, too. Unlike so many of us who lose our childhood spontaneity as we enter adulthood, and close off communication between the two, Craig remained in touch with his, the channels always open between them. That harmony he retained, I believe, throughout his life, and it revealed itself not only in his truthfulness but also in his love of play. For example, at the end of a long day's labor on

21 For what follows on Mark Twain's story of Huckleberry Finn, I am much indebted to Lionel Trilling's masterly essay, "Huckleberry Finn," in *The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society*, Viking Press, New York, 1950, pages 104-117.

the farm — “the fact is the sweetest dream that labor knows,” Robert Frost wrote²² — and usually just before milking time, Craig might suddenly, and often with a whoop, pick up and hurl at me (or at Richie Legg if he were there) a cow patty, preferably a juicy one, which of course forced me to retaliate in kind. I didn’t really enjoy it the first couple of times, I must say, but soon both of us, or all three of us, smeared over body, face and hair with dung, laughing and shouting throughout like a bunch of kids, would jump into nearby Duarte’s Pond for a quick, if superficial, cleansing.²³

Like Huck too, Craig had rebelled at an early age against the social pieties and conventions of his elders; and against the romantic evasions of his schoolmates in New Jersey, of his own Tom Sawyer and his perpetual, adolescent games — all before deciding to “light out for the Territory ahead of the rest”²⁴ — that is, in Craig’s case, for Martha’s Vineyard “to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life ... to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life.” I well remember how taken aback I was upon meeting his mother — she had come one summer to visit her son for a few days — by her begging me please to help persuade Craig to give up this vagabond life of his on the Vineyard, return to New Jersey, and take up a suitable profession like banking or business — in short, to become what was soon, in the post-war 1950s, to be popularized as *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*.²⁵

That was, of course, a preposterous idea, not simply because I could hardly be expected, at age 18 or 19, to have any influence at all upon a grown man of 26 or 27 and of vastly greater experience, but because, as I realized during our conversation, Mrs. Kingsbury was very like my own mother, an attractive matron, well groomed and handsomely tailored in navy blue, pearl necklace, gold bracelets and spangles, all the social graces cordially and sincerely enunciated and on display. On the other hand, she could hardly be expected to know that I was already in rebellion — surely this was an underlying reason for my interest in Craig as a friend and mentor — against those same social qualities I saw in her (and then called social affectations) and was beginning to discern in my own mother, who thought of me then, and so described me in her social circle, as “a gentleman farmer.” You can imagine what she had to say to me when I returned from John Hoft’s farm at the end of a day, stinking still of cow dung.

22 “Mowing,” *The Collected Poems of Robert Frost*, Halcyon House, New York, 1930, page 25.

23 Entry in my journal Sept. 7, 1940. We three had just dug, boxed and stacked in the cellar 22 bushels of potatoes.

24 Mark Twain, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Charles L. Webster and Co., New York, 1885, page 366.

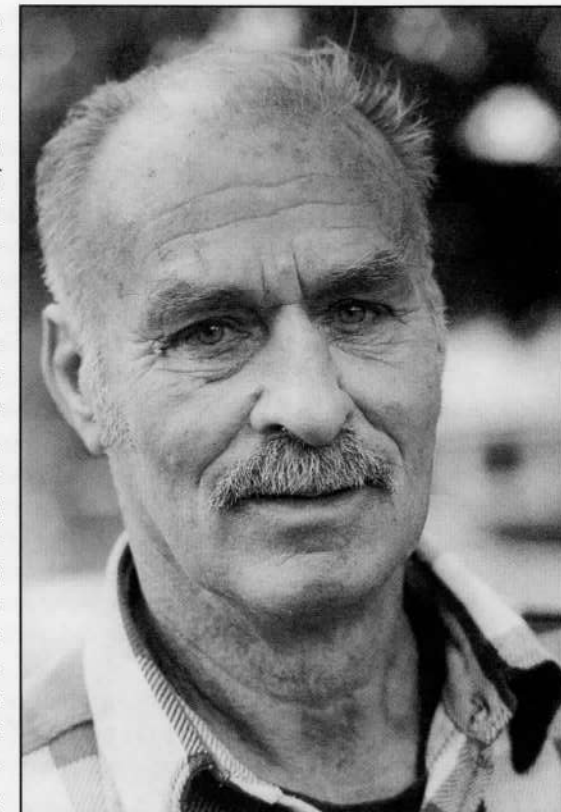
25 Sloan Wilson, *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1955.

These literary analogies and comparisons I have invoked are not, I submit, as far-fetched or fanciful as you may think. For both Henry Thoreau and the Huck Finn of Mark Twain’s experience and imagination came of age before the Civil War, that great watershed between pre-war, pastoral America and post-war, industrial America: the Gilded Age, so-called, the new world of industrial capitalism, of robber barons, and of a pervasive materialism displacing the older values of pre-industrial America. In publishing *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* in 1885, 20 years after the Civil War, Twain was dramatizing — and lamenting, as Craig did — a change in the quality of life he had felt eroding American moral values

— a change also reflected in the writings of Henry Adams, William Dean Howells, Walt Whitman and Henry James. All four novelists and historians dramatized in their works the loss of an innocence, a simplicity and a peace in post-war America as the gods of money and greed became dominant (much as they are among today’s corporate CEOs and business leaders) during the closing of the frontier near the end of the 19th century, the flood of immigration from Europe, the growth of big cities like Chicago and New York, the proliferation of machinery and the success of industrial capitalism and its materialistic values.²⁶

So too did Craig Kingsbury come of age in pastoral, pre-industrial Martha’s Vineyard, before World War II, another watershed, especially for islands, then far removed from mainland influences and values and thereby able to survive unchanged for the generations between the ends of the Civil War and World War II, quiet, rural and stable fishing-and-farm-

26 Alfred Kazin, *On Native Grounds*, Reynal and Hitchcock, New York, 1942, pages 12-24; Trilling, *Huckleberry Finn*, pages 113-115.



His independence was in a long tradition. (Mark Lovewell photo)

ing communities, late in entering the 20th century and slow to accept the predominant mainland values of a rampant materialism. So quiet, small and stable, as a matter of fact, that Craig could tell me in one of his many impromptu lessons, as he later told Robert Shaw (though I don't think that the idea was original with him) that there were really only two things to do on the Vineyard, anyway — both of which he enjoyed: fishing and fooling around (he used a four-letter word), and in the winter you couldn't fish! For it was right after World War II, in the 1950s, that the Island finally began to succumb to mainland lifestyles and values, began to lose its independence and its identity — thanks initially to the vast network of state and interstate highways built during the Eisenhower decade of the 1950s, which, in New England, opened up the Cape and Islands not simply to ever larger hordes of tourists but to the big money behind land speculators and developers, trophy houses, golf courses for the rich and famous, traffic jams, gas-guzzling SUVs, the pollution of our natural resources. Where now on the Vineyard do you hear bobwhites or whippoorwills, find painted, spotted or box turtles, leopard frogs, common toads, garter snake or trout? What you *do* find is the increasing exploitation for pleasure and profit of our once serene, unspoiled natural paradise.

Although both Huck and Craig did, each in his own way, “light out for the Territory” to escape being “civilized,” neither one, for all their escapades, acted irresponsibly. The original of Huck, scholars tell us, was a boyhood friend of Twain's by the name of Tom Blenkinsip; and he did, as Huck was about to do at the end of his adventures, “light out for the Territory,” to become a justice of the peace in Montana and a highly respected citizen.²⁷

So too Craig: Although he deplored and despised what was happening to the Vineyard after World War II, and did his best to prevent it, he remained within the system, within the Establishment, if you will. Always ready to give advice to those who requested it on the life of ponds and streams, flora and fauna, all creatures great and small, he did not “drop out” from society, did not feel “alienated,” as sociologists described the idealistically driven students of the 1960s and the Vietnam War — rebellious, yes, but never alienated. Rather he worked from within, not by preaching but by example, by cultivating his own garden, as Ted Williams I think learned to do under duress during World War II. Witness Craig's two terms, respectively, as shellfish warden in the 1950s and 1960s and as selectman for the Town of Tisbury in the 1970s — serving in one of those two posts as a guardian of the Vineyard's natural resources and in the other, like Socrates, as a gadfly for his own community, undoubtedly as outspoken, as sharp and biting in his advice, as ever Socrates was in the agora of Athens.

27 Trilling, page 108.

That was the reason, if it was not simple jealousy of his inventiveness and competence as a self-educated aquatic biologist, the selectmen, by a two-to-one vote, fired Craig from his post as shellfish warden at the end of nearly eight years of service on the grounds that he had failed to perform the work he had been appointed to do — despite the growing interest and support of state-wide officials for his success in experimenting with and studying shellfish propagation. By sowing lime on the bottom of ponds, particularly in Lake Tashmoo and the Lagoon, Craig had increased the value of the annual harvest of bay scallops from a total of \$11,000 in the years between 1946 and 1960 to \$13,000 in the single year of 1960.²⁸ But at a public hearing on his dismissal, initiated by Craig — which the two selectmen who voted against him failed to attend — some 150 voters of Tisbury gave Craig and his program a resounding vote of confidence.²⁹ Then, after a two-year hiatus, he was reappointed the town's shellfish warden, then elected in 1973 for two terms as a Tisbury selectman, and, finally, in the last year of his life, honored by the dedication of a chair in his name.³⁰ Even my mother, who had long deplored his influence on me as a boy, had come around to vote for him. I've often wondered since whether Craig's mother would have too.

Such independence places Craig Kingsbury in a long tradition of American thinkers and activists who have, like Herman Melville, dared to say “No, in thunder!” to the materialistic values they saw proliferating in the aftermath of the Civil War and we Islanders have seen prevailing in the aftermath of World War II.³¹ His independence is in a tradition that includes not only Henry Thoreau but James Fenimore Cooper in upstate New York and Walt Whitman in New York City and Robert Frost in New Hampshire and Ernest Hemingway up in Michigan and William Faulkner in Yoknapatawpha County, Mississippi — and, yes, Henry Beetle Hough too, on the Vineyard, especially in *Country Editor* and *Tuesday Will Be Different*. Craig became one of their characters, for he shared, indeed he lived, their lives — whether those of Natty Bumppo and Chingachgook, Ishmael and Queequeg (and of course Tashtego from Aquinnah), Huck and Jim, Nick Adams, Ike McCaslin or Sam Fathers — all, in an honorific sense, “noble savages,” noble men, democrats; all fictional variations on Craig Kingsbury, who, in turn mirrored their lives, relived them, but first and foremost his own. Not by writing historical or autobiographical fic-

28 Phyllis Meras, “Escapades of an Island Legend,” *Martha's Vineyard Magazine*, May-June 1999, page 32.

29 *Gazette*, May 25, 1962, pages 1, 6.

30 *Gazette*, March 5, 1965, page 1; Henshaw, page 7.

31 In a letter to Nathaniel Hawthorne, April 1851, cited in *The Portable Melville*, ed. Jay Leyda, Viking Press, New York, 1952, page 428.

tion and poetry (though he was himself a splendid teller of tales and stories), but in actuality, by living a full and productive life, living his protest against materialism, primarily as an individualist who dared to be different, to walk barefoot his whole life, and secondarily as a maturing member of his own community to which he contributed while yet remaining in a great American tradition of nay-sayers as well. Boy and man always; individual and citizen finally.

"I could give all to time," Robert Frost wrote:

*I could give all to time except — except
What I myself have held. But why declare
The things forbidden that while the Customs slept
I have crossed to Safety with. For I am There
And what I would not part with I have kept.*³²

What I have kept — what all of us who knew Craig have surely kept — is the memory of a lively, often rambunctious, thoughtful and quietly joyful Craig Kingsbury. But if I should be tempted to add as my farewell note, "We shall not soon see his like again," I would have to, as I am doing right now, revise it — given the temper of the times and the direction in which our Island seems to be moving (the wrong way, Craig would surely say!) — to read, "We shall not ever see his like again."

³² "I Could Give All to Time," *A Witness Tree*, Henry Holt and Co., New York, 1942, page 17.



To The Voters of Tisbury

*Today, land use, water quality, and
the environment in our county have assumed
ever-increasing importance.*

Therefore, I believe I am the Candidate with the
best qualifications, for the following reasons:

- 1.—Resident of Tisbury 37 years.
- 2.—Headed Town shellfish department 11 years.
- 3.—Certified aquatic biologist, 1972.
- 4.—Have owned own landscaping business for
9 years.
- 5.—Work has comprised—erosion control, im-
provement of wildlife habitat, pond building and
wetland improvement.

I SOLICIT YOUR SUPPORT AT
THE POLLS MARCH 8

Thank You,

CRAIG KINGSBURY

CANDIDATE for SELECTMAN
and ASSESSOR

Craig Kingsbury, State Road, Vineyard Haven.