



VOL. 50, No. 1

50TH YEAR

THE DUKES COUNTY INTELLIGENCER

AUGUST 2008



By the early 20th century, the Vineyard's status as a summer resort is assured, and Oak Bluffs is the center of it all. This band marches up Circuit Avenue past the intersection with Narragansett; Lake Avenue is in the distance. The post office (near the flagpole on the left) stands across the street from the Wigwam Department Store.

THE WATERING PLACE: PORTRAIT OF A SUMMER SEASON

*'Everybody come down and have a good time
when it's too warm to stay in the city,'
said the Herald. And they did.*

AND A FIRST-PERSON ACCOUNT:

When 'Sea Bathing' Turned to 'Swimming'

Plus: The Pagoda Tree ∞ The Edgartown Woman's Club

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Printed at daRosa's in Oak Bluffs, Massachusetts.

CORRECTION

In the caption to a photograph in the May issue, fireman John Sylvia's name was misspelled. Thanks to reader Beryl Stephens for this correction.

ABOUT THIS EDITION

The main story in this *Intelligencer* began with the study of a promotional brochure, *Picturesque Martha's Vineyard*, from the early 1900s. The brochure, produced by the New York firm of George W. Richardson & Co. (and issued in several editions up until World War I), carried photographs of various Vineyard scenes and lengthy paragraphs on each of several dozen advertisers. Those descriptive paragraphs, though mostly in standard promotional language (the hotels "combine ... the comforts of home and the special advantages only a modern hotel can furnish"; the stores are "well stocked with a very complete assortment of the many articles one expects"), provided inspiration for this article. Might there be, we wondered, enough substance hinted at there, and expanded upon through other sources, to recreate in some detail one specific Vineyard "high season" of long ago? It seemed to us there was; the result appears beginning on Page 3.

Thanks to Joe Pitt of the *Vineyard Gazette* for his assistance, along with Tom Clark of the Polly Hill Arboretum and Leo Convery of Edgartown for their advice, on articles in this issue.

— Ed.

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That Summer Consider a Bygone Year

Circuit Avenue Is Mobbed, A Star Visits,
Noise, Traffic & Development Are Issues

by JOHN WALTER

IN THOSE DAYS, coming up from New York, you caught the steamers of the Fall River Line, departing Pier 28, North River, daily at 5:30 p.m. It was an elegant and stimulating overnight trip. The steamers were highly designed, their fine interiors including deep-carpeted staterooms. In the corridors and the grand salons, the richest men in America, on their way to Newport, rubbed shoulders with the merely well-to-do and the middle class, bound for Boston or the Cape or the Islands.

"Floating palaces," the historian Roger Williams McAdam called these steamers, and songs were written about the fabled Fall River Line.

That summer, the New Haven Railroad, operator of the line, brought forth the newest and largest of its inclined engine fleet: The new flagship

JOHN WALTER is the editor of the *Intelligencer*. In addition to sources individually cited, supporting material for this article may be found in the tourism collection of the Martha's Vineyard Museum library, and in files of the *Martha's Vineyard Herald* and the *Vineyard Gazette*.

was *Commonwealth*, 456 feet long; draft, 22 feet.

She was meant to impress: Her interiors combined seven architectural styles — a cacophonous display including a Louis XVI library trimmed in ivory and gold; a Louis XV saloon with a paneled ceiling, creamy white walls, green carpets and upholstery; an Italian Renaissance café.

You could, if you chose, be seated in her topside dining room — 50 feet above the water, with broad windows. As *Commonwealth* eased out of the East River, the skyline of New York and the waterfront of Manhattan fell behind; as dark descended she moved at a stately 17 knots up the sheltered waters of Long Island Sound, out over the open ocean and into Narragansett Bay, past lighted towns and winking lightships.

She stopped at Newport and then, in the early morning, at Fall River, where you transferred to the express train for the New Bedford pier and caught the 8:10 steamer of the New Bedford, Martha's Vineyard & Nantucket Steamboat Company. Your luggage had been booked through, all the way from New York, and was waiting for you on arrival at Oak Bluffs, just after 10 a.m.

And so your vacation began.¹

Everything's Up to Date on 'the Circuit'

That summer, the Island was upbeat.

The winter population of the Vineyard was then 4,000; on summer days, it was said to swell to 20,000, though perhaps those totals, just as in the estimates of seasonal crowds today, were one part fact, one part pick-a-number. Nevertheless, the draw was undeniable. "There is no watering place on the Atlantic coast from Nova Scotia to Newport News combining so many advantages," said E.A. Jones, treasurer of the Boston Suburban Book Company, writing of Oak Bluffs in particular and the Vineyard in general.²

"We're in full swing; everything going," the weekly *Martha's Vineyard Herald* said on July 2, reaching out to potential visitors. "Trolley cars, skating rink, dance hall, moving pictures, flying horses, fishing, boating, auto-mobiling, bicycling, driving, etc. Everybody come down and have a good time during the season when it's too warm to stay in the city."

1 *Commonwealth* was, it turned out, last of the Fall River Line steamers. She and three other surviving ships were sold for scrap after the company collapsed in 1937, its business worn down by the expansion of Northeast train service, the building of the Cape Cod Canal, the impact of the Depression, and, of course, growth of the automobile.

2 His company had published, the previous summer, its first *Martha's Vineyard Directory, Containing Lists of Residents, Street Directory, Business Houses, Town Officers, Churches, Societies, Schools, Etc., of Oak Bluffs, Edgartown, North and West Tisbury, Vineyard Haven, Chilmark, Gay Head etc.*, today an invaluable resource to the period.



The Tivoli (its two square towers visible behind the Flying Horses), the carousel and the Civil War statue are prominent in this view of Monument Square in Oak Bluffs, looking toward the wharf. The statue is at its original location; by 1930, it will be moved as a traffic hazard.

Oak Bluffs was a town in a hurry. The name itself was new then — just a year old, and only now Dr. Edward Worth was getting around to changing the sign on his "Cottage City Drug Store" to "Oak Bluffs Drug Store." Three other institutions — the Cottage City Water Co., the Cottage City Ring Company, the Cottage City House — hadn't caught up yet. Neither had the roadside directional signs outside of town.

Landing at the wharf — and ignoring an unsightly, mounting rubbish heap accumulating along the bluff edge 200 yards to the south³ — a visitor was quickly swept into the happy spirit of the place. Circuit Avenue's unique architecture beckoned invitingly — "a succession of verandas and double verandas, supported by slender pillars, edged with ornamental railings, facing the street with all the imaginative fancy and graciousness that wood, as a material, and the tireless ingenuity of the builders could supply. Towers, gables, single and in pairs,

3 The *New Bedford Standard* of August 6 upbraided town fathers on the matter: "Tin cans, old books and papers, bottles, boxes, kegs, ashes, shavings, in fact a little of everything that has been thrown away ... is all left to fly whenever a breeze may lift it," the newspaper said, illustrating the story with a photograph of just that, in an area within sight of the bandstand at Ocean Park. As the newspaper pointed out, the landing was already unsightly: For some reason, the abandoned trestle of the now-defunct Martha's Vineyard Railroad, running along the beachfront, had been allowed to rot in place for years.

flagstuffs, ornamentation in unflagging detail, abound.”⁴

The visitor hurried past a row of American flags snapping in front of the distinctive twin towers of the Tivoli (in its second season, it was being used as a skating rink this year), the Flying Horses, a bowling alley and Dreamland, a two-story stone-faced structure that offered dancing and movies. He turned toward Circuit Avenue at the Civil War statue (then in its original location, in Monument Square), and gazed up toward a riot of commerce — shop signs (Soda! Cigars! Special Today!) and striped awnings all the way up the street. In the narrow confines of the roadway itself (there were neither sidewalks nor curbs), pedestrians strolled, arm in arm, and stopped to converse in small clusters, apparently oblivious to the motor cars and horse-drawn wagons putt-putting and clattering by. The selectmen had placed a speed limit of 5 miles per hour on automobiles when driving on “the Circuit.”

In those next two blocks alone, the ways in which a visitor could be parted from his money were almost beyond counting:

- An Automobile Station had sprung up on the western side of the street at the foot of the avenue (where the Island theater is now), and the Sea View Boarding and Livery Stable next door was under new management that year, leased by J.H. Thaxter; he rented out wagons and drivers to take visitors up-Island.

- Mattair Brothers, operators of an Oriental arts parlor (“interior decorators — finest line of art goods”), had not one but two locations on the street.

- The Old Popcorn Store, run by Carroll J. Darling, and known popularly by his last name, offered not just the famous corn but also saltwater taffy and potato chips fried in olive oil.

- Four big hotels (Island House, the Metropolitan, the Pawnee, and the Vineyard) elbowed each other for space on the avenue. On the first floor of the Metropolitan, at the corner of Circuit and Park, was James G. Norton’s Pharmacy. At A.J. Rausch’s ice cream parlor next door were sold Schrafft’s chocolates and salted almonds, fresh daily.

- New plaid dress gingham and kimonos were selling for 25 and 50 cents at Mrs. A.C. Smith’s Dry and Fancy Goods (and: bathing suits, souvenirs, gent’s furnishings).

- Cooper A. Gilkes ran the billiards and pool establishment (also selling cigars and tobacco) at Number 118, in the Island House annex.

- The Arcade, with its path leading through to the Camp Ground, had shops tucked invitingly in its corners: Bryant and Co. Jewelers offered silverware, jewelry, souvenirs. Frank Perry had a fruit stand there, and the

4 Henry Beetle Hough, “Oak Bluffs in Its Youth,” *Dukes County Intelligencer*, February 1980.



The Wigwam calls itself “headquarters for sea shore supplies.” The store dates from the 1880s; its current home (the Wigwam Block) from 1900. Next door is the Herald; subscriptions are \$2 per year. Proprietor E.F. Landers also offers job printing.

Maine Ice Cream Co. concocted ice cream sodas with syrup for 5 cents, sodas with fruit for 10. (“Physicians recommend ice cream for weak people, both young and old,” their promotions said.)

- The Wigwam Block Department store, dominating the eastern side of the avenue further up, caught the breathless nature of the whole: It sold everything (“almost anything wanted can be found here”) — furniture, china, rugs, hardware, trunks, window shades⁵ — and placards in the front promoted it all: “Books, Stationery, Toys, Sporting Goods,” and “New York Sunday Papers 5 cents.” Next door was the *Herald* building, with a notary, justice of the peace and auctioneer tucked conveniently in the corner.

- Ernest A. Pease ran the Globe Fish Market at Number 121½, and T.S. Swift’s grocery, marked by a blue sign with white letters, was next to the post office (hours 6:30 a.m. to 9 p.m.)

- And there were at least three real estate offices in business: E.H. Matthews was located in the Oakwood Building at Number 137 (he was also a

5 Stuart MacMackin, a resident of Edgartown and East Chop, wrote about Oak Bluffs in the ’20s for the *Intelligencer*, February 1983. His Wigwam memory was of “a whole section devoted to model boats: sailboats of varying sizes from 10 inches to 4 feet, all working models; also a variety of mechanical ‘motor-boats,’ some spring wound by a key that fitted into the smokestack.”

carpenter and builder); F.R. Sawyer could be found in the Pawnee House Store; W.H. Dutcher handled real estate and insurance at Number 123.⁶

Oak Bluffs was the hotel town, with more visitor rooms than either Edgartown or Vineyard Haven. Hotels and guest cottages operating there that summer, besides those on Circuit, included the New Wesley, with one of Oak Bluffs' five public pay telephones (of 20 on the Island); the Pequot, fully supplied with electricity, and bragging of the food at its dining table; the new Sea View, situated on the bluffs and just 60 feet from the bathing beach; the Grand View House; Attleboro Cottage; the Brookline; the Beatrice House; the Hotel Naumkeag. At the Nashua, George S. Wheeler, proprietor, who resided in Nashua, N.H., in the winter months, rented pianos.

And, of course, Oak Bluffs was the beach town. Both Highland and Oak Bluffs beaches were public then, and lined with bathhouses — the ugly, boxlike structures obliterating views of the water and occupying great swatches of sand. There were 700 such rental bathhouses in Cottage City at the turn of the century (and 100 more at the Vineyard's third formal bathing beach, Edward Chadwick's facilities at Chappaquiddick Point, home today to the Chappy Beach Club). From these cubicles trooped, each morning, eager families in their bathing costumes, wading into the warm sea. And warm it was: The average water temperature was 67 degrees that July, and 69 in August.⁷

That summer, the Oak Bluffs Association had placed new "settees" along the paths at Ocean and Waban parks. The Oak Bluffs Street Railway, connecting to Vineyard Haven, had new cars, brightly painted.⁸

A Way of Life, Aided by Montgomery Ward

Yet that summer the Island was also still a place inextricably linked to its past.

Edgartown would not, until that fall, get electric lights, and pigs were raised off Pease's Point Way.

In Tisbury that year, there were 417 dwellings, 664 taxpayers on town rolls. One hundred horses resided within the town, 46 cows.

Gas lights lined Main Street; H.L. Tilton and E.R. Tilton kept them cleaned and trimmed.

6 Not all of Circuit was commercial. Hamilton J. Greene lived amidst the hubbub; in the fall, he would yank his residence up and move it away, then in its place build, in brick, Greene's Block for new businesses.

7 We know this because George W. Eldridge, chart maker and scholar of tidal currents, a Vineyard Haven resident, kept a record. See the following article in this issue.

8 This is the electric trolley, covering seven miles, formerly known as the Cottage City and Edgartown Street Railway (although there was never an Edgartown branch). It ran only in summer.



With collapse of the whaling industry, Edgartown has fallen into decline. Chappaquiddick, in the distance, is still rural. Daggett Street, from North Water to Steamboat Wharf, is being "concreted," to ease foot travel. Sidewheel steamer is the Nantucket (built 1886, 629 tons).

Professor Nathaniel Southgate Shaler once wrote that Vineyard Haven was "one of those accidental villages with none of the premeditation belonging to the towns which have straight streets and well-aligned houses. One of those natural asylums where old sea captains come to end their days, and today we can say old captains of finance come to prolong them. Here still flows the blood of the sea kings...."

Now, if few of the sea kings were left, some of the romance remained. This year C.G. Hine, son of the man who first summered on Hines Point, self-published a book about the Island, and his passion for place was fired most strongly by the image of Vineyard Haven. He contrasted "the distant village sleeping on the western slope" with the harbor, "the foreground a moving scene of vessels and laughter."⁹

It was 25 years since much of Vineyard Haven had burned to the ground, 40 acres of rubble, 60 buildings lost. Two old homes — the Nye and Daggett houses — guarded the entrance to the village where the trolley track crossed and Beach Street began, but most of Main Street was rebuilt, and, to some eyes, not particularly attractive.

The Seaman's Bethel stood at the shore end of the wharf; it was a busy working harbor in those days. Schooners unloaded lumber, and took on

9 C.G. Hine, *The Story of Martha's Vineyard*, Hine Bros., New York, page 70.

Island produce in return (cranberries, quahaugs, fish). Capt. William Randall ran a modern-day version of the old "bumboat"; his *Susie D*, a little steamer, circled the harbor each day and pulled up to new arrivals, selling dry goods and other necessities to the crew and anchors, water and other supplies to the captains.

If it was not as picture-perfect a waterfront as in years past — sails of the schooner fleet had begun to disappear, replaced by barges bearing coal and ocean-going tugs — it yet had its charms. Hine described the harbor at dark, "riding lights gleaming," and said:

The evening silhouette of the village as one approaches along the Beach Road will, seen under proper conditions of light and shade, be long remembered, with its trees outlined against the dusk of coming night; the shadowy forms of its homes, the lights suggesting comfort and cheer and the church spires crowning all, finishing and humanizing a picture that warms the hearts of the wayfarer.¹⁰

Up-Island, the rural way of life endured. Chilmark was a land of fishermen, farmers, carpenters. Its farmhouses, white with green shutters, or yellow with white trim, were neatly painted. Everyone, including commercial fishermen, kept small gardens. Twenty-two residents obtained dog licenses that year. There remained about 10 deaf people in Chilmark; sign language was still common.

The fishing that summer was good. Bluefish, flounder, sea bass all were abundant in Vineyard waters. Swordfish, too. Off Nomans Land, Capt. Fred DeWolf of the schooner *Priscilla* spotted schools of ravenous sharks.

A state-sponsored dredging project was underway at Menemsha Creek. There were three stores at the head of the basin at Menemsha, along with what was then the Creekville Post Office.

In West Tisbury, S.M. Mayhew's store carried the old *Farmer's Almanac*, and for the privilege was given the back page to advertise its wares: "Dry and fancy goods ... straw and oil carpeting, paper hangings, curtain fixtures, boots, shoes, nice groceries, provisions and flour; paints, oil, varnish; farming tools, grass and garden seeds; patent medicines; horse blankets, carriage robes. The whole comprising the largest variety of goods to be found in any store in Dukes County."¹¹ For other goods, the mail order house of choice was Montgomery Ward.

Long Days and Short Tempers

In July, they had a prolonged hot, dry spell. At the Cape Pogue light-station, keeper W.A. Eldredge noted in his journal 28 days without rain — June 24 through July 21. The grass on the lawn at the Edgartown Court

¹⁰ Hine, pp. 86-87.

¹¹ The almanacs from this period are in the collection of the Museum.



Chilmark center: Author C.G. Hine calls Chilmark "a wonderful living, moving picture... a foreground of pasture lands dotted with sheep and occasional homes, with here and there a well ... off in a field by itself. Beyond are the quiet waters of the pond, the strip of sand beach and the limitless Atlantic..."

House withered and turned rusty brown. The dust on the unpaved town roads — and there were still many of them — swirled up in choking clouds, particularly as drivers in their shiny new automobiles — and there were still relatively few of them — sped by.

On Tuesday, July 7, it was 92 degrees at 11 a.m.

At Squibnocket, the cisterns went dry and gardens wilted. In Vineyard Haven, it prompted a weak joke: "We may advertise 'no hay fever' this summer as it is too dry for hay of any kind."

It was also the summer of an infestation of the gypsy and the brown tail moths, and the elm beetle. Jon F. Hoft was paid \$150 by the Town of Tisbury for spraying the elm trees.

Perhaps the heat shortened tempers. An article in the *New Bedford Standard* suggested all was not well with the Vineyard tourist economy, hinting at tensions between Islander and visitor. This prompted an outburst from summer resident George F. Hadley of Oak Bluffs, whose letter to the *Herald* said that, contrary to the *Standard's* report, prices here were not exorbitant when you factored in the costs involved, that year-round-

ers were "always courteous" and "very appreciative of the patronage of the summer visitors," and that the visitors were not, as the *Standard* may have suggested, tightwads, but instead "liberal spenders ... willing to pay a good price for every luxury as well as necessity." His boosterish letter is notable not just for its passion but for its description of the role of the Vineyard's Portuguese community:

With our family we have been summering here eighteen years, and have not found or expected an Arcadia. But we have found a "God's Country"; its duplicate in air, and water, and sky, its glorious sunrise, and sunsets, and its health-giving properties cannot be found in America.... We have further found a supply of drinking water pumped into our houses city-wise, in amazing abundance, pure, and attractive to the taste. We have over fifty miles of superior drives, upon well-kept macadam and state roads, and excellently cleaned.... We have found those necessary conveniences in this day and generation, gas and electric light. The Boston markets land at our doors every day the country's best available food, and our law-abiding, sober, and industrious colony of Portuguese furnish us with summer vegetables, the like of which cannot be duplicated in any city in the Union. They also raise "Island" lamb, the superior of the famous "Southdown" mutton of old England. They also bring us in early morning, milk, cream, and new-laid eggs in abundance. ...¹²

Mr. Hadley may not have noticed, but there *were* signs of strain as the price of progress.

In Oak Bluffs that year, three of the Vineyard Grove Co. lots at Lake Anthony were sold to a Philadelphia dentist, who promptly erected a house and garage, thereby angering citizens who had considered the old plank walk formerly laid across his grounds a public way.

On Chappaquiddick, summer residents Lester and Irene Clark announced they were going to court to stop the Martha's Vineyard Telegraph Co. from locating poles and wires through what the Clarks claimed was their property. Their sense of offense was echoed by author Hine, who, in his otherwise mild-mannered musings, complained of the telegraph company, too:

The writer would like to express his disapproval of the telegraph-telephone-trolley poles and wires that line so many public highways to the serious detriment of their beauty; the generation is probably not far off that will wonder why such disfigurements were allowed.¹³

And that summer in three towns — Oak Bluffs, Vineyard Haven and Edgartown — seasonal residents were on the warpath about the motors on

¹² *Martha's Vineyard Herald*, August 13.

¹³ Hine, pages 81-82. Hine would no doubt be cheered by the news that the telephone lines along North Water Street in Edgartown will be buried this fall.

fishermen's boats; the noise roused vacationers from their slumber in the pre-dawn hours, they said.

This debate had rippled up and down coastal communities for the last few years. The Submerged Exhaust Co. of Newburyport offered, for \$8 to \$10, what it said was equipment that would muffle the motors now proliferating through every harbor.

After Philip Saltonstall and other seasonal residents, mainly of West Chop, presented a petition declaring power boats to be a "nuisance and a menace to health," Tisbury town fathers called a meeting in Association Hall. There Saltonstall and his brethren said if the boats weren't quieted in some way the West Chop summer residents might just stop coming to the Island. Charles Brown, representing the fishermen, said underwater exhausts would lessen the power of their engines, and make them useless.¹⁴

Early Risings and a Parade Mark Independence Day

That summer, as so many summers since, there was a great rush to be here for the Fourth of July. The Fourth fell on a Saturday.

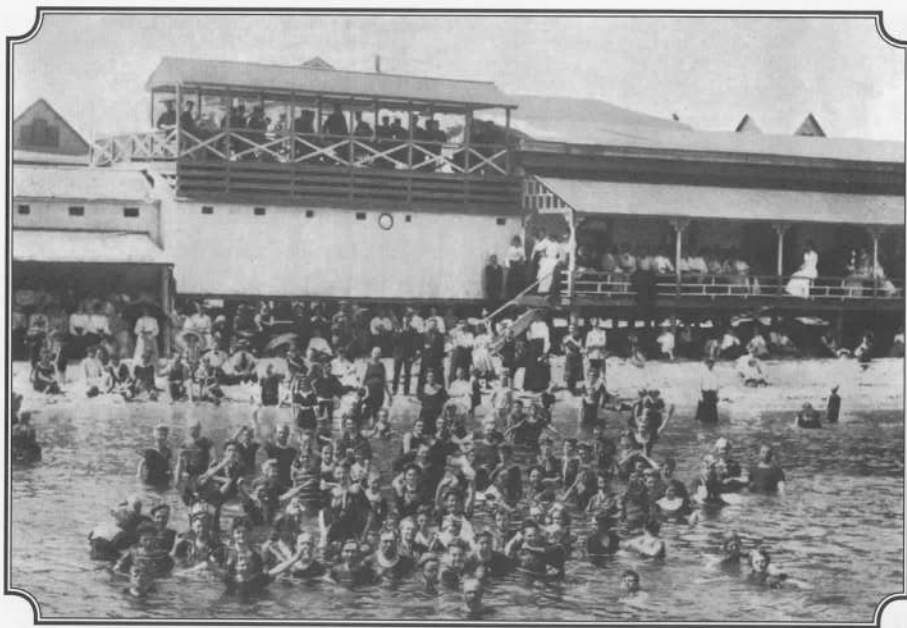
On Friday night, fog descended over Vineyard Sound and Buzzards Bay, and the crew of the steamer *Uncatena*, bound from New Bedford for the Island, decided it was not prudent to proceed past Woods Hole. The anchor was dropped in Hadley's Harbor, and there crew and passengers remained till dawn. At Woods Hole, several hundred pleasure-seekers waiting for transit from the train had to spend the night, piled on top of each other in the cars or stretched out by the track.

In those days, the holiday on the Vineyard was ushered in before dawn with a usually lighthearted game of hide and seek played between the villages' young men and boys, on the one side, and crews of special policemen, hired for the occasion, on the other. The challenge, for the policemen, was to keep the youths from getting to the bell ropes of the churches and the town high school and ringing in the holiday while everyone was still asleep. Every year, somehow, the policemen failed. It was no different this year: In Edgartown, the clamor awakened town residents just before daylight — a confusion of bells and the sound of firearms and firecrackers being set off. Whooping and hollering, the victorious protagonists vanished down Main Street, littering as they went — leaving paper wrappings, pasteboard boxes and the hangdog policemen, defeated once again, in their wake.

The weather was lovely, crystal-clear and not too hot.

The central events of the day were in Oak Bluffs, where the parade started at 9:15 a.m. The Edgartown band was at the head; autos festooned

¹⁴ Somewhat related: Vineyarders that year noted a movement in Nantucket, spurred by seasonal residents, to have the annual town meeting moved from February to August. Taxation without representation — it was an old complaint.



Oak Bluffs' Highland beach and bathhouses are on the far side of Lake Anthony from town; the beach has not yet been taken private. Watching bathers from the pavilion is almost as popular a sport as going in. Bath houses will continue to be used in Oak Bluffs until 1944.

with flags and flowers followed it. Weston Chase's car, filled to bursting with young passengers dressed in white, was covered with a latticework of white ribbons with red rambler roses fastened at each crossing of the ribbon. Marching units included those of the GAR, the Odd Fellows, the Red Men, the Portuguese Association and the school children.

Down Circuit they went, to Pennacook, Waban and Ocean Park, circling back to end up at the Tabernacle, where the orchestra played "Hail Columbus" and the "Battle Hymn of the Republic" and declarations were read. The Rev. J. Wesley Johnston, president of the Martha's Vineyard Camp-Meeting Association, delivered the main address: "America for Americans."

In the afternoon, there was horse racing at Girdlestone Park.

At dusk, celebrants kindled a bonfire on the high bank of the Oak Bluffs jetties, and this was followed by fireworks from a float in the harbor.

Elsewhere, celebrations were simpler. In Lambert's Cove, families picnicked in the grove by the schoolhouse; chowder was served at noon. For Squibnocket residents, Mrs. Jared Mayhew organized a strawberry festival; Rose Mahan sang.

And as night fell, individuals on Chappy and around Edgartown Harbor — from Cape Pogue to Tower Hill — and Vineyard Haven and Oak

Bluffs and Chilmark set off fireworks, too. In Edgartown Mrs. John Carter's cottage caught fire, apparently the victim of errant fireworks. Neighbors squelched it.

"Which feature or incident of the Fourth did I enjoy most?" Charles Harris, summering with his family that year in a tent on the hills of Menemsha, asked in a journal. "Easy to ask, hard to answer. The morning swim? The walk over the hills? The gathering at Sydney's, where all the family met together for the first time in some years, the lunch? The first view of the tent? The fireworks in the evening? Which is best? Who can say? I liked them all the best, for how can one tell which was best when all were equal? Eureka! Eureka! The evening's entertainment by the children of their fire works, that I may say I liked best."¹⁵

Recreation: First and Foremost, the Yachts

That July 4, summer resident Elmer Jared Bliss, grandson of the whaling captain Jared Fisher, head of the Regal Shoe Company (with stores in cities from Maine to the Pacific) was not on the Vineyard. Instead, he was speeding across the Gulf of Maine in his 65-foot schooner, *Venona*, to win the race for small schooners from Isles of Shoals to Portland, an event sponsored by the Eastern Yacht Club. The distance was 35 miles; *Venona* led her nearest competitor by 16 minutes.

In the decade of the great yachts, this was *Venona's* year: She had started the season, in the spring, winning the Bermuda Race — Marblehead to Bermuda — a "gallant little craft which beat the big schooners."¹⁶

Where once columns of the Vineyard newspapers had been filled with shipping news of the great whaling fleets, now they recorded the comings and goings of passing yachts: "Steam yacht *Machigonne*, Ex-Gov. Douglas owner, was anchored here last night, as were also steam yachts *Surprise*, *Jessie* and others."

Years before, the New York Yacht Club had taken control of the bleak old abandoned New York and Portland boat wharf at Eastville and, constructing a small building, christened it Station Number 7 for their annual cruises. Here the "naphtha launches," which served as tenders for the big yachts, could land, bringing passengers ashore for a look at the place, while Islanders gathered to look at them in turn; in one 24-hour period in August that year, hundreds of viewers flocked to the shore to watch the magnificent yachts pass through.

15 Sydney was Charles' brother, who was staying in a house elsewhere on the Harris property. The diaries that Charles' children kept that summer are the subject of an article by Tom Dunlop in *Martha's Vineyard Magazine*, May-June 2004.

16 *Vineyard Gazette*, August 13.

The Edgartown Yacht Club (founded 1905) was a splintered outgrowth of the old Home Club, an Edgartown social organization (founded 1899), where whaling captains, other town residents and visitors played cards and cribbage and which — in summer months — sponsored catboat races. The original Yacht Club clubhouse was a modest two-story affair on Lower Main Street, presided over by the legendary Lott Norton, son of a Cape Pogue lightkeeper who grew up to sail aboard various merchant ships and, for a time, served as sailing master for Tom Thumb in the *Maggie B.* Norton's official job was custodian of club property; he also served, that summer, on the Membership, By-Laws, Finance and House committees of the club.

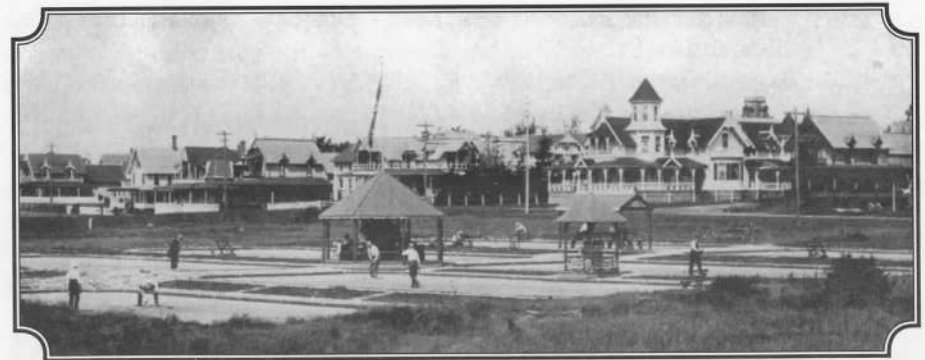
Under Commander Thomas D. Mills, the club claimed more than 100 members and a fleet of 72. It opened its season Saturday, July 18 with the Club Regatta. On July 25, there was a clambake at the Harborside. On August 1, an Open Regatta. On August 8, a Ladies' Race, "in which boats must be steered by ladies only, and any boat whose tiller or wheel is touched by a man, excepting to prevent accident, shall be disqualified."¹⁷ On August 22, another Open Regatta, for Island and Nantucket boats and boats of members. On August 29, another Club Regatta. In events such as these, boats were handicapped by load water line, over-all measurements, extreme beam and horsepower rating; the entrance fee was \$1.

In and out of competition, the yachting crowd provided good business for Islanders. When the steam yacht *Corsair* left Edgartown harbor that July, it had stocked up with 100 loaves of bread from the Edgartown Home Bakery.

The boating crowd was a traveling bunch. Island native Charles S. Simpson, now a part-time resident, was the biscuit king of New Bedford, owner of Snell and Simpson Crackers (maker of the famous "butter thins").¹⁸ This summer, he took his power boat *Mahdeen* to the Harvard-Yale races at New London, and then set off with a party of friends on a tour that went to Nantucket, New York, Albany, Lake Champlain, up the St. Lawrence to Quebec and then, via the Saguenay River, to Halifax, coming home via Maine and Marblehead. With him went S.K. Smith and D.J. Johnson of New York, and Martin J. Canole, a 25-year-old Irish-born lightweight boxer, the first of two professional prizefighters to whom Simpson became attached, sharing his Chappy summers with them. Home in August,

¹⁷ This description is from a club advertisement. Since 1906 women had been eligible to be members of the club — "to fly the Club burgee, enroll their boats and enter all races," according to George F. Brown III, *As We Were: The Edgartown Yacht Club 1905-2004*, Edgartown Yacht Club, 2005.

¹⁸ Profiled in the *Intelligencer*, November 2007; he donated portions of his art collection to the Edgartown Library.



Roque (above; a form of croquet) and baseball are both played at Waban Park. Spectators can wander over from the new Seaview Hotel, opened at the waterfront's edge in 1907. On the ballfield, Oak Bluffs beats New Bedford, 12-5, in the season opener July 17.

Simpson, scouting more land purchases in the Wasque area, tripped over barbed wire concealed in high grass, broke his knee-cap, was carried away to New Bedford aboard *Mahdeen*.

Other Recreations: Roque, Roads, the 'Flickers'

In August, the rains, so long delayed, played havoc with the plans of the pleasure-seekers.

A gale on Saturday, August 1, sank a power boat just off Nomans Land. Heavy storms and a fine shower followed at noon on Tuesday, and Vineyards were startled from their beds by a sharp electrical storm just before dawn on Wednesday. There was a fine drizzle that Friday, more showers Sunday.

Another gale on Thursday, August 27, closed in much of the Island, though the *Uncatena* sailed as usual. On Wednesday, Sept. 2, it poured so hard that one day of the 51st Annual Cattle Show and Fair in West Tisbury was washed out.

Through it all, those who didn't have yachts pursued other recreations, outdoor and in.

Baseball was played at Waban Park, an Oak Bluffs team taking on visitors from New Bedford and Middleboro. As many as 600 watched the contests.¹⁹ Roque and tennis were played at Waban, too; golfers went to Edgartown, where the Pine Side links were modeled on Scottish courses.

As for "auto-ing" or "motoring" or "going for a drive," though the Vineyard was still a place of winding, dusty dirt roads, railway brochures were, like letter writer Hadley, accentuating the positive: "miles and miles of macadam, concrete and shell roads — smooth and hard as asphalt."²⁰ Not only visitors were thrilled at the opened-up vistas: When Captain and Mrs. Marshall of Edgartown were driven Up-Island by their friend and neighbor J.W. Vose, they marveled at parts of the Vineyard they hadn't seen in 26 years of residence.

The rise in popularity of the automobile was not without controversy: Nantucket that summer had rules banning its use from June 15 to Sept. 15. The Vineyard had no such qualms, but on New York Avenue July 21 an auto crashed head-on into the mail stage. No one was injured.

Dr. Orlando S. Mayhew had a new runabout that summer; he joined a list of other doctors in deciding they were good for house calls. Philip Corbin, summer resident of Oak Bluffs, brought his car with him from Connecticut. Carleton Dexter of Edgartown had a "fine Maxwell car" to let for hour or day, for "private parties, with services of chauffeur," seating five adults.

On clear summer evenings, visitors could take a moonlight cruise from Edgartown to Oak Bluffs, hosted by Antone Prada Jr. on his catboat *Gem*. Or they could play whist. Young people would make a beach fire, have a corn roast, toast marshmallows.

The movies were shown not just at Dreamland but also nearby, at Tivoli Temple; and on Wednesday and Thursday evenings, the American Vito-graph Co. sponsored movies at the Tabernacle.

This was the age of the nickelodeon, when old storehouses, lecture halls, the rear of amusement parlors — anything that could be turned into a modest theater — showed "flickers" and "galloping tintypes" — simple stories whose outline could be contained in a single reel. D.W. Griffith this year made *The Adventures of Dollie* and *Lines of White on a Sullen Sea* for Biograph Pictures; but it was not until the coming year that he would introduce the idea of close-ups, cutting and editing that formed the basis

19 The Oak Bluffs nine on August 7: Howland, lf; Metcalf, 2b; Noyes, 3b; Tasker, c; Jackson, 3b; Knoop, rf; Rhodes, 1b; Flint, cf; Livesy, p.

20 Patricia Rodgers, *Three for a Nickel, Martha's Vineyard Postcards 1900-1925*, Aqua Press, 2002, p. 13.

for the motion picture as we know it today. Never mind: These short movies were the perfect summer amusement, and, at 5 cents admission, priced right for the crowd.

The Talk of the Vineyard: Bobbing Bottles, Accidents

The Vineyard was, then as now, a place where a letter in a bottle was big news. That summer, Sylvanus Norton picked up such a bottle on South Beach, where visitors liked to go to watch the surf. The stationery inside was from the Hamburg-American Line steamer *President Lincoln*, dated May 26; it didn't say where it had been thrown into the Atlantic.

Excitement was generated by homecomings: Back to the Vineyard that season came the wandering sailor Shadrach D. Tilton of Vineyard Haven. A cousin of George Fred Tilton of Chilmark, Shadrach had been away 20 years. Landing at New Bedford on the bark *Alice Knowles*, he surveyed old Vineyard haunts, then announced he preferred the Pacific Coast to the Atlantic, and the sea to the land; he would head off to look for a ship sailing out of San Francisco.

In July, a summer guest of J.F. Adams in West Tisbury made news by falling from a second-floor window in the middle of the night. Fay Conant said it happened while he was walking in his sleep, that he had been "troubled with somnambulism" for some time. This time he broke his arm. Cutting short his holiday, Conant went home to Newburyport.

Occasionally things took a more serious turn. On the night of July 11, six summer residents of Marion and Falmouth took the motorboat *Dolphin* over toward the Vineyard; there was an explosion, and four men died. Two others clung to bits of wreckage all night in heavy waves; in the morning, a fisherman, Walter Bowman, found them as he went out to pull lobster pots. Boat owner Arthur Tarbell of Marblehead, one of the survivors, had started out from Marion at 5:15 and was hurrying to get through the dangers of Woods Hole before dark. The blast set the launch on fire. Tarbell grabbed a life preserver, and the other survivor an oar, before they jumped; fastening them together, they drifted about Buzzards Bay all night until Bowman heard their shouts two miles off Scraggy Neck. All along the bay that day, residents and fishermen with yachts and launches searched in vain for the boat or its other occupants. There was no trace.

On the Island, on Wednesday, August 12, a clerk in the ice cream parlor in the Circuit Avenue Arcade was filling the soda tank with gas when it exploded on him. Antonie Batty was blown through the door, along with the tank, into the Arcade, and broken glass was carried into the fruit stand opposite. Batty broke two legs and one arm, tearing his other arm at the

shoulder; he was transported to the hospital at New Bedford.²¹

Just beyond the news columns of the papers, more personal sorrows lurked. On August 28, John H. Foster of Gay Head took out legal papers to declare the end of a marriage: "Whereas my wife, Ann J. Foster, without just cause has left my bed and board, I hereby forbid all persons trusting her on my account, so I shall pay no bills by her contracted after this date."

A Great Singer Visits Her Cousins

It was the summer of a singular sensation.

Her name was Lillian Nordica (nee Norton) and she was an American operatic soprano, a rock star of opera's Golden Age.

Born in 1857 in Farmington, Maine, Nordica was related to the Nortons of Martha's Vineyard (and also the Mayhews, Allens and Athearns).

Trained as a singer in Boston, and graduating from the New England Conservatory of Music, Lillian took the stage name Giglio Nordica ("Lily of the North") to perform in Europe, and not long after her debut in 1879 was the premier Wagnerian soprano of European opera. For years she roamed the Continent, performing in Russia, Germany, Paris, London and, back in the U.S., New York, gathering applause, wardrobe (elaborate gowns), jewels (countless) and husbands (three).

On August 13, the *Herald* ran a Vineyard Haven item: "Madame Nordica's sister, Mrs. [William] Baldwin, with a party of relatives and friends, have the Wilbert Call house on Greenwood Avenue. It is rumored that her gifted sister will be with her for a brief stay."

Just ten days later, accompanied by a cousin, Nordica drove her touring car north from her Hudson River estate, boarded the ferry (the car came, too), and began a two-week visit that was part Royalty Visits the Hinterlands, part Genealogy Quest, part Island Tour — everything but a summer idyll by the seaside.²²

She visited the Bayside Hotel and Cottages, on the shore of Vineyard Haven harbor, the new operation by the old Innisfail management, Innisfail having burned two years before. She attended a tea at the Historical Rooms of the DAR and church on Sunday morning and a clambake on Lambert's

²¹ The Vineyard would not have its own hospital until the summer of 1922.

²² She was not a stranger to the Vineyard. As a young woman, visiting her cousins here in the summer of 1874, Lillian worked part-time sorting mail at the Tisbury post office, and, hearing old family stories became "immensely proud of [her] courageous ancestors." That, according to Ira Glackens, *Yankee Diva: Lillian Nordica and the Golden Days of Opera*, Coleridge Press, New York 1963, page 24. Two years later, in March 1876, as a student at the New England Conservatory, she performed at the Town Hall in Edgartown on a program headlined by G.C. Wheeler, a singer and composer of the day.



An American girl: Touring the Vineyard, opera star Lillian Nordica visits the William Street home of seasonal resident Capt. James B. Robinson. She poses with what is presumably the flag presented to her one day before, at her public performance in Vineyard Haven.

Cove. She sang for the Camp Meeting at Ocean Grove. She descended on Edgartown to visit the Old Mayhew House, and went to Gay Head, where L.L. Vanderhoop ran the restaurant at the Cliffs, and to the fair. Meeting Mrs. Chester Pease of Edgartown, a locally highly-praised soprano, Nordica asked for a private performance, which occurred two days later in the music room of a Vineyard Haven home; Mrs. Pease sang three selections and went away flushed with praise from the great singer herself.

Public highlight of the trip was a reception in Vineyard Haven, at the Methodist Episcopal Church, from 4 to 6 p.m. on Saturday, August 29. "The invitation is general, and doubtless hundreds will avail themselves of the opportunity to meet this charmingly gifted singer," the *Vineyard*



Ocean Park and its "cottages" date from the plans laid down by landscape architect Robert Morris Copeland and developer Erastus Carpenter in the years just after the Civil War. In the park, children sail small boats in the pond, and a hired band greets the arrival of steamboats at the pier. The turreted mansion at right (erected 1891) is that of Philip Corbin, hardware and lock manufacturer from New Britain and former Connecticut state senator. The newspapers note the arrival of the Honorable and Mrs. Corbin just before July 4, their departure in September. Mr. Corbin, born 1824, will live only two years more.

Gazette reported. So hundreds did. Throngs gathered long before the appointed hour, filling up the sanctuary and spilling over far outside; a Chicago man was heard to offer \$50 to get in. So jammed were the streets that Madame Nordica's car, upon arriving, had to turn around and try twice before finding access for the guest of honor.

Her accompanist was down from New York for the occasion. Nordica wore a Parisian gown and performed German, French and English songs. The crowd outside stood in rapt silence as the soaring voice of the soprano wafted from the windows. They presented her with a rich silk American flag, prompting an impromptu singing of the Star-Spangled Banner. Making what she called "the first speech of my life," she announced plans to build an opera house ("a replica of the German Wagner Opera House at Bayreuth") on the slopes of the Hudson River, and to create there an Institute of Art for girls.

And still she was not done:

She visited her cousins, the Nortons, on their farm, spreading her jewels on the kitchen table. She plucked a rose in the garden and sang, "The Last Rose of Summer." She rode one dawn with handsome 18-year-old Franklin Norton on his milk route, astonishing the customers.

In pouring rain, Wednesday, Sept. 2, her motorcar sloshed through mud and sand to the old family homestead in Farm Neck. There she spent an afternoon browsing the attic, studying old deeds and talking with Henry Constant Norton, owner of the pre-Revolutionary farmhouse since 1887. She sang for him, too.

After her entourage steamed away, there was an interesting coda. Boston police, the *New York Times* reported on Sept. 15, were searching for "a large collection of jewelry stolen recently" from "the summer home of Mme. Lillian Nordica, the singer, at Edgartown. The local police failed to find the thieves. The articles of jewelry stolen are worth at least \$4,000 and probably more. Among them were jewels which Mme. Nordica prized very highly." This incident apparently went unreported in the local papers. But the Vineyard Haven correspondent of the *Gazette* ran a cryptic sentence on Oct. 8: "Wanted! A Sherlock Holmes." The remark was not explained.²³

23 Other notables on the Vineyard that summer included two artists, Enid Yandell and George D.M. Peixotto, and two authors, James Barnes and Frederick Van Rensselaer Dey of Westport, Conn., who, under the pseudonym Nick Carter was author of a highly popular series of boys' books. Dey sought solitude; he rented the Binnacle on Chappaquiddick.

That Year, a State Forest Was in the Making

Another rock star dwelt on the Vineyard that summer, too. She was 18 inches tall and lived in the oaks, the bayberry and the dwarf sumac of the Island's center.

The heath hen was much on the minds of Islanders that year. The battle to protect this distinctive bird — the size of a ruffed grouse, light red-brown feathers above, rusty white below, with a gray-brown tail tipped in white and spots of orange on neck and eye — had gone on for decades. At least once (1876), it had been believed the bird was extinct.

As early as 1831, the State Legislature had tried to prevent hunting it during breeding season, and by the late 19th century there were many years when hunting was banned completely. The heath hen had vanished everywhere but the Vineyard; a terrible fire in 1894 left skeletons of dozens of birds and reduced its numbers significantly.

Still the heath hen lived on; in the summer months it ate grasshopper, crickets, spiders and worms and nipped at the leaves of red clover. It had a peculiar toot — sometimes like a tugboat in the fog, sometimes like the hoot of a barred owl. The state hired a deputy to live on-Island and enforce the no-hunting rules, although the prime nesting grounds of the bird were on private property.

In 1907, a survey by the State Commission on Fisheries and Game estimated that only 45 to 60 were left on the Island, and John E. Howland of Vineyard Haven proposed that a heath hen reservation be created. The idea was soon endorsed by George W. Field, chairman of the state game commission. A fundraising effort, to finance purchase of the land, followed; a total of \$2,420 was collected, including donations from the towns of Tisbury and West Tisbury.

Then, in the first week of July, Field's office announced the state had under consideration purchase of the 600-acre farm of Antone Andrews. A bill introduced by Rep. Mayhew of Martha's Vineyard authorized the taking of 1,000 acres. (Later, it would grow to 2,000 acres.) The bill, supported by the Audubon Societies and sportsmen's organizations, passed, and \$2,000 was appropriated for the purpose. The Andrews acreage would be purchased before the end of the year; Field announced the closing of the deal on Dec. 8.

By the next summer, the heath hen count was estimated at 200. There was a collective sigh of relief: The bird would be saved.

A Changing of the Guard

That September, Susan Clapp Bradley died in Brockton. Years before, she had turned daily supervision of the Oakland Mission in Cottage City over to O.E. Denniston, who "with the cooperation of his wife and other faithful Christian workers," Denniston wrote, "has endeavored to main-

tain the earnest and loving purpose that was in the mind of the friends of the mission ... founded for Portuguese, colored people and for the good of all the people." The Mission would be the precursor of Bradley Memorial Church.

At Seven Gates Farm, too, a new era had begun.

Professor Shaler, the Kentucky-born expert in paleontology and geology who had acquired for his summer home 2,000 acres of North Tisbury land, had died two years earlier. Control of "Shaler's Farm" had passed to his daughter Gabriella and her husband, Willoughby Lane Webb.

Webb is described in Elizabeth Bramhall's book about Farm history as "a 'tweedy gent' who always wore a coat and tie and straw hat and had a 'natty little goatee,'" a New York lawyer who gave up his practice "probably 'for reasons of health' (it has been speculated that he had a nervous breakdown)." ²⁴ Nevertheless, he seized the reins, with an ambitious plan to build a model dairy farm.

He started with a herd of registered Jerseys, and, this summer, was producing milk and cream in sealed glass bottles, each bottle bearing words, blown in the glass, that proclaimed its origin: "SEVEN GATES FARM, NO. TISBURY, MASS."

Down the way, in an ancient farmhouse on the Edgartown Road, half a mile from the post office in West Tisbury, Joshua Slocum was transitioning, too. Slocum, a Nova Scotia native, and his wife Henrietta (Hettie) had purchased their farm with earnings from his book, *Sailing Alone Around the World*, and he had tried to settle down. It hadn't taken; the winters were too cold for him, and for three years now he had mostly been away, sailing on a series of voyages in the 37-foot sloop *Spray*, alone again.

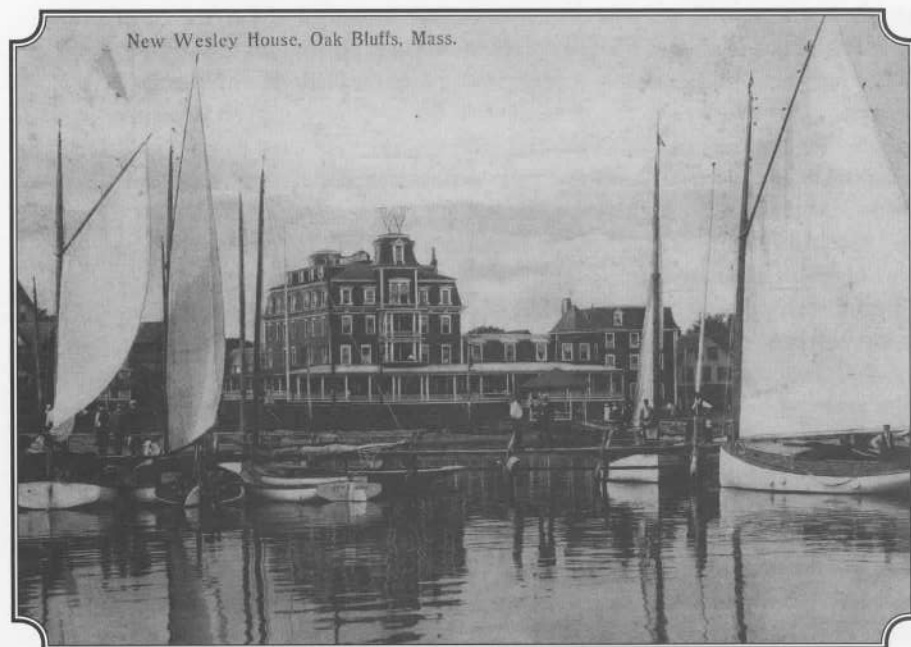
That summer, in June, he had sailed *Spray* into New York harbor bearing a two-ton chunk of coral from the Bahamas; scientists had hired him to carry it to the U.S. for delivery to the American Museum of Natural History.

Now he came back to see Hettie. Both he and *Spray* had seen better days. *Spray* was damp, cracked and in need of paint, and Slocum, 64, was more shabbily dressed than usual, wearing a ragged black felt hat. Some wondered if *Spray* was no longer seaworthy; this was the year before Slocum sailed her south and was never heard from again. ²⁵

But this summer, on a sunny, clear day, with the wind out of the Northeast, Nat Harris, 10, and his sister Catherine, 9 — the children of Charles Harris — went aboard *Spray* at Menemsha Creek and met Slocum. It was a moment they would never forget. He pressed into their hands some shells — and a piece of yellow coral.

²⁴ Elizabeth Bramhall, *Seven Gates Farm — The First One Hundred Years*, Seven Gates Farm, 1988.

²⁵ Walter Teller, *The Voyages of Joshua Slocum*, Rutgers University Press, 1958.



Originally known as Wesley's Hotel, with a front entrance facing the Campground, the New Wesley now faces the water, has a sun parlor warmed by steam heat and a fine piano and polished floor for dancing. Transient rooms, \$2 to \$3 a day; catboats for rent "at a reasonable cost."

A New Generation Is in Residence

Some of the youngsters at work and play on the Island that summer would figure in Vineyard life for years to come.

Joseph Chase Allen was 16 that year, and working in Menemsha aboard Everett Poole's famous catboat, *Goldenrod*. Built in 1897, *Goldenrod* originally sported a huge sail — a spread of 525 square feet of canvas — and had a reputation as the fastest cat in the water. Equipped with an engine about six years later, she was used for lobstering in summer; handlining, codfishing and trawling in winter.²⁶ Allen, who became a prolific and long-running writer for the *Gazette*, would always remember how in those days the local catboats in Menemsha Creek and Down-Island were joined by those of summer visitors from the Cape; "the fleet was inspiring."²⁷

Henry Beetle Hough, future *Gazette* editor (and Allen's boss), was also here that summer. He was 12 years old, and with his mother and brother, stayed at Fish Hook, in North Tisbury; his father George, the newspaper editor in New Bedford, commuted on weekends.

²⁶ John Leavens, "Up-Island Catboats," *Intelligencer*, February 1986.

²⁷ *Gazette*, June 11, 1965.

Dorothy West, then just one year old, was brought here that year for the first summer of many. Her mother, Rachel, loved the Island; her father, Isaac, was bored by it and stayed home in Boston to run his wholesale banana business in Haymarket Square.²⁸ That summer, the Wests shared a duplex with Phoebe Moseley Adams Ballou, on the waterfront in Oak Bluffs, next to Call's Market (now Our Market). The next year, it would burn down and the Wests would move into the Highlands; they were, West later said, one of about a dozen of the first seasonal black cottage owners, all from Boston. (New York blacks came later, a group whose style and attitudes astonished her crowd.) In West's childhood summers here, her mother, unlike their neighbors, would not return to Boston till long past Labor Day: "My mother could not bear to leave. Fall was so lovely. Winter would be so long to wait to see an Oak Bluffs sky again. We lingered for those magic days until my father wrote, as he wrote every year, 'Come on home; there are no more flowers to pick.'"²⁹

And it was the first summer for some Island newborns.

Wesley Mayhew Whiting, later the distinguished Harvard professor, was born that June at Quenames. At the agricultural fair, his big brother Henry Lawrence exhibited Wesley, along with a tray of 11 varieties of vegetables in big brother/little brother sizes.

Thelma Luce, daughter of Harry and Irene Mayhew Luce, was also born that year, in Edgartown; growing up, she played on the family dairy farm on the site of what is now Farm Neck. Thelma Luce Baird would live 100 years.³⁰

Enthusiasm for the New and Different

The Vineyard was changing; in Ocean Heights, the latest "resort" development was underway. Blocks were marked off alphabetically and cottage lots numbered. A plant on site was churning out concrete to support the new construction. Isaac Burgess of Plymouth was building on Lot 24, Block K, and Andrew Cassidy of Waltham, with grander ambitions, bought four lots for a single residence in Block J.

Change, of course, would be a way of life on the Vineyard from that time to this. Yet in spite of that, looking through the contemporary documents of that summer, a reader today is struck not by the differences between their time and ours, but by the similarities.

All the major mechanisms of the Vineyard as summer resort are by then in place. The pleasures, and conflicts, of a year-round community welcoming seasonal visitors in its midst (and depending on them, economically) were as familiar to the Islanders of that day as they are in our

²⁸ James Robert Saunders and Renae Nadine Shackelford, *The Dorothy West Martha's Vineyard*, McFarland and Company, Jefferson, N.C. 2001, pp. 5-6.

²⁹ Dorothy West, *The Richer, The Poorer*, Doubleday 1995, p. 176.

³⁰ She died Jan. 22, 2008 in the Windemere Nursing Home.

own. The obsession with weather, the importance of ice cream and entertainment, the wary eye on development — all these were already part of the Vineyard story. The delicate dance between year-rounder and summer visitor had begun.

Only one thing is missing, and its absence is striking: In none of the contemporary accounts can be found a sense that the Vineyard's best days are past; on the contrary, everyone is filled with enthusiasm for the new and the different. They haven't invented Nostalgia yet.

Much later, *Gazette* Editor Hough would yearn for days he had never himself seen:

After the turn of the century there came a freshening of different winds, a new spirit, a different dominance. The summer community was all at once aware of itself, began to act as a separate social force, broke with the drifting of the past and directed its own affairs. The naïveté of the old age had gone beyond recall, and in place of the regime of sea captains projecting railroads and hotels to develop a watering place, there was a new regime in which summer residents formed clubs and associations to lay out golf courses and provide for their own entertainment.

In this new period there was a slighter overlapping, a narrower contact between the summer community and the all year residents of the island. The early summer visitors had mingled with the islanders; in the early clubs, the two worlds had met on something like equal terms.... Now the summer visitors were apt to be strangers who remained strangers, except to themselves.³¹

But if that was noticed at the time, one searches in vain for evidence of it. Only a single phrase in the North Tisbury social column of the *Gazette* that July 30 perhaps inadvertently, or wistfully, hints at Hough's complaint. The unnamed columnist reports:

"The residence of the late John B. O'Brien is occupied by people from away."

At Season's End, A Rush to the Exit

That summer, on Labor Day weekend in Oak Bluffs, there were balloon ascensions over Lake Anthony, in front of the Wesley House, and fireworks on Saturday evening. The Banda Rosa played music during the display, and Wesley House management provided sittings for hundreds on their 85-foot-long piazza, while hundreds more watched from the em-bankment.

At Tower Hill Cottages in Edgartown on Monday, Sept. 7, just after breakfast, guests gathered on the lawn and Jay B. Benton, on behalf of

31 Hough, *Martha's Vineyard, Summer Resort*, Turtle Publishing Co, Rutland, 1936, pp. 268-269.

the guests and employes presented the owner, Mrs. Goell, with a new flag. They all sang the Star-Spangled Banner as they ran it up the pole. Rev. Rowland Nichols gave a speech about what the flag means to true Americans, and children gave the School Salute to the Flag.

There were extra steamers to handle the crowds on Sunday, Monday and Tuesday, connecting to trains at Woods Hole and New Bedford.

Public schools opened Tuesday, Sept. 8.

Some visitors lingered; like Rachel West, they found it impossible to leave. The weather remained fine and they sought the best of the waning days. Soon there would be a chill in the air. The Tivoli closed. Dreamland remained open. The Casino on Oak Bluffs Beach gave free admission that Tuesday night. (In the basement of the Casino, you could have a salt-water bath, hot or cold.)

At one of the Oak Bluffs shops — perhaps the Wigwam, where post-cards were displayed in racks right on the front porch — a woman named Katherine bought one of the "view postcards" popular in those days, cards showing Island scenes artificially colored by the manufacturer. Her card was of Ocean Park, a particularly popular scene. In it, summer visitors are scattered across the lawns near the bandstand, which has been painted with a bright red roof. In the foreground, three children play near a large rock, and a couple lounges by the fountain, she in white blouse with her hair piled on top of her head, he in a white shirt, leaning on one arm and wearing a straw hat. A bicycle lies, on its side, behind them. Another couple lounges on a park bench nearby, the woman in a long dark skirt. The young trees at the edge of the fountain are tinged red and yellow. The grass is green. In the distance, the houses that circle the park have windows thrown open. It is the perfect image of peace and tranquility, romanticized, frozen in time.

Katherine addressed the card to a friend named Mary, who lived in Oak Bluffs. On the back she wrote a brief, teasing message whose meaning has been lost to time: "Mr. C. thought you were a fine Little Girl." And on the front she wrote her own name and the date: "Sept. 8th, 1908."³²

And then that summer — 100 Vineyard summers ago — was gone.

32 Collection of Patricia Rodgers.

When 'Sea Bathing' Became 'Going in Swimming'

by GEORGE W. ELDRIDGE

"Ocean bathing began on the Vineyard in the late 1870s," Arthur Railton has written. "Bathers were mostly women and children.... Bathing was not an athletic exercise. It consisted mostly of standing in water about chest deep, talking with the other lady bathers." But in the early years of the 20th century, "sea bathing" was changing. Men had joined the crowd. Bathing costumes were getting shorter, brighter. The beach was much more fun. — Ed.

UNDOUBTEDLY SEA BATHING is one of the chief attractions for a large majority of the people who frequent the seashore. The reader may feel assured that the bathing at Martha's Vineyard is varied enough to suit all temperaments.

The bathing at Edgartown, Oak Bluffs or Vineyard Haven is undoubtedly superior to any on the Atlantic coast south of Cape Cod. The temperature of the water is 12 degrees warmer than the North Shore, and the beaches are the finest.

Right here, and to satisfy my mood, and perhaps make for the reader a pleasant diversion, let me describe a representative scene of what is common most any day at our beaches in summertime. Place, Oak Bluffs; time of day, say about 11 o'clock a.m. A sandy beach in the foreground, edged by the foamy wavelets that swish themselves lazily landward. The sheeny ocean with its blue and emerald tints sending forth its mysterious odor, and the summer breeze, heavy with its subtle pungency, greet the nostrils and lungs of the saunterer on the beach.

This cursory glance at Old Neptune's allurements will suffice for the moment, so we will turn our attention to the flood of humanity who are wending their way to the beach, willing victims to the attractions of this old god of the sea.

And now let us draw a little closer and observe the eager, expectant throng that are "going in swimming," and in a few minutes to be arrayed in garments that shall vie with all the hues of the rainbow, and cause the coat of Joseph, of Biblical fame, to sink into insignificance, for the hour at least.

GEORGE W. ELDRIDGE published his first *Eldridge's Tide and Pilot Book* in 1875. This is an excerpt from an article, "Martha's Vineyard, the Gem of the North Atlantic," in *New England Magazine*, April 1909.



The line forms here: Diving from a pier in Vineyard Haven.

First comes a young and fearless swimmer. Watch him now as he rushes from his bathhouse like some amphibious animal. In a few minutes he is apparently as much at home in the water as out of it.

Here comes a dainty maiden arrayed for her toilet for the sea. See her pretty foot, how it toys with the water; hear her "Ugh!" as she draws back. She pauses for only a moment, however, and then another charge oceanward, until with a fling and a splash she is fairly in. Old Neptune embraces her, and for the hour she is his willing creature, a veritable mermaid.

Here is another subject for study and comment. Who is he? It is immaterial to us as to his name, but we will wager he is a representative business man from some of the inland cities. Watch him now in his "bran-new" [sic] sea garb, donned for the first time. He approaches Father Ocean with the same air of deliberation that he would exercise in a commercial transaction, firm, decisive. Now he is in the water, his look of confidence partially replaced by one of surprise at its effects on his sturdy frame. Onward he advances; deeper and deeper the water grows until his ample waist is submerged. On, still on, until his shoulders are level with the water. Then, with a shudder and a swash, he fairly realizes what a bath in old ocean signifies.

A hundred different types of humanity are now in the water, splashing, diving, swimming, puffing, all bent on a full enjoyment of the stimulating and novel experience of sea bathing. How it braces upon those tired, jaded nerves; how the blood is going to tingle and bound when they conclude to quit old ocean, and don their dry and grateful clothing; and then the feeling of renewed vigor and life that they are going to experience. Try it, reader!

Clubwoman's Commandments: No. 5, Spare the King's English

And, Over the Years, Other Expectations As Edgartown Woman's Club Grew Up

by CAROLYN O'DALY

In the August 2007 Intelligencer, an article about the Triad Club of Oak Bluffs recounted how that women's organization grew and changed through its existence, 1908 to 1981. Here, Carolyn O'Daly records how the Woman's Club of Martha's Vineyard, founded in Edgartown 10 years before the Triad Club and still surviving, went through its own processes of change. —Ed.

In 1898, after enjoying the hospitality and mental stimulus of a Lynn's Woman's Club, I began to wonder why a similar club could not be organized in my home town — Edgartown on Martha's Vineyard.

My wonder and enthusiasm quickly developed into real intention to found such a club for study and improvement. Upon getting back to the Edgartown home, I turned to Mrs. Mary Wesley Worth for co-operation — a broad-minded woman of advanced thought. Mrs. Worth was intensely interested in my plan, ready at once to go side by side in the work of forming such a club.

A tentative list was made of those who, presumably, would be interested and friends were interviewed and called together. These, unanimously, ... with ready enthusiasm, at once fell in with the project.

Naturally, and graciously, Mrs. Worth urged that I become President, but I chose to decline for obvious reasons. Mrs. Worth was a much older woman, well-fitted to be such a leader — while I, on the other hand, especially wished to be free to conduct and develop the Class in Current Events and Literature — the development in which I was particularly interested in the Lynn Club. This I did, by the way, until I went away to teach.

All the necessary business having been transacted, the details of organizing a Woman's Club having been worked out — the Woman's Club of Edgartown became an organization and a factor in community life and thought.

Sara Joy Mayhew wrote those words in 1948 on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Woman's Club.

Carolyn O'Daly is a Katama resident and a member of the Woman's Club.

The club gavel, still in use today, was fashioned by Manuel Swartz from a tree felled in Mrs. Fannie Deane's yard. The first program, hand printed in 1899, included 51 planned meetings and seven club receptions. The ladies (it may sound archaic, but the women of the club have always called themselves ladies, and do so to this day) were very busy indeed.

It began, as Mayhew describes, with an invitation to a Woman's Club meeting in Lynn. Afterward, Mayhew and her friend Mary Wesley Worth started a club of their own.

The Edgartown Woman's Club (alternately The Woman's Club) was organized in 1898. The oldest existing club in the Cape and Islands district, it joined the State Federation in 1924 and the General Federation in 1926. The original objectives as set down in the club constitution were "to broaden individual ideas, to develop latent power, to obtain a practical utility of general knowledge, and to encourage social intercourse."

To today's ears, those ideas may sound radical for a group of women at the end of the 19th century, but Martha's Vineyard, with its long history of whaling, was known for its strong, independent women.¹

When civic responsibility and philanthropy were added, the motto of the club became, "Not for self, but for all," and the club altered its purpose early on to include philanthropy as one of its goals.

With a focus on literature and literacy, the women's initial interest was the creation of a library and in 1902 a permanent library fund was formed. Money was raised by hosting benefits such as bridge parties, basketball games,² an "Old Folks Concert and Musical Entertainment," and fashion shows.

Outreach to the Community

It wasn't long before requests for support started pouring in to the club.

A Welfare Committee was formed and shoes, clothing, food, drugs and coal were distributed. In 1933, donations included 600 pieces of wearing apparel, 18 pairs of shoes and other necessities. Then, oddly, that committee was dropped in 1934 due to lack of need.

Another long-standing program supplied milk to undernourished children at the Edgartown School, and there was an annual stipend for the dental clinic at the school.

Others who benefited from the charitable works included the Martha's Vineyard Hospital, the Animal Rescue League, the Boy's Club, and Girl Scouts. In 1908 a rubbish can was donated to the town, "to be placed on one of the four corners of Main Street," and money was raised to help refurbish Town Hall.

1 The charter members, besides Worth and Mayhew, were: Eliza A. Norton, secretary/treasurer; Maria T. Pease; Harriet Pease; Fannie A. Deane; Lavinia Coffin; Parnell Fisher; Julia Fisher; Abbie D. Pease; Dora L. Peakes; Harriet Morse; Sadie Pease; Caroline Schofield; Jennie C. Marchant

2 I don't believe the women played.

Some donations went off-Island: The club contributed \$5 toward the purchase of a dog for the Byrd Expedition in 1933, and, the same year, sent money to the Federated Forest Fund.

What Was Expected of Them

In 1914 club members adopted The Clubwoman's Ten Commandments:

- I. Thou shalt have no other clubs before this one.
- II. Thou shalt not worship any false thing.
- III. Remember thy club engagement, especially the business meetings.
- IV. Honor thy club sisters.
- V. Thou shalt not murder the King's English.
- VI. Thou shalt do the best thou canst with thine own talents.
- VII. Thou shalt be prepared for roll call.
- VIII. Thou shalt not at the eleventh hour begin to hunt for material for thy paper.
- IX. Thou shalt not speak in meeting when thy sister has the floor.
- X. Thou shalt diligently keep these commandments that thy club shall be a delight, whose fame shall be spread to the uttermost parts of the town where thou dwellest.

The Woman's Club and the Want to Know Club survive today, but they had plenty of company during the early years of the 20th century, including the Triad Club of Oak Bluffs, the Acanthus Club of Vineyard Haven and the Woman's Community Club of Chilmark. These clubs shared their educational programs on a regular basis.

The 1916 minutes reported:

On October third fifteen members of the Woman's Club went to Vineyard Haven by automobile to attend the annual meeting and reception of the Want to Know Club. There they met the members of the Triad Club of Oak Bluffs and the Acanthus Club of Vineyard Haven, and were very enjoyably entertained by music and charades and a bountiful collation. Mrs. Hillman recited an original poem and gave a summary of the club work of the preceding six months.

In those days, the club had an ambitious agenda. Membership was limited to 50. The club met September through May, as it does today. There were originally four standing committees or departments: Current Events, Literature, Travel and Home Science, each of which met twice a month putting on various programs.

Along the way, Home Science morphed into Domestic Science and in 1933 became the Department of the American Home.³

3 By 1948, the 50th anniversary, the standing committees were: Youth Conservation, Drama, Art, Music, Social Welfare, Education, Legislation, Press and Custodian. By 1998, the 100th anniversary the standing committees were: Education, Conservation, Fine Arts, Home Life and Public Affairs.



From the Woman's Club scrapbook: founders Mary Wesley Worth and Sarah Joy Mayhew.

Caring for a home and family was of high priority for these women, and Domestic Science Class tackled such topics as salads and household hygiene. Discussions led by club members included "Does the modern youth play too much?" (1909), "a woman's idea of summer comfort," and "the vacuum cleaner and its practicability."⁴

In Literature Class, there was study of the classics, poetry and drama and musical presentations. Program titles: "The Character of Hamlet as Portrayed by Great Actors," "Historical Events During the Reign of Henry VIII," "Interpretations of Shakespeare's Heroines" and "Music in Shakespeare." Committee chairmen frequently picked a topic for an entire year's study. In 1911 a 21,000-line narrative poem by Robert Browning, *The Ring and the Book*, was chosen, and 1922's topic was "The Modern American Poet."

Tourist Class was a way for women who were isolated on the Island to study history and geography and to travel vicariously through their friends. Sometimes one country was studied for an entire year (Holland, 1912; the U.S., 1922). Other years there were slide shows of members' travels: the ruins of ancient cities, the women of Damascus.

Changing with the Times

Over the years, departments and committees changed to reflect members' lives and interests. As the three original departments evolved, there were introduced committees on public health, art, child welfare, mother-craft, defense, legislation, social welfare, education, religion, drama, American citizenship, community service and international affairs,

4 Outside speakers, the custom today, were not introduced until the 1930s.

among many others. As women's issues changed, so did the club.

So did the by-laws.

Initially the club had a constitution. By-laws were added, and eventually all that was combined into one document.

Membership was limited and there was a waiting list until sometime around the 50th anniversary, when membership was increased to 100. Pastors' wives and teachers who were not members were included as permanent guests and could attend most of the meetings. Women who wished to join were sponsored by two members and voted on by the entire membership. From 1939 until 1975, the vote was accomplished by members dropping black and white balls into a voting box; three black balls and a candidate was turned away. It happened rarely, but at the Sept. 26, 1935, meeting, Alice R. Cleveland was rejected.⁵

The original constitution said that if a member were found, for whatever reason, unsuitable she could be dropped from the club by a two-thirds majority vote; that was eliminated in the revised by-laws. Originally there was no term limit for the presidency, and Abby Hillman, the second president, served for 25 years. Two-year term limits were set in 1933.

Dues have changed, been modified and raised over the years. In 1898 it was called a "club fee," and ran 75 cents for the year. By 1983 dues were \$5, and in 1999 they reached the current \$30, more than half of which goes to the State and General Federations for membership fees.⁶

The club's political activities began in 1902 with a letter drafted to Edgartown selectmen "entreating that some means may be used whereby our elms may be preserved." The Legislation Committee studied bills coming before the legislature and formed opinions then approved or opposed by the membership. In 1937 the club went on record as approving serological tests of pregnant women, backing the Massachusetts Birth Control League and protesting the closing of Mother's Health Centers. In 1939, Legislation Committee Chairman Marjorie W. Braley encouraged a "uniform traffic law — including laws for bicycle regulations — more of a problem every day." In the late '60s and early '70s the upheaval in the rest of the world did not pass go unnoticed. Local legislators' names and addresses appeared in the handbook with a line encouraging members to write them about political issues.

Major world events changed the club. The outbreak of World War I in-

⁵ One of the club's current life members, Norma Bridwell, found this process distasteful and did away with it during her presidency, donating the ballot box and its black and white balls to the Martha's Vineyard Museum. Sponsorship is now only a technicality.

⁶ The rest subsidizes the club's charitable works including two or three Red Stocking children at Christmas, and a \$1000 scholarship to a Martha's Vineyard Regional High School graduating senior in need.

* To secure prompt and correct attention all business communications should be addressed to the firm. We cannot be responsible for loss of Books sent by mail, or sent out for enclosure.

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The Woman's Club was an early supporter of a town library. This receipt for eight books is in the scrap-book of the club.

spired members to forgo their socials and donate the money to the Red Cross. With the onset of World War II, clothing was collected for the "Bundles for Britain" program and members were encouraged to collect scrap metal and rubber. They purchased bonds to fund an ambulance plane and hospital train. They volunteered as plane spotters, air raid wardens and canteen workers.

Meetings were held in members' homes;⁷ there were as many as 40 events a year, counting meetings, classes, entertainments, socials and occasional field trips.

⁷ St. Andrew's Parish House became a permanent home in 1986.

Into the Modern Age

In the 1950s and '60s, musical programs, auctions and fashion shows were on the agenda.

Programs involving outside speakers were begun that have continued to the present day. Speakers have come from both on-Island and off: In the early days, Miriam Van Waters, superintendent of Framingham Reformatory for Women; Blanche Robinson, radio commentator; Chester Sweatt, superintendent of schools; Dr. Russell S. Hoxsie; Sidney N. Riggs; Henry Beetle Hough; Robert Carroll. Helen Lamb showed a film about the camp that would become Jabberwocky. The members still had an active interest in homemaking; Helen Grant gave a Singer sewing machine demonstration.

Then, over the years, the women have heard from Norman Bridwell on Clifford the Big Red Dog; Gus Ben David, when he was in charge of Felix Neck; Arthur Railton, former editor of this journal. Author Cynthia Riggs holds the record for visits, because she comes every time someone cancels.

The average age of the club's members has risen over the years, as women's lives have undergone so much change. Now many women work and don't have the luxury of attending daytime meetings. Membership is down; from a high of 80 or more members, the club has 48 now, about average for most clubs in the state. The women no longer actively fund-raise; charitable funds come through donations and dues. Club activities have settled back into being a social event; the handbook encourages members to "bring a sandwich and a friend."

Still, in spite of all the change, recent club presidents have links to the history of the organization: Eileen Robinson's mother, Lucretia Sibley, was the tenth president, and Peg Kelley's aunt, Laura Vincent, was the eighth.

In 2006, after many years of discussion, the Edgartown Woman's Club changed its name to the Woman's Club of Martha's Vineyard.

DOCUMENTS

The Pagoda Tree of Water Street: Captain Milton's Enduring Gift

by MRS. GRAFTON DUVALL DORSEY

This paper was written for presentation to the Dukes County Historical Society on Wednesday, July 25, 1945. —Ed.

ON SOUTH WATER STREET, Edgartown, in front of the house that until lately was the home of Dr. and Mrs. Edward P. Worth, stands the pagoda tree, an off-islander indeed, for it was brought from far China by Capt. Thomas Milton in 1837. It came in a small flower pot, was welcomed, cared for, protected, and today is one of the most beautiful and gracious sights of Edgartown, as well as being for over 100 years an outstanding example of our good hospitality. Ninety feet in height, with a spread of 70 feet, it is a noble specimen of its kind, and has been so long among us that we no more regard it as an alien, but claim it as a civic possession in which we take great pride.

Botanically, our tree is a *Sophora japonica*, the generic name having been given by Linnaeus from *sophora*, an Arabic term meaning a tree with pea-like blossoms. The *Sophoras* belong to the pea family, *Leguminosae*, one of the largest botanical divisions, for it has 429 genera and 7,000 or more species, with almost endless subspecies, varieties and forms.¹ The *Sophora japonica* is related to the locust, the tamarind, the poinciana, the wisteria and many other trees and shrubs familiar to us all. It has some varieties strictly its own, as the *Sophora japonica* 'Pendula,' when it twists its limbs and hangs its branches low like a weeping willow, but interesting as they are, details become confusing, and for the moment it is enough to know

¹ Although in 2008 the name *Sophora japonica* is still widely used, most taxonomic treatments now assign the tree to a new genus, *Styphnolobium*, making the current scientific name *Styphnolobium japonicum*. The family name, too, has undergone a change since Mrs. Dorsey wrote: The current scientific name for the pea family is *Fabaceae*. It is the third largest family of flowering plants, after the orchid and aster families, with more than 700 genera and more than 19,000 species. This updated information is provided by Thomas Clark, collections and grounds manager at the Polly Hill Arboretum.



Woodcut by Sidney Noyes Riggs

that our Edgartown tree is a *Sophora japonica*, or Chinese pagoda tree.

This name, however, is unknown in China, its native country. There it has been in existence from the earliest times, and in the Erh-ya, the oldest Chinese dictionary, 12th century B.C., it is described as the Huai tree, and by this appellation it is known today. Any research concerning Chinese information in regard to this tree should be made about the Huai, which will be found to figure both in song and story in its own land. It is there sometimes called the scholar's tree, from the saying that when the flowers of the Huai fade, the students are busy preparing for the autumn examinations.

Its earliest home was in the north of China, although today it is found in many parts of that country. From China, the pagoda tree came to Japan, introduced by some Buddhist priests, and thereafter was highly cultivated and chiefly used around temples and kindred places, for which reason foreigners give it this particular name. Thus in China the tree is known as the Huai tree; foreigners have called it the pagoda tree; botanically it is the *Sophora japonica*. The same tree, with a choice of three names.

It was highly valued for its shade and because it flowers in August when few trees are in bloom. In the grounds of the Temple of Heaven in Peiping there was a fine avenue of *Sophora japonica*, and it is to be seen in many

squares and streets of the city itself. In Italy it is largely used as a shade tree today, for it withstands cold winters well, as is proved by our own grand pagoda. One of the indications by which the *Sophora* may be distinguished as such is the fact that the bark of its twigs and smaller branches remains green in winter.

Sophora japonica was one of the first Oriental trees to be introduced to the western world. In 1747 it was brought from Pekin to Paris by Father d'Incarville, a Jesuit missionary, and seeds given to Bernard de Jussieu, one of a family of famous botanists, and at that time demonstrator of plants in the Jardin du Roi. The first *Sophora japonica* in Europe bloomed 30 years later in 1779. In the meantime, however, de Jussieu was given the job of laying out the Trianon gardens at Versailles, where one of the new trees was planted, and he also sent seeds to London. Here they were propagated by James Gordon, a nurseryman living at Miles End near Kew. One of the pagoda trees grown by him is still standing at Kew, although an unsightly ruin. Near it two young trees are growing to take its place.

There are fine specimens of the *Sophora* at both Oxford and Cambridge. The tree at Cambridge has a height of 75 feet, with a girth of 11 feet, the one at Oxford being almost as tall, with a girth of 12 feet 3 inches. In our own country there are many fine specimens. A particularly fine pagoda tree stands in the Public Gardens of Boston, and there are others in the Arnold Arboretum and in numerous botanical gardens such as those of St. Louis, Philadelphia, the Bronx etc. Many nurserymen in the United States offer these trees, in several varieties, as hardy and ornamental for landscaping.

Although of relatively quick growth, the *Sophora japonica* blooms only after 30 or 40 years, and then only every other season. This statement has been questioned by Dr. Merrill of the Arnold Arboretum whose experience has shown that *Sophora japonica* bears flowers at any time between 15 and 20 years, if not before, and that it frequently blooms year after year. Soil conditions and climate undoubtedly influence these results, as they certainly do the color of the blossoms, which are individually formed like sweet peas. The color varies from a deep yellow to white. In northern and central China they are white, near Canton a bright yellow, in England pale yellow at times tinged with violet. Our own tree bears beautiful yellow blossoms.

It is remarkable that the flowers fall from the pagoda tree while yet fresh and unshriveled, often forming a carpet of gold beneath it. This carpet-spreading is, of course, a habit among trees, but too often the earth is covered with withered or decaying blossom or fruit; therefore this unblemished largesse of the *Sophora* is one of its very praiseworthy characteristics. The wood is pale brown, coarse-grained, but light, tough and durable, its layers of annual growth marked by bands of open cells. It is good material for such carpentry as house trim, pillars, doorframes etc. In Japan, it

is frequently used to form the tokonoma, a recess erected in the principal formal room of a house.

The tokonoma is a deep frame with shelves, and having pillars at the sides. Here are placed objects of beauty or of special interest, only one or two at a time — some flowers, a vase, a crystal, a painting — things to be given a place of honor, and to be enjoyed unspoiled by contact with anything else. The wood of the *Sophora* is used for the framework and pillars. The *Sophora japonica* is not mentioned in books of forestry as an important wood. It seems that the barks, buds and flowers are of more value.

The whole tree possesses a cathartic property not unlike that of senna leaves, and if worked before being seasoned, has disastrous effect upon those handling it. The botanical garden at Dijon, France, has a pagoda tree standing near a well, and when the leaves and flowers are about to fall, the gardener covers the well, because the water becomes laxative by diffusion, with unfortunate results for the populace. Du Hamel even asserts that the bark and green wood exhale a strong odor which produces on those pruning this tree a remarkable effect — the rest is left to your discreet imaginations. Some claim that this cathartic property preserves the tree, but this has yet to be proved.

There is, however, a pleasanter value to the flowers and bark of the pagoda tree. They are used as dye, giving a beautiful yellow that colored the fine silken robes of the mandarins. Long descriptions of the process of dyeing are found, but whether it is a matter of boiling and then baking, or long infusion and added salt, or dipping blue cloth in a solution to obtain a shade of green, or any other formula or method, the delightful thing to ponder over is the splendid robes of the mandarins with their beautiful embroideries, which lead one to fancy that the pagoda tree is blossoming again in gleaming silk. Authorities differ as to the parts of the *Sophora* that are best as a dye. Some say pods only, some flowers and bark, and yet others claim that the entire tree, even its roots, are good for this purpose. The pods are small and pointed and have a soapy feeling when crushed, which seems to make them front rank candidates, but the field remains open.

There are yet other ways in which the pagoda tree has been employed. We are told that in China it was frequently used in cemeteries, and was planted by law at the side of tumulus, or a rounded grave, which was only four feet high and the resting place of a low official. The tumulus of the emperor was 30 feet high, and around it pine trees were planted. In the Golden Bough, Fraser tells us that "In China it has been customary from time immemorial to plant trees on graves in order thereby to strengthen the soul of the deceased, and thus to save his body from corruption. Hence the trees that grow on graves are sometimes identified with the souls of the departed."

Once can understand why the pine — the emblem of long life — should

be planted for the emperor, but the relation between a pagoda tree and a low official is somewhat puzzling! In the Chou Li, a classical book dating several centuries before Christ, the Huai tree is mentioned as having a place in official audiences. The highest official was installed behind three sophora trees, and the counselors stood at their side. No reason is given for this choice of tree, but it is interesting and satisfactory to know that our tree had a place of dignity in public life.

It is probable that Capt. Thomas Milton, who brought the pagoda tree of Edgartown from China, knew nothing about its history or its properties, or even that it was a *Sophora japonica*. To him, the pagoda trees that he saw in the Orient were remarkably fine trees, giving desirable shade and having beautiful blooms. One would look well near his home, and he hoped it would grow — just as simple as that! And how successfully it all turned out!

His house on South Water Street was built in 1836,² and his interest in it must have been great, for only the best of material went into its erection. The lumber came from Gardner, Me. and the foundations and cellars were made with blocks of granite at a cost of \$3,000. He paid \$900 for the labor of building the house alone.

The pagoda tree was planted in 1836, probably on Captain Milton's return from his last voyage to the East Indies, as he retired from active sea life at the age of 50. He was born in Teinmouth, Devonshire, England, and came to America at the age of 10, landing at Salem, Mass. There is a record of his marriage with Jane Hammet in Edgartown on the 17th of March, 1808. He was a seafaring man all his life, sailing merchantmen, not whalers, and making several voyages to the Orient. He was also master of a line packet from Boston to Philadelphia, and in the War of 1812 prize master of the privateer ship *Yankee*.

Captain Milton lived to watch the growth of the pagoda tree for 19 years. It stood at the corner of his property, between the house and the road, generously shading both, and must have been fine and upstanding when he died in 1862, at the age of 75 years. Perhaps, during his lifetime, the pagoda tree had not yet bloomed, which would have been a great disappointment, but he must have had, nevertheless, much satisfaction in the knowledge that the little slip from overseas had thriven well in the land that had adopted it, and that it gave promise of beauty for many years to come. It certainly was a fine legacy to leave Edgartown, and South Water

² Marcus W. Jernegan, a letter writer to the *Vineyard Gazette* on Sept. 13, 1946, disputes this timing. A contract in the Dukes County land records describes the building of the house in 1840-41. But Captain Milton owned the land much earlier; he could have planted the tree anytime between 1819 and 1837, Jernegan said.

Street is not only graced, but blessed, by its great pagoda tree.

At the moment the tree is going through a time of depression due to the hurricane of last autumn; its leaves are spare, and some of its branches quite bare. Some years ago, the tree went through another hard experience, in that instance due to disease, rot and wood worms. An extensive curative job was undertaken. Besides being thoroughly curretted and reinforced with cement, the branches high above the street were rigged with braces, and the three became strong and healthy. What has occurred once, may occur again, and we confidently look forward to full foliage and golden blossoms next year.

And now, we are back where started. On South Water Street, in front of the house that until lately was the home of Dr. and Mrs. Worth, stands the pagoda tree. It seems like an old friend by this time, for do we not know its name, its family, its history, its wanderings, its characteristics, its habits? We surely do, and our inclination is to give three rousing cheers! Well, very well, but then, what may be said on the part of the tree? It has no voice that we can hear; its silence is only broken when the wind rustles its leaves and sways its branches. But imagination is a wonderful interpreter, even if not entirely reliable, and with its aid one may arrive at many an interesting point of view.

With this help, we see the tree with a little world milling around it for more than a century. Progress has had its way, and roads have been hardened, pavements (such as they are!) laid, new houses built, wires for light and communication passed between its branches, men come and gone, while in the meantime, the tree has steadily grown up and up, its branches ever stretched toward the sky. It seems to have had a two-sided existence, filling the need of man for protections against the sun's heat, and satisfying his delight in a thing of beauty, yet always aloof and stately, lifting its crown of verdure up beyond the affairs of men. It has attended strictly to its own business, and become the great tree it was from the beginning meant to be. Listen, has it a message for us today? Or is imagination overdoing its part?

Hail! Ancient Huai tree! More power to you, *Sophora japonica*! Bless you! Old pagoda tree of Edgartown!³

The *Intelligencer* welcomes contributions. Letters to the editor intended for publication are also welcome.

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Edgartown MA 02539

E-mail: jwalter3337@yahoo.com. Put "*Intelligencer*" in the subject line.

³ In 2008 at least two other pagoda trees bloom in Edgartown, progeny of the original one. One is in the front yard of the Edgartown Library, and another is on the grounds of the Martha's Vineyard Museum.

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