



50TH YEAR

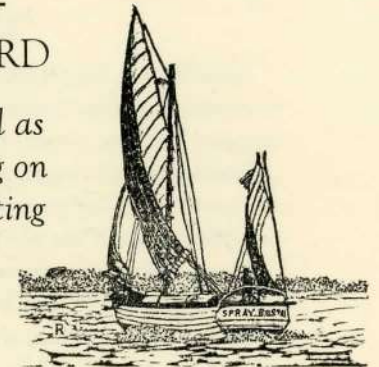
THE DUKES COUNTY INTELLIGENCER

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THE ROAD NORTH: EXODUS TO NEW VINEYARD

'The excitement and challenge, as well as the danger and hardship, of embarking on the frontier was as real to them as setting forth on the sea.'



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The Road North

Vineyarders Migrating to Maine, 1789-1795: 'They Were Not So Much Pushed, as Pulled'

by JAMES H.K. NORTON

WHY DID SO MANY PEOPLE leave the Island during the 1790s? Four reasons have been suggested: (1) the economic hardship caused by the Revolutionary War and its aftermath; (2) the occupational hazard of making one's living at sea; (3) nepotism and intra-family strife, and (4) the depletion and inadequacy of the land for farming. Yet, based on what we know about some of the heads of households, all over 50 years old, who led the migration, none of these reasons seem sufficient to explain such a large exodus. A simultaneous migration from Connecticut to Vermont caused by the new, more urban, commercial expectations of living in, and becoming dependent upon, an industrial society, may have had a Vineyard parallel.

At a time when Islanders are concerned about the increase in the year-round population on Martha's Vineyard it may be hard to recall that there were times in its history when the number of people living here actually decreased.

The decline of the Native American population is, typically and regretably, the most dramatic. Dr. Charles Banks, whose three-volume study of Martha's Vineyard is the classic source on early Island history, suggests their number at the time of European settlement to be more than

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3,000.¹ By the time of the Revolutionary War, that number had been reduced to close to 300, due largely to infections brought by those settlers for which the native population had no immunity.

Banks further records that from the first Federal census in 1790 to the census of 1900, the Island settler population increased by only 40 per cent, from 3,245 to 4,561. From 1900 to 2000, even with a lag during the Depression, the increase was 227 per cent, from 4,561 to close to 15,000.

Impact of Death at Sea

An important restraint on population growth during the 18th century was the number of young men who died at sea. The placement of the Island as the landfall for shipping from all over the world to ports of New England north of Cape Cod provided Vineyarders with extensive involvement in seafaring activities.² This was especially true for those who lived in the village of Vineyard Haven, on the shore of what was then known as Holmes Hole, on the northern tip of the Island. Their reputation for skill and agility in this endeavor was well recognized, as recorded by Hector St. Jean de Crevecoeur, a French traveler who visited the Island in the 1770s:

Go where you will from Nova Scotia to the Mississippi you will find almost everywhere some native of this island employed in seafaring occupations. Here are to be found the most expert pilots. . . In stormy weather they are always at sea, looking out for vessels, which they board with singular dexterity, and hardly ever fail to bring safe to their intended harbor.³

1 Charles Edward Banks, M. D. *The History of Martha's Vineyard, Dukes County, Massachusetts*, The Dukes County Historical Society, 1966, Volume I, pages 56-7. Much of the data about those who participated in the migration to Maine during the last decade of the 18th century is taken from Volume III, *Family Genealogies*, of Banks' *History*.

2 For a description of Martha's Vineyard as the landfall for oceanic shipping to New England, and for the evolution of the name of the harbor from Homses Hole to Holmes Hole to Vineyard Haven (in 1871), see the author's *Walking in Vineyard Haven*, Martha's Vineyard Historical Society, 2000, Chapter I.

3 Hector St. Jean de Crevecoeur, *Lettre d'un Cultivateur Americain*, London, 1782, quoted in Banks, *op.cit.*, Volume I, page 443.



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The extent of this nautical enterprise gave to the community a distinctive quality of life, characterized by very strong family ties. Again, according to Crevecoeur,

All was peace here, and a general decency prevailed throughout: the reason I believe is that almost everybody is married, for they get wives very young; and the pleasure of returning to their families absorbs every other desire. The motives that lead them to the sea are very different from those of most other seafaring men. It is neither idleness nor profligacy that sends them to that element; it is a settled plan of life, a well founded hope of earning a livelihood.⁴

That the business of living at sea was hazardous was well understood. Being raised close to the ocean, every Island child knew the terrors of the winds and waves, and the dangers involved in setting forth in fragile wooden craft upon treacherous waters. And every wife lived with the haunting fear that each departure of her husband would be his last, and that his time away would be extended into widowhood.

This loss was especially experienced in the village of Holmes Hole. Many heads of households earned their livings as pilots, seamen and master mariners. Six of the 25 males born in the first four generations of the family of the original settler of the community, Isaac Chase, died at sea. Chase's eldest son Thomas, master of a small packet sloop called *Vineyard*, was the first, lost off the coast of Virginia in 1721. Thomas' only son, Thomas Jr., met the same fate in 1739.

Three of the 16 male Daggetts born during these years were lost at sea. And six of the 53 sons, grandsons and great-grandsons of Dr. Thomas West were claimed by the sea.

In the Wheldon family, John, who settled on the Island upon his marriage to Abigail Chase in the late 1730s, died at sea in 1755. All three of their sons met the same fate in a shipwreck in 1769. His grandson sought a livelihood in the more secure occupation of a cooper.

Among adult males in Holmes Hole, death at sea represented just under 20 percent of the total, more than double the number of those who died in childhood.

A History of Heading Out

Even with such occupational loss, a more significant cause for the slower rate of growth during the Vineyard's early history was a constant pattern of emigration from the Island from the very beginning of the English settlement. Peter Folger, companion of Thomas Mayhew, Jr., and probably one of the original group to settle with him here in 1642, was one of sev-

4 Hector St. Jean de Crevecoeur, *Lettre d'un Cultivateur Americain*, London, 1782, quoted in C. G. Hine, *The Story of Martha's Vineyard*, Hine Brothers, New York, 1908, page 37.

eral to depart during those early years. Upon Mayhew's death at sea in 1657, Folger moved to Rhode Island, and eventually settled on Nantucket, from whence he became Benjamin Franklin's maternal grandfather.

Spurts in this steady flow of migration came as each generation came of age. Daughters moved to their new husband's homes, and sons moved away to seek their fortunes. The departure in 1753 of Thomas West, grandson of the original West settler in the village, to begin a ministry in Rochester, took all of his six surviving sons away from the Island with him. With his youngest brother and a cousin having left the year before, almost half of the West family migrated at one time. Over the years, almost half of all those born in the village moved away to earn their livelihoods and raise their families somewhere else.

One mass migration stands out: From 1789 to 1795, some 40 families, totaling almost 500 people, moved to clear the forest and build new homes along the remote frontier in the Sandy River Valley in western Maine, still then part of Massachusetts. That exodus to a New Vineyard — for that became its name — represented about 15 percent of the total Island population at that time.

Why did so many leave? For the young, there was probably a spirit of youthful adventure. But what distinguished the Maine migration was the number of the older generations of established families, some in their 50s, Chases, Allens, Nortons, Butlers and Luces. This paper will look specifically at those heads of households from Holmes Hole who joined in this adventure to see what might have contributed to such a momentous decision in their lives. More than 80 individuals, led by 15 heads of households, moved away. Though less than a fifth of the total from the Vineyard who migrated at this time, their number reduced by a quarter the population of the harbor community they left behind.

The Background: Holmes Hole Life, and the Purchase at New Vineyard

Three extended families dominated the life at Holmes Hole during the first half of the 18th century: the children of Isaac Chase and Dr. Thomas West, and the brothers Samuel and Seth Daggett.

Isaac Chase, a blacksmith from Hampton, New Hampshire, became the first permanent settler along the harbor shore when he was refused permission in 1673 to settle in the new village of what has become West Tisbury. He settled instead near the ferry landing at the head of Holmes Hole. Successful there at ferrying and inn-keeping, he began to purchase the shares into which Gov. Thomas Mayhew had divided all of the Neck, between the harbor and Lake Tashmoo, in 1667. By 1735, this land was owned entirely by the families of two of Isaac's sons, Thomas and Abraham.

Thomas West, trained as a doctor and a lawyer in Rhode Island, pur-



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chased a large tract of land south of the Chase holdings, west of the Lagoon Pond, from Sachem Point. He moved in 1682 from West Tisbury, after he had been fined for making "unsavory speeches" in that village.

Samuel and Seth Daggett, brothers from Edgartown, married into these two families, Samuel to granddaughter Sarah Chase in 1733, and Seth to granddaughter Elizabeth West in 1734.

These families were joined later in the century by a number of fifth-generation Nortons from Edgartown. The most prominent were members of the family of Major Peter Norton, sometime county sheriff, who maintained a large farm on Farm Neck, near Major's Cove (named after him) in Sengekontacket Pond, in the southern part of what is now Oak Bluffs. Members of all four families participated in the mass migration to Maine.

One explanation for the migration from the Vineyard of so many from such established families is the despair that was created by an extended time of depression starting with the domination of Island waters by British warships in the years leading up to the Revolutionary War. Difficulties were intensified by a devastating event in 1778, when, in what is known as Grey's Raid, the British pillaged the Island to gather provisions for their army stationed in Rhode Island. Despite an initial burst of enthusiasm that the end of the war and independence brought to the community, in the years that followed, as the slow rate of new building indicates, boom

and prosperity did not come. For those such as John Holmes, eager to see a rapid expansion in the harbor during these years, to have so many pick up and leave must have appeared an immense act of despair by those who left, and for those who stayed behind. For him it was only heightened by the death of his only son, lost at sea in 1795.

Ebenezer Norton, eldest son of Peter Norton, experienced firsthand such waning enthusiasm after the end of the war. In high hopes, in 1782 he purchased with his father a 20-acre parcel on West Chop out of the estate of Abraham Chase. They subdivided this land into quarter-acre lots and promoted their sale as a housing development, the first such on the Island. The spirit of the country's new independence was reflected in the name of the development: Williamsburg, after the site in Virginia where the surrender of General Cornwallis in October 1781 had brought the war to a close.

Three lots sold immediately, one to Captain Nathan Daggett, who had been in Williamsburg, Virginia at the time of the surrender. (He had been commissioned by George Washington to bring the French fleet from the Caribbean Sea to Chesapeake Bay to block any British retreat from the Battle of Yorktown.⁵) But the West Chop development failed to catch on; most of the building sites remained unsold.

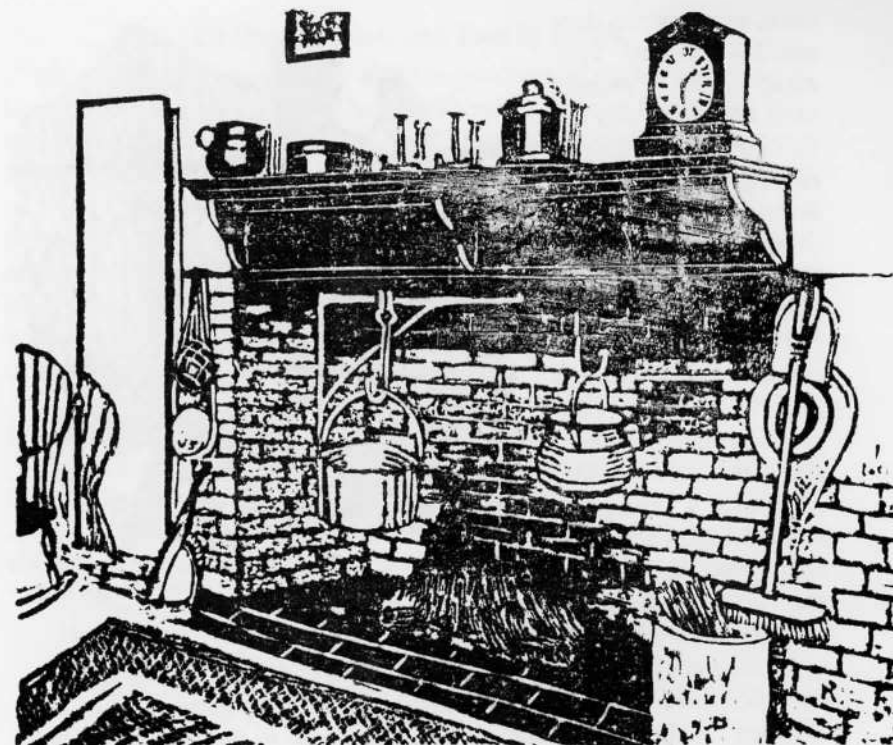
Norton, still hopeful, began to look for other horizons. Based on an introduction by his brother Ephraim, who had moved to Maine in 1788, he formed a partnership with Jonathan Knowlton of Farmington, Maine. Together they bought, at less than 14 cents per acre, 1564 acres of undeveloped land northeast of Farmington, in what they called the New Vineyard Gore.

Also included in this partnership were Ebenezer's brother Cornelius, an innkeeper, and cousin Abner Norton, both of Holmes Hole, and Daniel Collins, a mariner from Providence. Collins' relationship with Ebenezer had started four years earlier, when he bought one of the house lots in the Williamsburg development. But despite having built a small house on the lot, he, too, did not see a future for himself there.

The movement of Island Norton family members to Maine did not begin with Ebenezer's purchase. Earlier migration occurred with the normal outflow of young adults since the very beginning of the English settlement. First to settle in Maine was Seth, eldest son of Phineas, a farmer, of the Tribe of Benjamin Norton⁶ in Edgartown, in 1770. At the age of 34,

5 Dorothy Cottle Poole, "Captain Nathan Daggett, Pilot and Patriot," *The Dukes County Intelligencer*, Volume 20, No. 2, November 1978, pp. 81 ff.

6 Dr. Banks, in Volume III, *Family Genealogies of his History*, divides the descendants of Nicholas Norton, the first of the Norton family to settle on the Island (ca. 1657) into three tribes, being the patrilineal offspring of three of his sons, Isaac, Joseph, and Benjamin. Because of family loyalty, cross cousin mar-



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determined "to establish his own domain,"⁷ he set out with Daniel Look from Tisbury and two others from Nantucket to settle in Addison, "down East" on Pleasant Bay.

The new migration of Nortons to the Sandy River Valley of western Maine started in 1788.

Four young men, all bachelors, joined together to explore the new frontier that western Maine then offered, and to "share with each other their gains and losses." Two Norton brothers, Ransom and James, sons of Sylvester Norton, a farmer and French and Indian War veteran from Edgar-

riages occurred frequently on the Island, a practice initiated in his own way by Thomas Mayhew, Jr., when he married his step-sister. Intra-family marriages led to a high instance of deaf mutes among the Mayhew family in Chilmark, due to the retention of that genetic trait within the family. For a description of this phenomenon on the Island, see Nora Ellen Croce, *Everyone Here Speaks Sign Language, Hereditary Deafness on Martha's Vineyard*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1985. Full disclosure: Major Peter Norton and I are both descendants of Joseph Norton.

7 Dorothy Cottle Poole, *A New Vineyard*, Dukes County Historical Society, Edgartown, MA, 1976, page 23.

town, were both in their mid-20s. Samuel Hillman, son of a yeoman from Chilmark, was just 19. Last to join their pioneering partnership was Sylvanus Boardman, son of the minister of the Chilmark Church. At 31, he was the oldest. When the Revolutionary War cut short his family's plans for his higher education, he had wandered aimlessly for a decade. Accepting a "disagreeable resolution and a last alternative," he became the least enthusiastic member of their expedition.



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All four responded quickly to the challenges of this frontier life. Given their Island background, this could have been anticipated. They even affirmed its Mayhew missionary heritage. Three of the four found their calling as ministers among those with whom they settled in the Sandy River Valley. Samuel Hillman became the Methodist minister and Ransom Norton the Baptist pastor in Livermore, Maine. Sylvanus Boardman soon found himself — and a wife — in this new land. Upon the organization of the town of North Livermore in 1795, he became a selectman. In 1802 he also became the minister of its United Congregational and Baptist Church, a post he held for the next 38 years.⁸

This foursome was joined later in 1788 by a son of Major Peter Norton. Ephraim, then 38, had earlier been a whaler. His move placed him on the spot to introduce his elder brother Ebenezer to the region. Ebenezer, in turn, enticed other members of his family, mostly from the Norton Farm Neck homestead; these included four more of Ebenezer's brothers, a sister and a nephew, all following with their families.

Also from the Farm Neck region came Butlers, Davises, Peases and Smiths. From Tisbury came Luces, and from Chilmark, Allens and Mayhews. By 1795, the migration was practically complete. Branches of many of the established families on Martha's Vineyard had taken root in the Sandy River Valley.

⁸ *idem*, page 27.

Of Death at Sea, and Family Feuds

We can see the opportunity that his purchase of such a vast tract of land in the Sandy River Valley had for Ebenezer. Having failed with Williamsburg, his promotion of this New Vineyard development was not a change in direction, only a change in location. The fate of his development on West Chop revealed to him that there was not enough wealth in the harbor in the years immediately following the war to support the kind of residential building program he had in mind. The economic development of new American industry and the maritime activity that supported it were growing too slowly. He therefore sought land that promised a more immediate return on his investment.

But what was the draw for so many others from all parts of the Vineyard to pack up as entire families to follow him there?

Two extended explanations have been given, one by Charles Banks and another by Dorothy Cottle Poole, author of a study on the topic entitled *A New Vineyard*. Banks suggests that it was the heavy toll life at sea was taking upon the population that caused the departure of these families.

The romance and mystery of the vast waters held no more charm for them and their one desire was to go to some remote inland country far removed from its sound and sight where they would have no more of the awful reminders of those tragic and often unknown deaths tallied up at the season's close as "lost at sea."⁹

Mrs. Poole is less lugubrious. Family feuds and economic hardship on the Island following the Revolutionary War seemed more common and tangible than the pervasive, haunting gloom of which Charles Banks wrote.

Nepotism had spawned feuds lasting generations. Whaling had reached a low ebb, with dangers greater than ever; and the natural advantages of island living had been overshadowed by its exposure to the hazards of war. The economy had collapsed and, due to the limitations of the sandy soil, agriculture could not support the growing population. Acreage was limited on the Vineyard, but Massachusetts offered "free lands" in the province of Maine, so, recalling the reports of men returning from garrison duty "to the eastward," many islanders packed their belongings and sought a new Vineyard.¹⁰

Correspondence cited by Mrs. Poole describes the threat Uriel Hillman's family felt life at sea represented to their children. Like his father and six brothers, Uriel started his adult life as a mariner. But with the death at sea of his two older brothers around 1800, he turned to carpentry. He built at least two houses in Holmes Hole — his own and Seth Daggett's at Five Corners

⁹ Banks, *op.cit.*, Volume III, pp. viii-ix.

¹⁰ Poole, *op.cit.*, page 16.



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(now moved to the Packer Tisbury Wharf lot on Beach Road). In 1807, he succumbed to his own and his wife's anxiety that, if they remained, their children would be drawn to the sea. They moved then to dwell among Vineyard neighbors who had preceded them to the Sandy River Valley.

But for others who migrated, the existence of this dour image is not so clear, especially for those who had distinctive careers as mariners.

The families of Samuel and Nathan Daggett who sailed from Holmes Hole to Maine in 1792 might have been departing specifically from the challenges and terrors of the sea. Samuel and Nathan were both sons of Seth Daggett, the housewright who had married Elizabeth West in 1734. His family of seven sons and two daughters included distinguished exemplars of the nautical life of the harbor community. (Daughter Mary (Polly) distinguished herself during the war as one of three village maidens who blew up the village Liberty Pole rather than let it be used to replace a broken mast on a British warship.)

Of the seven sons of Seth, one died in childhood. The other six all became mariners; three died at sea. Peter, the oldest, was lost at the age of 30, and left his young widow with four children. The youngest, West, was only about 16 when he died. Their brother Silas did everything. He retired from

the sea at the age of 41 to become an innkeeper. Eight years later, in 1805, he left to join his brothers Samuel and Nathan in Maine. But he returned to Holmes Hole some 10 years later — where he drowned in 1825, at 78.

William was the only son of the Daggett family to retain his home in Holmes Hole while he plied the seas as a merchant captain. His son, William Jr., also had a distinguished maritime career. (And he was a prominent village leader; William Street, locus of the Island's first historic district, is named after him.)

Brothers Samuel and Nathan had also been master mariners with extensive naval experience, especially during the Revolutionary War. Samuel sailed on the privateer *Mars*, which attacked British warships in the British Channel. Nathan's skill and experience as a pilot, as we have seen, led to his participation in the battle that ended the war.

Because of the extent of their nautical experience, their departure from the Island in 1792 to live safely inland in Maine might suggest that "the perils of the deep became a constant specter" to them. Samuel, then 48 years old, took his only son Samuel with him, and Nathan, 43, all eight of his children. But the call of the sea eventually was too great for young Samuel Daggett. More charmed by the fame of his uncle than deterred by whatever apprehension about his seafaring he might have expressed, Samuel returned to Holmes Hole after 14 years of farming in Maine, and took up again his own earlier life as a pilot.

A similar lack of fear of the terror of the sea is indicated by the West family. The two heads of households who went to Maine during the 1790s were brothers George and Peter, sons of (Army) Capt. Peter West, who had married Thomas Chase Jr.'s widow, Elizabeth, upon his loss at sea in 1739. George was a mariner and young Peter a housewright.

We have already described the early generations of Wests as itinerant. Peter had earlier moved away, to Conway, Massachusetts, in 1777, only to return to Holmes Hole a decade later. In the 1790s, when they departed for Maine, both George and Peter were in their mid-40s. George left all of his children behind. Of his three sons, two remained and became master mariners. His third son moved to Ohio. Peter, on the other hand, was accompanied by his nine children, a son-in-law, a daughter-in-law and a grandchild. Of his family, only son Shubael had been a mariner. The others had already found alternative, less perilous livelihoods.

A third member of the West contingent was Capt. Levi Young, then over 50 years old. He was married to Peter and George's cousin Mary, a daughter of Dr. Elisha West. But it was the marriage of his daughter Susanna to Capt. Sarson Butler in 1783, rather than the West connection, that led to his move to Maine in 1794.

Captain Butler was the eldest son of Elijah Butler, a tanner from Farm

Neck. His family owned extensive lands in Eastville, including that part of the old Daggett farm that is now the Oak Bluffs town center. In 1790, at the age of 53, Elijah decided to move with his family of eight children and his mother to Maine. Sarson, who had become by this time a master mariner, then began to sail his coastal schooner *Snubbett* back and forth between the Vineyard and Maine, maintaining a significant link between the two communities. In 1792, he brought ten families from the Vineyard to Hallowell, Maine, where they began the trek overland to the Sandy River Valley. This number included the families of his aunt, Abigail Smith; his uncle, Henry Butler, and their cousin, Ephraim Butler, all from the Oak Bluffs side of the harbor.

The move of such a large contingent of Nortons and Butlers essentially vacated the land that was to become Cottage City, and, later, Oak Bluffs. Their departure suggests that the urgency of their move was not caused by family feuds, nor by the inadequacy of land for agriculture, as suggested by Mrs. Poole. Sheep farming continued to be the primary agricultural activity on the Island throughout the 19th century, leading to a major woolen industry. Even as far back as Grey's Raid in 1778, the British seized more than 10,000 sheep, 807 of from Major Norton's farm on Farm Neck — more than four times the number taken from any other Edgartown farm.

The abandonment of this land by these families allowed for their intense housing development during what Henry Beetle Hough called the Days of the Great Boon in the 1870s.¹¹ He records the vast subdivision for summer homes of 1308 acres between Sengekontacket Pond and the Lagoon Pond by July 1873. A *Vineyard Gazette* reporter records the lack of activity still there. "For three fourths of the year, the abomination of desolation — the stillness of almost utter abandonment prevails."¹²

The Case of the Chase Family

Further confusion about the cause of the mass migration is raised by the members of the Chase family, who moved to the Sandy River Valley in 1789-92. Six of the 15 heads of households who moved from Holmes Hole were descendents of Isaac Chase, the original settler there.

Samuel Chase was the senior male of the family to go. He was a half-brother of George and Peter West. The details of his life given in Banks' history generate an intriguing narrative. He lost his father, a mariner, when he was only five years old. His grandmother had established an inn, called the Beehive, in her home on the harbor shore upon the death of his grandfather at sea 18 years earlier, in 1721. He spent his younger years

with her in the inn, but moved when he was seven with his mother and sister to her new husband's house on the south edge of the village. He probably moved back to his grandmother's around the time of her death in 1750, if for no other reason than to get out of his mother's large household of seven younger half brothers and sisters.

Like many of his contemporaries, he may have had a stint at sea during these years, but may have also tried his hand at managing his grandmother's inn, especially after his marriage to Jedidah Mayhew in 1752. He would have had the help then of his grandmother's slave, "the mulatto servant Ishmael Lobb," to whom she granted freedom in her will, but not until his 30th birthday, in 1762. Samuel Chase may even have developed a distaste for the sordid and commercial life of those who, plying the coastal waterways, patronized the harbor's inns, for in 1760, he sold his interest in the Beehive to his cousin, Isaac Daggett.

Isaac managed the inn, renamed Daggett Manor, for the following 45 years with such success that at the end of the century he was the wealthiest man in town. Samuel himself turned to farming on his inherited share of his grandfather Thomas' lands on the neck to the west of the harbor. There he and Jedidah survived the Revolutionary War years, raising a family of 11.

In 1789, before Ebenezer Norton purchased and promoted his New Vineyard development, Samuel Chase unaccountably pulled up stakes and left for Maine. He was then 55. Most of his children were grown and the eldest married. Son Samuel had already moved to London, and Lothrop, a fifer in the Island militia during the war, had gone to Virginia. Eldest daughter Sarah had moved to Lenox, Massachusetts, with her husband, William Merry, during the war years, but had returned to settle permanently in Holmes Hole after the war.



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11 Henry Beetle Hough, *Martha's Vineyard Summer Resort, 1835-1935*, Tuttle Publishing Co., Rutland, Vermont, page 84 ff.

12 *idem*. p.87.

Samuel Chase took his son Sarson to Maine with him. He, then 25, had been farming with his father. Also with Samuel were two younger daughters. They married other early members of the Maine migration soon after their arrival there. Olive married one of the original four Island migrants, James Norton, in 1789. And Lydia wed Samuel Hillman's brother Moses in 1794. Son Thomas Chase, then 36 and also a farmer, followed to join the other members of his family two years later, in 1791.

Also going to Maine at that time were three Chase in-laws, two of them farmers. Samuel Look had married Abraham and Mercy Chase's youngest daughter Margaret in 1769. They bought the Seth Daggett house, close to the Tashmoo spring, after he died of small pox in 1779. In 1794, they moved to Maine, taking all 12 of their children with them. Some of them remained there, but Samuel himself came back to the Island after the death of his wife Margaret in 1815.

Another of this Chase group was David Merry. He was 53 in 1794, when he moved to join his son Asa in New Vineyard. He was only a sort of son-in-law to Abraham Chase; he had married Valentine Chase's widow Eunice in 1761. He also had been a farmer, on the lands of his step-son, Abraham Chase, between the harbor and Lake Tashmoo. David Merry took to Maine with him his son-in-law, Charles Luce, then 31, one of only two in this Chase family group who had been mariners.

Charles Luce's family could have been one that was driven to rural Maine by fear of the sea. As chance would have it, he had an unfortunate encounter with a marauding bear during his years in Maine, from which he bore scars for the rest of his life. He might have been safer on a ship at sea.

The other Chase family member departing from seafaring was George Benson. He arrived in Holmes Hole on a ship, where he met and married Margaret, daughter of Jonathan and Sarah Chase Manter, in 1789. Two years later the young couple moved to New Vineyard with a newborn son.

An Apprehension of a Changing Lifestyle

Because they were in agriculture, most of the Chase relatives who migrated had not lived under the terror of the ocean as described by Charles Banks. Nor is it likely that any of them were forced to leave by either family feuds or economic hardship. They were all adequately landed and self-sufficient, if not prosperous. That Samuel Look returned to the Vineyard in 1815 rather suggests that they did not feel under any compulsion from the Island side to pack up their belongings to leave. They were, I would argue, not so much pushed as pulled to Maine. The excitement and the challenge, as well as the danger and the hardship, of embarking on the frontier was as real to them as setting forth on the sea. The difference is that they did it as

whole families rather than as individual males.

Given especially the experiences of Ebenezer Norton, Samuel Chase and Elijah Butler, all in their 50s, their decision to take entire families to Maine may have been something other than a reaction to the slow pace of maritime growth in Holmes Hole. They may have recognized in the possibility of its eventual success significant change in the character and quality of Island life as they had known it. The maritime traffic increasing in Vineyard Sound was not only giving promise of greater economic activity and wealth; it was also altering the established values and lifestyle of the community as well.

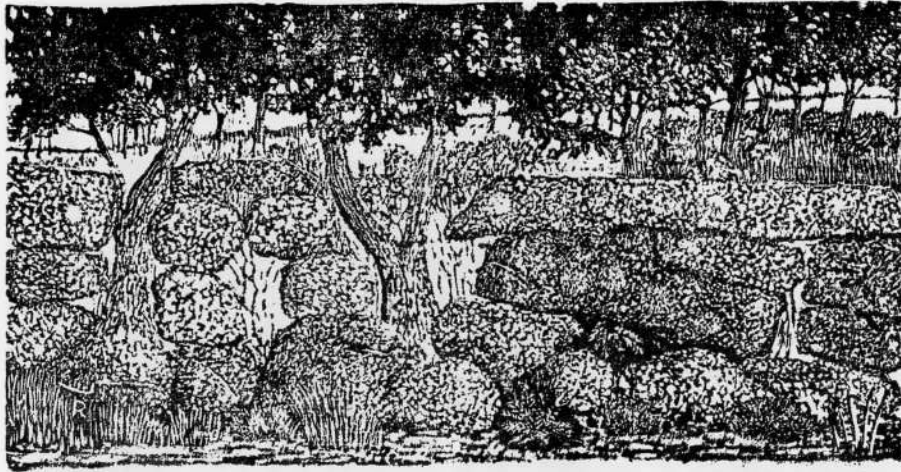
Many families living along the south coast of Connecticut at this time of its industrialization during the late 18th century felt a similar apprehension of such change. It caused a significant migration to follow Thomas Chittenden to the north into the hills of Vermont to settle on lands upon which they could maintain and nourish their pre-industrial lifestyle and values. In 1791, Chittenden became governor of the new state of Vermont¹³

During the early years of American independence, before the days of railroads, the coastal waterways of Massachusetts formed a primary highway for the new nation's commerce. Those who lived along this highway, as the maritime fleets grew and the distance to other parts of the world were shortened, found themselves on the edge of an extensive and expanding stream of commercial activity. Coastal towns touched and served a kind

13 From a conversation with Robert H. Churchill, associate professor of history, University of Hartford. See Frank Smallwood, *Thomas Chittenden: Vermont's First Statesman*, The New England Press, 1997, p. 35.



Sidney Noyes Riggs



Sidney Noyes Riggs

of extended city afloat, carried by myriad merchant ships.

These ships involved in coastal trade brought an urban reality more buoyant than continent, as Henry David Thoreau wryly observed of the earth.¹⁴ Those who lived and worked by this transient metropolis along the coast were exposed to a distinct variant in the urban patterns of specialized skills, stratified social class and high mobility that was characteristic of the emerging industrial society of the new American nation. The urbanization brought to the coastal towns by the merchant fleet was based upon a surplus of wealth that was created not by production, but by transport and trade. The new urban lifestyle that the harbor community began to emulate stood then in contrast to the industrialization upon which it developed. But it came in even more marked contrast to the Puritan values of equality and self-sufficiency upon which the English colony on the Island had been built. For all the new prosperity that maritime traffic sought to generate, it also brought to the Island a new set of social values. Commerce would replace production, competition self-sufficiency, and style would come into fashion.

It is hard to know from this distance what was in the minds of those older members of the harbor community who set forth for Maine during the 1790s. One wonders if there were among them some who saw clearly this profound change slowly beginning to take place in their harbor home.

¹⁴ "It is well to have some water in your neighborhood, to give buoyancy to and float the earth. One value even of the smallest well is, when you look into it you see that earth is not continent but insular. This is as important as that it keeps butter cool." Henry David Thoreau, *Where I Lived, and What I Lived For, Walden Pond*, Vintage Books, New York, 1991, pp. 71-2.

They would have been moved not so much by a feeling of despair that their lot was hard and unrewarding; they were to experience that same life in Maine. They would rather have felt dismay at what they saw happening to the character of their Island home. Could they have looked upon the increasing number of sails in the Sound with the same apprehension that, some 50 years later, Henry Thoreau was to observe the noisy clamor of freight trains along the far bank of Walden Pond?¹⁵

One suspects that even then some of the older generation saw the most profound values of their Island heritage deeply challenged; that those who left with such a vision had a vital concern to preserve the Puritan integrity and hard-won egalitarian values that had sustained the original English settlement of the Island. Such concern would surely have encouraged them to seek new shelter in an unsettled, rural part of western Maine, far removed from its coastal waters. By migrating, they would have sought to maintain that heroic integrity which comes of producing on one's own, all the while challenged by the awesome forces of the wilderness.

The frontier has long been held in the American heritage as the place where a man's natural self-sufficiency and individual nobility are affirmed. The migration of such a large number of families from the Island to Maine during the 1790s may have been an instance of that reality out of which this image of the American frontier was formed.

¹⁵ *idem.*, pp. 94-100.

DOCUMENTS

Notes from New Vineyard, Maine: 'Good Dinner, Good Appetites'

by THE REV. PAUL COFFIN

Extracts from the diary of Rev. Paul Coffin, missionary to the Puritan churches in Maine, describing the settlement made by Vineyard people in the wilderness there before 1800. Charles E. Banks, who came across the diary a century later while researching his histories, included a copy of them in a letter to the Gazette, published Sept. 3, 1908:

Farmington, July 16th, 1796
— Crossed the river, and put up on the east side of it with Capt. Enoch Coffin, and rested most of the day. He keeps a tavern. On one side of his sign is the brig General Arnold, sailing on a cruise. On the other side she is in distress, her masts cut away and the waves breaking over her. The first side leads people to cry out, "Anti-federal, No Republican" or the like. The other rectifies the mistake, shows traitors brought to ruin and teaches them not to judge from partial views. Several such lessons we made it teach. The occasion of the sign is, however, really this. Capt. Coffin

was on board the privateer brig General Arnold, when she was cast away at Plymouth, and was one of the fifteen survivors out of one hundred and five. He assisted in cutting away her masts.

Farmington, July 17th, Sabbath.
Preached all day from John 12:36, to a large and very attentive audience, well pleased, and I hope instructed. Many seemed to see the difference between a plain, methodical and faithful sermon and the loose, indigested harangue of Methodists and Baptists. This was a good and hopeful day. I was treated with great attention and respect. Rode home toward New Vineyard with Capt. Allen, who married a sister of Capt. Coffin. He had in this place another sister, wife of a Mr. Davis.

New Vineyard, July 18th.
Solomon Luce's. Preached from 1st Corinthians, 6:20. From Capt. Allen's to this house the land is rich and the road bad. Rode to Herbert Boardman's. This is a

place of a deep soil and rich. It contains about fifty families, mostly from Martha's Vineyard. Perhaps a thousand bushels of grain have been sent to market from this settlement, only five years old. Here is one high hill from which, looking southwest, you see four ridges of mountains, rising one above another, the fourth and last very lofty and majestic.

New Vineyard, July 19th. Herbert Boardman's. Preached from Matt. 5:23, 24. Serious, attentive, friendly. I was much respected here, and the difference between the standing clergy and itinerants was fully owned. It rained most of this day. Six or seven of us dined at Boardman's. Cold weather, good dinner and good appetites. Some Baptists and Methodists here. Capt. West and family here. Rode to Capt. Daggett's through woods, bars and fields. Bad road, guided by the obliging James Mantor.

New Vineyard, July 20th.
Capt. Daggett and his son Capt. Daggett. Old Capt. Daggett has a likely, young second wife and no children by her. His house is



R

Sidney Noyes Riggs

double, log and bark as usual. He has also a little building, north of his house, half under ground, for a cellar. Thus his house is a T. At the south end of his house, through a door, you go into a sweet little bed-room of logs and bark. It has no chamber, and seems an arch. This is well furnished, and for this place 'tis admirably pleasing. In it are six mezzo-tinto pictures under glass; two of them are likenesses of Cotton Mather and George Whitefield. In this rural arch of New Vineyard I slept sweetly after a night of fleas.

The Talk of Main Street: A Breezy Old Girl Is Coming to Lunch



Martha's Vineyard Museum

EDGARTOWN, TUESDAY, AUGUST 31, 1954. Winds are up. At 9 a.m., the roof blows off the outdoor eating place at the Edgartown Café, on lower Main Street. Shortly before 9:30, Corinne Fournier, in the beauty shop next door, gives her last permanent of the day, then retreats to the second floor to wait out the storm.

SHE IS CAROL, third hurricane in just 16 years to visit the Vineyard. She proves to be not as windy as the storm of '44 nor to unleash as vicious a flood as that of '38, but she smacks the Island hard nevertheless. Up in Menemsha, educator Chester V. Sweatt says: "It is as if a giant hand swept everything into a heap of wreckage." Oak Bluffs and Vineyard Haven see heavy damage, too.

WINDS GUST to 94 miles an hour. A chimney falls at the Harbor View; a honey locust on North Water is uprooted. The height of the tidal flood comes at 12:15. A summer visitor, in cotton shirt and shorts, strides gamely along Summer Street. Water runs waist deep at the Edgartown Yacht Club; the piano is washed to the deck outside.

THEN SHE IS GONE. Back by the County Jail, special police rope off Main Street to traffic, and as shopkeepers sweep water out their doors, the pedestrians, young and old, outfitted in yellow macs, slosh down toward the harbor to see it all. Gulls swim in deep water in town yards. The sun comes out. Over at Martha's Vineyard Hospital, Mr. and Mrs. Otis Rogers name their brand-new baby Carol.

LETTERS

The Boys of Island Summer, 1908: The View from Left Field

by JOHN A. HOWLAND

IN "PORTRAIT OF A SUMMER SEASON" in the August 2008 *Intelligencer*, a footnote refers to a baseball game that year at Waban Park, identifying the players for Oak Bluffs. The first name in the list is that of Howland, left field.

My father was a pretty good ballplayer as a young man — good enough to be offered an athletic scholarship to Dartmouth on his 1906 graduation from Cranston (R.I.) High School. It was a boon he unfortunately could not take advantage of because his father had died just recently before and he had to go to work to support his mother.

He was good enough, however, to get hired by a semi-pro team in the Rhode Island Industrial League — a group of teams sponsored by large New England textile mills and factories which played on weekends for the enjoyment of local rooters. This was common around the country in those days and these teams in fact acted as "feeders" to the big leagues much as the minor league farm teams of today. They were paid a few dollars per game plus bonuses of small change for hits, steals and put-outs in the field. (They were also docked for errors or strike-outs.)

When my father heard I was dating a college classmate who was a Martha's Vineyard "summer kid," he told me that he had fond memories of the Island, having played ball for several summers before World War I, being hired as a "ringer" by several resort hotels, companies or local towns.

Once, the Pawnee House in Oak Bluffs hired him to put together a few other off-Island "semis" to play some Fourth of July doubleheaders against the Wesley House. He thought he had gotten a few heavy hitters until on game day he saw that Gabby Hartnett, a star for the Woonsocket mill

JOHN A. HOWLAND, a resident of Lambert's Cove, is a former director of advertising with AT&T. In the late 1980s, he authored a number of interesting *Intelligencer* articles, including pieces about the West Tisbury land boom of 1668-1671 (November 1986) and the West Tisbury cemetery (May 1989). It is a pleasure to have him back in our pages.

team, had pulled together fellows who, like himself, had just been signed by some major league teams.¹ My father's days as "manager" for the Pawnee House were over!

Another Vineyard anecdote:

When my college sweetheart and I got engaged to marry after graduation (now my wife of 60 years), my fiancée's parents, the late Harold and Helen Tinker, rather well-known residents of New Lane, West Tisbury, invited my family for a weekend so the in-laws-to-be could get acquainted.

A friend of Hal's, Charlie Turner, owner of Turner's General Store in West Tisbury (now Alley's) dropped by. Hal introduced my father and Charlie, who for several minutes eyed each other quizzically, until my father blurted, "Your name isn't Turner, you're Swede So-and-So, who played for Bryantville (Mass.) when we were kids." To which Charlie replied, "And you're Del Howland who played for Pembroke" — my grandmother's hometown, where my father visited relatives in the summer. And so that afternoon's conversation went. In fact Charlie was an orphan of Norwegian descent, adopted by a Turner family whose name he later used as his own.²

Whether or not that Howland mentioned in the 1908 scorecard was indeed my father, we'll never know — the reference does not mention first names nor initials. But the time was right and he did play ball on the Island.

So I would like to believe it was he, defending left field for Oak Bluffs, on that August afternoon 100 years ago!

John A. Howland
Lambert's Cove

1 This anecdote, however, must date to the World War era or just after. Charles Leo "Gabby" Hartnett, a Hall of Fame catcher who played mostly with the Chicago Cubs, was born in 1900, and joined the Cubs in 1922. He had a long career, and was behind the plate on the day in 1932 when Babe Ruth made his infamous "Called Shot" home run.

2 Charles Alma Turner began clerking for Sanderson's Store, as it was then known, about 1910. In 1914, owners Ulysses and Sanderson Mayhew sold the store to Charlie and Benjamin Woodaman, a new arrival from Nova Scotia. Woodaman, leaving the Island, sold his share to Charlie in 1925, and Turner continued to operate the place for another 20 years, and was active in many civic affairs, including a stint as postmaster — which brought the Post Office to Alley's.

The Vineyard as Health Spa: Testimony of G.W. Eldridge

Captain George, Charter of the Tides, Was Passionate Booster for Island

by JOHN WALTER

UNTIL THE END OF HIS DAYS, George Washington Eldridge believed in the healing power of the Vineyard life. And he believed in it literally: He urged a visit to the Island upon “those who have not health, but wish to find it.”

He offered his own story in evidence. As a young man, he said, he was told by a doctor after a crippling sports accident that he would never walk normally again. Breathing the salt air of Vineyard Haven, and raising a family here, he defied that verdict — and threw away his crutches.

Of course, G.W. Eldridge was always defying something or other — he was a creative, curious, argumentative man. But whatever it was that happened to his health here, along the way “Captain George” became the Island’s most passionate booster in the late 19th century — a passionate promoter for his adopted home. A one-man Chamber of Commerce, with a dash of faith healer thrown in.

All that, on top of that for which he remains best known, almost a century after his death: He was co-founder of the *Eldridge Tide and Pilot Book*.

‘When Does the Tide Turn?’

Born in Chatham in 1844, G.W. Eldridge was the grandson of a fisherman and son of another George — “Chart George,” the older man was called. After a massive storm in 1851, Eldridge the elder took soundings and produced a large-scale chart of what he called “the most dangerous spot on the coast of the United States” — the Chatham New Harbor Bars, which lay in the track of vessels bound east or west by way of Vineyard Sound.¹

Partnering with S. Thaxter & Son, a Boston ship chandlery, Chart

1 *Eldridge Tide and Pilot Book*, 100th anniversary edition, published by Robert Eldridge White, Boston 1974, page 3.

JOHN WALTER, editor of the *Intelligencer*, asked that this author’s citation take note of the fact that his father comes from Wooster, Ohio. (See James H.K. Norton author’s note, on page 3.)

George published the chart — “The Vineyard Sound and Nantucket Shoals” — and over ensuing years there followed 13 more, all but one (No. 9, St. Augustine to New Orleans) focusing on the important fishing grounds of the Northeastern coast. The partners also produced a slim little 32-page book, *Eldridge’s Pilot for Vineyard Sound and Monomoy Shoals*, with descriptions of ports and suggested courses, based in part on the experiences of Chart George in the region. Later came another book: *Compass Test*.

After some years at sea, George Washington Eldridge went to work for his father, selling the older man’s books and charts, sailing his catboat from Chatham into various harbors to find coastal vessels at anchor.

Vineyard Sound was then, as throughout the age of sail, one of the world’s busiest sea-lanes, famous for its strong currents. Here were found “not just concentrated tidal rips, but also large three-mile wide areas of fast current gushing through narrow gaps between islands and filling the tidal basins of Buzzards Bay, Narragansett Bay and hundreds of estuaries... Strong southwest winds ... sculpt the shoals with standing waves and fierce, steep chop.”² Headed to Boston or Maine, traffic from all along the Eastern seaboard passed between the Cape and Islands, and there were sometimes as many as 200 schooners anchored at Vineyard Haven. When a favorable tide arose, 20 to 50 might go out at a time, to make their way through the Sound. So, with his potential customers waiting at the front door, G.W. Eldridge was drawn to stay on the Vineyard.

In pursuit of a chart sale, while chatting with captains, George W. was always asked one question: ‘When does the tide turn in the Sound?’ There were no current tables and the tables they might have had on board did not give daily predictions of the time of high water for the Sound. In 1867 the government had begun to publish daily predictions of the times of high water for a limited number of ports but the need for a Vineyard Sound are current book was obvious and George W. saw this as an opportunity.³

2 Dave Jacques, “Playing in Woods Hole” *Wavelength* magazine, August-September 2005.

3 *Tide and Pilot Book*, 1974, page 1A.



Sidney Noyes Riggs

Eldridge studied the tides. On an August day in 1874, in the ship chandlery of Charles Holmes at Vineyard Haven, he picked up one of Holmes' business cards, and on the back of it, made a rough draft of a current table.

He approached his father: What if they produced a Vineyard Sound-area current book? His father, and S. Thaxter & Son, agreed.

The result, in 1875: *Eldridge's Tide Tables*,⁴ a green-covered, 64-page pamphlet, selling for 50 cents, offering daily current tables for Pollock Rip, Gay Head and Cross Rip, West Chop; and daily high water at Chatham Lights. It was an instant hit.

The Language of the Coastwise Vessel

The Eldridge publications specialized in speaking the language of their audience.

The charts made use of existing work that had been published by the government's Coast and Geodetic Survey of the day, but enlarged them, with clean lines and no clutter. The result was more legible overall, and could be read easily on a rolling vessel in poor weather conditions and dim light. Soundings were larger; the charts were oriented to "magnetic" rather than "geographical" north, a practical amendment.

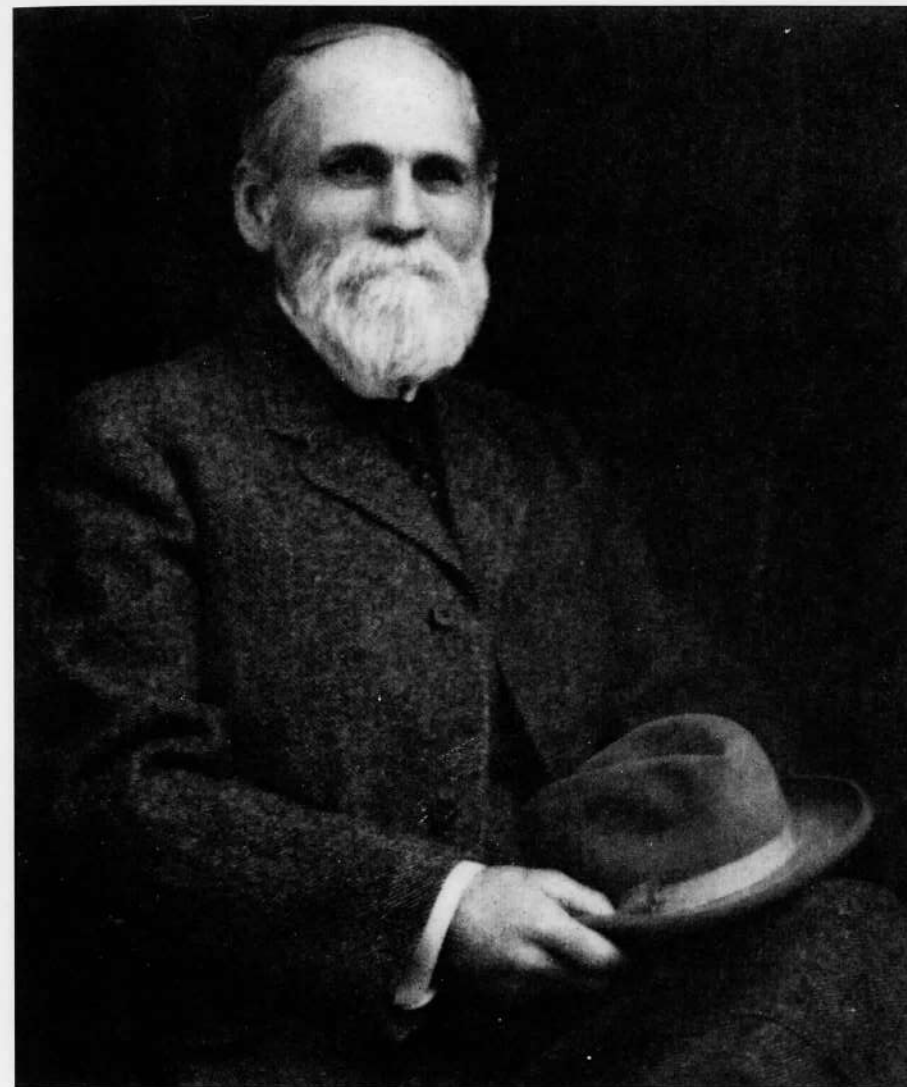
A Boston newspaper of 1899, calling attention to a new chart of Boston harbor from Captain George, noted the Eldridge charts "rank high in the favor of seafaring men. Like the other Eldridge charts, this one of Boston harbor has the merit of clearness over the government charts in that shores, shoals, etc. are more distinctly outlined, and that fewer soundings are given, and hence the varying depths of water made more readily apparent."⁵

This same straightforward, clear approach carried over to the *Tide Book*. G.W.'s letter to "My dear Captain and Mr. Mate," appearing annually through the years, begins this way: "As I cannot talk with you, I will do the next best thing. I will write you a letter":

Do you know, Captain and Mr. Mate of a place on the Atlantic Coast that is called "The Graveyard"? I propose to tell you something about it, and do what I can to keep vessels out of it. "The Graveyard" so called, is that part of the coast which lies between Sow and Pigs Rocks and Naushon Island. This place has been called "The Graveyard" for many years, because many a good craft has laid her bones there, and many a captain has lost his reputation there also. If a vessel gets into this graveyard, there must be a cause for it. Did it ever occur to you that seldom does a vessel go ashore on Gay Head, or on

4 Over the years the title has altered slightly. Variations include *Eldridge Tide and Current Book*, *Eldridge's Tide and Current Tables for the Coast of the United States*, and the present *Eldridge Tide and Pilot Book*, with no possessive on the author's name.

5 "Excellent Harbor Chart," *Boston Daily Globe*, June 2, 1899, page 7.



George W. Eldridge, from the Martha's Vineyard Museum collection.

the south side of the Sound? but that hundreds of them have been piled up the "The Graveyard, or on the north side of the Sound? I will explain why this is so...

And he goes on to discuss the currents in the area, calling attention to a table and chart elsewhere in the book, concluding, "Yours for a fair tide, Geo. W. Eldridge."

In subsequent years, as the coastal merchant sailing trade diminished

toward the end of the 19th century, the Eldridge publications began to address the tug skippers and yachtsmen.

This book is the result of years of practical experience and labor [the Captain wrote in an introduction to one of his chart-books], and I believe it will meet the wants of all, especially the yachtsman, whether his boat be a "21-footer" or the largest steam yacht afloat. In any case he will find it invaluable when entering harbors, bays and passages. The ordinary chart is all right for general sailing or navigation; but when the captain or yachtsman wishes to enter a harbor, the size or scale of the general sailing chart oftentimes makes or shows the harbor desired very small, and he finds it impossible to get such information as he wishes for easy and safe work. In approaching a harbor, when up with the outer buoy or within the limit of the harbor chart, whatever it may be, it is only necessary to push aside the general chart and open this book at the index, find the number of chart desired, and the harbor lies before him on a large plain scale, and the rest is easy.⁶

Raising a Family 'Down the Neck'

About the time of launching the *Tide Book*, young George, restless, as he would be all his years, set off to see a bit of the world. When he got to Fort Wayne, Indiana, he met the love of his life. She was Sydna Saurbaugh, a schoolteacher from Bridgeville, Ohio. They became engaged, with plans to marry the following spring.

The accident that crippled him intervened. According to his daughter Gratia in *The Captain's Daughters of Martha's Vineyard*, a wonderful oral history compiled by Eliot Eldridge Macy,⁷ the Captain suffered a broken ankle while playing a game of croquet. The balls in this game, for some reason, were made of iron, and one hit him in the ankle. The doctor said he would always need crutches or a cane.

Eldridge wrote to Sydna, back home in Ohio, telling of the accident, offering to release her from the engagement. She said nonsense; the wedding is on. So he again traveled west; he was using two canes to walk on their wedding day.

The couple settled "down the Neck" — outside of the old Holmes Hole, partway up to West Chop — in a house on Grove Street. Nearby, the Captain took over the old Holmes ship chandlery perched on the water's edge. A sign on the side of the building, in large letters, announced SHIP STORES, and in letters almost as large, advertised availability of the NEW YORK HERALD, the largest circulating newspaper in America in those days, the paper that had Mark Twain writing as a Western correspondent and that

6 Reproduced in Peter J. Guthorn, "America's Last Independent Hydrographer," *Imago Mundi*, Vol. 43, 1991, page 78.

7 Eliot Eldridge Macy, *The Captain's Daughters of Martha's Vineyard as Recalled by the Eldridge Sisters*, Chatham Press, Old Greenwich, Conn. 1978, page 30.



Sydna Eldridge, from the Martha's Vineyard Museum collection.

had hired freelance writer Henry Morton Stanley to find the Scottish missionary David Livingstone in Africa. More to the point, the *Herald* had the shipping news.

In the chandlery, in addition to the newspapers, The Captain sold marine and field glasses, spy classes and telescopes, compasses, barometers, nautical books, tackle blocks, lanterns, oilskins, foodstuffs in bins and barrels.

Sydna Eldridge, in a paper prepared for the Want to Know Club in 1932 when she was 85 years old and had lived in Vineyard Haven for more than 60 years, recalled those days:

Along the shores of the harbor there were at least three ship chandler's stores, but the [Holmes chandlery] ... was the busiest and best known. ... [It] stood at the head of its own wharf for half a century and more. There is not much to mark the site of it now, but it was long the rendezvous of all coastwise vessels. Captains, officers and crewmembers called there for mail, for water, and for ships' supplies of all sorts. An Associated Press correspondent there reported all arrivals and departures, and the old store rang with the three questions: Where are you from? Where are you bound? and How are you laden?

There was a sail loft above the store and a repair shop adjacent. Torn sails were mended in the former and damaged gear in the latter. Anchor dragging,⁸ piloting and surveying of wrecks were great businesses in those days.⁹

After years of running the chandlery, the Captain tried his hand at managing the biggest business in the village, the Crocker Harness Company, but that was not successful, and in 1892, when Chart George retired and turned publication of the *Tide Book* over to his son, the family uprooted and moved to Boston. The Captain loved it; his wife and girls did not.

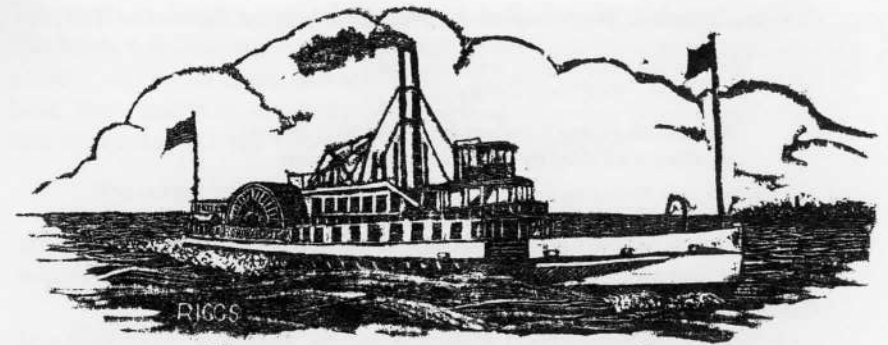
Soon they moved back to the Vineyard, to a house on William Street, but Eldridge remained behind, undertaking a commuter relationship, visiting on weekends when he could. This absence makes him a less than central figure in *The Captain's Daughters*, but it may also have spared the family some grief: Eldridge is described as having a terrible temper that flashed at unexpected times. His face would get red as he boiled over; afterward, he might sulk for days. He had a stern look, with thick brows and a dark beard that turned pepper and salt as he aged. He was fond of drama, poetry and music, and was a raconteur. "The townspeople always thought he was a little crazy," Gratia said.¹⁰

It must have been a difficult marriage. Sydna was strong and smart and thrifty; the Captain impetuous. The family struggled to make ends meet (in their new home, Sydna took in boarders), but Eldridge would arrive home with adventurous tales of big-city life, and a fine feathered hat as a present. Both parents were strict: Sydna had a strong sense of right and wrong, and George was firm on discipline ("Don't tell Papa I have been sick," daughter Ruth asked Riv, her future husband and an employee of El-

8 Searching for and salvaging lost anchors and anchor chains.

9 A copy of Sydna Eldridge's remarks is in the files of the Martha's Vineyard Museum library, and appeared in full in the *Intelligencer*, November 1965.

10 *The Captain's Daughters*, page 129.



The sidewheeler *Mattapoisett* — blockprint by Sidney Noyes Riggs

dridge in Boston, "He would prohibit basketball, school and enforce early hours — anywhere from 7 to 8 o'clock. If these things were cut off I would die of nervous prostration."¹¹

All of the family pitched in to help on the chart business, which Eldridge had also inherited from his father. The buoys had to be inked in by hand in red, as did any corrections demanded by new information. The children were paid seven cents and five cents an hour for the work. Sydna bound the edges of the charts with cloth, using a sewing machine.

Throughout his life, the Captain's curiosity never waned; he was always full of new schemes and activities. And his loyalty to the Vineyard spanned all the years, even when he lived in Boston and commuted here. He wrote to Rudyard Kipling, then in Vermont, and invited him here; Kipling politely wrote back, declining.

In 1892, he executed a fine, detailed map of Martha's Vineyard, 62 by 94 centimeters. Just before the turn of the century, he led a petition drive to establish a high school in Tisbury, getting on the town warrant a bid to spend \$1500 for the cause (it was defeated). He got the town to make an oyster-shell road to West Chop, perhaps his favorite part of the Island. "The delicious roads through the pines," he would write, "have charms inexpressible. Some of the happiest hours of my life have been spent in threading these lovely roads."¹²

He was active on the Town Republican Committee. He argued with the state (and lost) to put the breakwater off Hazzleton's Head. He was influential in getting Madison Edwards to move here from Woods Hole, for foundation of the Seaman's Bethel. And in 1905 he wrote a poem extolling the

11 A letter recorded in Isabel White West, *Riv & Ruth: A Vineyard Saga of Love & Vocation*, Martha's Vineyard Historical Society 2004, page 57. The daughters in order of birth were: Nina, 1878; Mary (Macy), 1880; Ruth (White), 1883, and Gratia (Harrington), 1885.

12 *Martha's Vineyard*, pages 20-21.

Vineyard's virtues. Two couplets are enough to suggest the tone of the rest:

*Sweet isle, so blessed by wind and tide,
Thy name I love, thou art my pride...*

*Here health-giving slumbers bring happiest dreams
To idlers, who sleep by her murmuring streams.*

In the wider world, Eldridge:

- Developed a theory about the cause of the tides in the Bay of Fundy. He suggested they were not, as commonly believed, a function of the unique shape of the bay, but rather a meeting of two currents.

- Became a frequent expert witness in courts, testifying to currents and their role in collisions and wrecks.

- Designed and put into production "trim gauges," to help with the loading of ships. They were designed to divide cargo so that the vessel remained well balanced.

In the last years of his life, he was working on aids to navigation in thick fog, and patents on the system were granted in foreign countries.

The Captain was back on the Vineyard just days before he died to attend Town Meeting on Tuesday, March 3, 1914.

The meeting that year voted to stay "dry" — 39 for going "wet," 115 for not changing, and The Captain would have cheered the result — and to purchase William Barry Owen's land for a town park. The Vineyard Haven columnist for the *Gazette* said: "Capt. George Eldridge, the 'UNIQUE,' was home for the town meeting and made his personality felt thereat."¹³

He died just two weeks later in Allston, of heart disease, and his obituary in the Boston papers called him "the well-known hydrographer and tide expert."¹⁴ The *Herald* said he was "known the length of the coast by his publications, which are in universal use."¹⁵

'The Elixir of Life'

Now about the Vineyard and its healing power.

After the croquet accident, Eldridge believed he was "an invalid and supposedly so for the rest of his life," Ruth said. She does not explain how quickly her father's recovery came, but says he staged a remarkable one, "always attributing his cure to Tashmoo drinking water and the mild climate of the Island."¹⁶ "I owe my life, as it were, to the healthful atmosphere of this island," he himself said.

In 1889, Eldridge produced a remarkable little booklet called *Martha's*

13 *Vineyard Gazette*, March 5, 1914.

14 *Boston Daily Globe*, March 20, 1914, page 18.

15 *Boston Herald*, March 20, 1914.

16 Ruth White, in a privately printed promotional brochure for a summer camp she ran in the 1920s.

Vineyard: Its History and Advantages as a Health and Summer Resort.¹⁷ The book, 6 inches by 9 inches, included advertising from Vineyard merchants, sold for 25 cents and served as a modest visitor's guide to the Island. There and in an article for *New England Magazine* 20 years later,¹⁸ he laid out his case for the Vineyard's restorative attributes:

The author of this work came to Martha's Vineyard 14 years ago, an invalid. To-day, he is a practical demonstration of what the singularly salubrious climate of this Island has done to restore him to health, and his experience has been verified in the cases of many others, and the principal object he has in publishing this book is to make its advantages as a health resort more extensively known. He has endeavored to conscientiously represent these advantages in the following pages, and he believes that when they are more fully known and understood that the people of the United States will make of this Island a great sanitarium. May this work be one of the means of its becoming such is the earnest wish of the author.

Eldridge's basic selling points are: the Vineyard has a perfect climate; the drinking water is pure; children thrive here.

In describing the Island's climate, and particularly that of Vineyard Haven, he describes its "mild and balmy air," its "cool breezes, fresh from the domains of Neptune, both day and night."

He credits the favorable effects of the ocean currents:

The great ocean tidal wave known as the flood tide sweeps in upon the coast in this locality every 12 hours. The temperature of this tidal wave in summer time at the surface is about 65 degrees, while at a depth of 100 feet or more it is 55 degrees. To the eastward and in the immediate vicinity of this Island are large sand shoals, which have an area of thousands of acres.

These sand shoals, therefore, serve as an obstruction to the normal action of the flood tidal wave, and the water, in order to find its level, or to equalize itself in its onward course, comes in contact with these shoals, causing the colder water to be whirled to the surface, thus cooling the atmosphere for miles around, and thereby keeping the mercury far below the nineties.

The action of the ocean currents referred to secures to the Island a climate of less variation in temperature than at any other place on the New England coast...

This climate, he says, is precisely one that one would look to for health

17 G. W. Eldridge, *Martha's Vineyard: Its History and Advantages as a Health and Summer Resort*, E.L. Freeman & Son, Providence 1889. Two copies of the booklet reside at the Vineyard Haven Library.

18 "Martha's Vineyard, the Gem of the North Atlantic," *New England Magazine*, April 1909. An excerpt from this article, "When 'Sea Bathing' Became 'Going in Swimming,'" appeared in the last *Intelligencer*.

and comfort, and "in looking here no one will be disappointed."

Of drinking water, he says in the 1909 article: "It is the best and the nearest to absolute purity I have ever seen, excepting none. This water has been analyzed by the State Board of Health and pronounced by them as the nearest approach to absolute purity of any that has been submitted to them for test in this state." In the 1889 booklet, he appends a statement from the board of health.

Epidemics, including diphtheria, are unknown on the Island, he posits, and malaria does not exist, and "this climate will be found remarkably beneficial for those who suffer from nervous diseases, dyspepsia, various troubles of the liver, malaria, general debility, &c."

The people of the island are exceptionally free from all diseases incident to the human family, and Time is left to do his work almost single-handed; and he toys with the people of this Sunny isle most indulgently, as a careful inspection of the records show that the average duration of human life is 57 years, being 23 years above the average length of life throughout the world.¹⁹

In the 1889 booklet, Eldridge says there have been only six deaths of youngsters under 15 years of age in the 14 years he has lived on the Vineyard, a fact "without parallel" elsewhere in America. By 1909, he reports that in 33 years there have been only 12 deaths under 15 years of age, "this in a village of about twelve hundred inhabitants. I doubt if this record can be shown by any other locality, and it seems to me that this phenomenal exemption of children from the fatal diseases should deserve special mention."

He reports imaginative, if remarkably anecdotal, research:

In conversing with the physicians of Vineyard Haven, the above was substantiated by the assertions of these gentlemen that but a small part of their practice was in cases of children, and if a child lived to the age of six months it was quite sure to grow up. For further evidence in this direction an actual count and measurement was made of the graves in the several cemeteries in Vineyard Haven, and it was found that only one grave in six was smaller than that of a

19 This is from the 1889 book. By the time of the 1909 article, Eldridge is saying the average lifespan on the Vineyard is more than 60 years, 26 years longer than the average in the United States. But the Captain has his facts wrong: Life expectancy in the U.S. by 1900 was 47 years, indicating a 13 year difference. Nevertheless, his point here does have a factual basis. The *Encyclopedia of American History* notes that data from 1890 found death rates 27 percent higher in urban areas than rural areas, and explains that such a difference occurred in almost all societies before the 20th century, because the spread of germs in highly-populated areas was basically uncontrolled before the advances of 20th century medicine. Hence, Eldridge's general point that the Island was an exceptionally healthy place has its basis in fact — at least compared to city life.



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grown person. Now in connection with this the fact should be taken into account that fully 80 per cent of all who are born on the island leave it at maturity to seek employment in the various spheres of life which the island does not afford, and ply their avocations among the busier haunts of men. Thus we are irresistibly led to believe that for children, even more than for persons of riper years, that no place in the world affords such perfect protection against those diseases so peculiarly cruel to children, as Martha's Vineyard.

And, in his conversational style, he addresses the skeptics among his readers as he declares the Island mostly fog- and mosquito-free:

Now the skeptical may say, there are some things that you have not mentioned... I don't suppose you have any fog down there in the summertime, have you? How about mosquitoes, have you any of them, or do they all go over to Cape Cod to spend the heated term?...

In answer to the fog question, I would say, that I have lived on Martha's Vineyard and in its vicinity for 35 years, and have had an extensive and varied observation of the fog area or belt of the Massachusetts coast, and, as a matter of fact, Vineyard Haven, Edgartown, and Cottage City are the only places I know of, wherein it can be truthfully asserted that a foggy day (entire) has never occurred, at least, during my residence in this place.

Now as to mosquitoes — The tourist or summer visitor has undoubtedly had occasion to say in his heart that "all men are liars" on this subject, or especially those who solicit patronage from an unsuspecting public.

We *do* have mosquitoes on Martha's Vineyard, but we would say that they are not of the Jersey species — but rather of the diminutive, debilitated kind of mosquitoes, and have evidently come here from afar to recuperate their wasted energies. ... By taking a little precaution, no one need, at any time, be annoyed by them.²⁰

'Under the Canopy of Heaven's Blue Dome'

In producing both the book and the magazine article, Eldridge's stated intention was to draw more visitors and/or residents to the Island. In the

20 *Martha's Vineyard*, pages 30-31.

innocence of another age, he says: "There are still some beautiful building sites left." In the book, his advertisers include Francis Peabody Jr. and William V. Owen of Boston, offering cottage lots for sale for summer residences in the new village of West Chop: 5,000 to 20,000 feet, prices from \$200 to \$2,000 per lot. In the magazine, he mentions East Chop, Vineyard Haven and Edgartown as possibilities — as well as some beautiful farmland bordering Vineyard Sound, which the owner is anxious to sell.

The magazine article is the last significant piece of writing we know of from the Captain; his descendants, Robert Eldridge White in Boston and Eliot Eldridge Macy on the Vineyard, don't know of files of private or business correspondence in existence.

So we give the Captain the last word. His exhortation concludes this way:

To those who have health, and wish to enjoy it; to those who have not health, but wish to find it; to those who are happy, and wish to continue so; to those who are sorrowful, but long for happiness, and, especially, to that vast multitude who delight in beautiful summer homes, where they may be in touch with old ocean's rolling bosom, and under the canopy of heaven's blue dome surrounded on all sides by nature at her best, to those and many others, I write with the sincere hope that they may, in the near future, visit our glorious island, and verify the statements made herein.



Sidney Noyes Riggs

In Praise of 'This Isle of Health'

Pure Air and Most Excellent Water Abound
On This 'Great Natural Sanitarium'

by EDWARD P. WORTH

WHY IS THE VINEYARD so healthy?" I am often asked. The very form of the question admits that people regard it as healthful but are interested to know why.

No single reason suffices to answer this, for health is a complex equation, with the mind, body and environment as factors. The Latin proverb of a "sound mind in a sound body" should not be forgotten, but the effect of surroundings ought also to be considered, just as plant and animal life depend for the best growth upon climatic conditions.

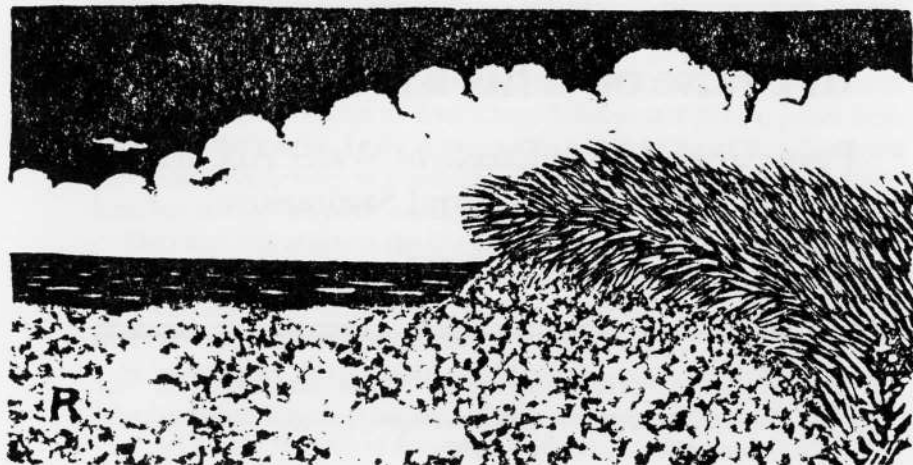
Let us consider first the conditions existing upon this Island — (a) those created by nature; (b) those formed by man.

Situated well within the limits of the temperate zone, the Island of Martha's Vineyard, twenty miles in length and seven in width, the largest island off the New England coast, has well been termed the "Gem of the Atlantic."

Discovered by Gosnold in 1602, its origin, from a geological standpoint, is essentially a glacial debris, and for a further study of its geology and meteorological conditions, its flora and fauna, as well as its history in general, I gladly refer the reader to Dr. Banks' "History of Martha's Vineyard," a work which will be increasingly appreciated by successive generations.

The temperature is equable, being warmer in winter and colder in summer than the mainland. It is rare indeed to have a temperature of zero or of ninety degrees, and then for only a few hours. The water, too, is about twelve degrees warmer around the Vineyard than in Massachusetts Bay on the northern side of Cape Cod.

EDWARD P. WORTH, Ph.G., M.D., wrote this article, originally titled "Martha's Vineyard, the Isle of Health" for a special Vineyard-related edition of *Cape Cod and All the Pilgrim Land Magazine*, published in Hyannis, February 1922. In the same issue, Henry Beetle Hough wrote an article about Edgartown, and H.B. Shultz contributed a commentary on Whiting, Shuler and Banks. A copy of this and other issues of the magazine are in the Huntington Library of the Martha's Vineyard Museum.



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Therefore the Vineyard is not as liable as the mainland to either an extreme or sudden change of temperature. The summer nights are always cool; — there are no buildings of brick or stone to absorb the heat of day and give it off during the night. Being an island, the breeze must cross the water and so its dry warmth is modified.

The purity of the air is readily admitted and explained: There is but little dust, since there are no manufacturing establishments, and for the same reason no large volumes of carbon dioxide; and while the vegetation of the island is not of a large growth it is more than sufficient to convert the carbonic acid gas into cellulose products and liberate the oxygen, thus completing the cycle which maintains the purity of the atmosphere, and with the plant life so largely in excess the interchange is bound to be prompt.

The individual water supplies all over the island are abundant and good. Three towns — Edgartown, Oak Bluffs and Vineyard Haven — have a public supply whose entire freedom from color, organic matter and nitrites, with only a minute quantity of albuminoid ammonia, proves a quality most excellent for table use.

The character of the soil is generally loose and sandy, yet fairly fertile, especially in the western portion, and well adapted to produce a good variety of garden vegetables, cereals and fruit. This loose soil favors to a marked degree sand filtration of sewage waste, a wise provision from a sanitary standpoint.

Thus it will be seen that nature in the beginning endowed the Vineyard with favorable conditions: Conditions so clearly defined that man could not fail to see and accept; and so we find the Indian with unerring instinct

chose this region as all sufficient to meet his requirements to live easily, happily and long.

Since 1642, the whites have gradually supplanted the Indians until only a remnant remains on Gay Head. The early colonists were of a rugged and stalwart type, and settling in a land so richly endowed, we should expect a race to develop having a high bodily resistance, both mentally and physically, and we find this development reaching its highest type in the men engaged in the whaling industry, men of strong physique and sound judgment, who were as resourceful in sickness as they were skilful in navigation.

Such, briefly, is the ancestry of earlier days but, as the cares of business life have become more strenuous, the need of vacations or rest periods has compelled people to leave the turmoil of the city for a time, and so today there are two classes of people in the county: the independent resident and the summer visitor.

The non-resident comes to the Vineyard to regain or conserve the health of himself or family. "To live a favorable life the climate must be such as, in connection with diet, rest, exercise and recreation, shall promote the highest physiological efficiency of the human machine," and the Vineyard offers these unsurpassed.

The climate we have seen is equable — the rainfall is average; the atmosphere remarkably free from impurities; thus tending to rest the individual without producing lassitude.

Diet is always an important factor, more so in health than in disease, for this is a day of preventive medicine. The water supplies have already been spoken of as a natural asset. The milk supply is abundant, clean and pure, is promptly delivered and with reasonable after care pasteurization is entirely unnecessary. Milk sickness among children practically does not occur. Vegetables, garden fruit and berries are easily cultivated, are gathered in the early morning and delivered in ample time to be prepared for the mid-day meal. Fish and fowl in variety are freely obtainable and in a perfectly fresh condition without the stigma of cold storage. Transportation facilities are such that meats and other food stuffs from the city markets are received within a few hours.

Rest, reading and recreation are the three Rs for the simple life on the Vineyard. The way or manner of resting is largely a choice, with the individual, but the automobile and the state highways, the sailing or motor boat and the safe harbors are suggestive. A surprisingly good variety of books and magazines are in every home, and the public libraries in the larger towns assure contentment to the reader. Recreation is again a matter of choice, but Oak Bluffs offers amusement of every variety for every age, and the Country Club with its golf course is a happy medium. Sea bathing,

a most cheerful exercise, and tonic in effect, is rendered very agreeable by the warmth of the water, averaging 72 degrees at Oak Bluffs during July and August. There is no undertow, the depth increases very gradually, so safety is assured.

Another important reason for health is the entire absence of malaria and its sequelae. The mosquitoes are not the (anopheles) malaria-bearing sort.

In the decade 1909-1918 only four cases of typhoid fever occurred in the town of Oak Bluffs, each being a non-resident and the disease developing so soon after arrival as to indicate it was imported. This certainly proves a good water and milk supply as well as a safe sewage disposal.

It will not be surprising to learn that Dukes County has the lowest mortality rate in the State in diseases of early childhood. It also has the highest rate among diseases of old age, simply because so large a proportion reach old age.

In addition to these definite reasons for healthfulness there is something intangible, which we may well call the "lure of the Island"; something which brings people back each year or after a lapse of years, just as it caused many of the whaling captains, who had retired early from the sea and had settled in business inland, to return to spend their declining days.

It would be neither fitting nor right to close the reasons for health and protection, the reasons for Vineyard vim and vigor, without a tribute to my brother physicians, a majority of whom are native born. Men of education, training and experience, they represent the best type of the general practitioner.

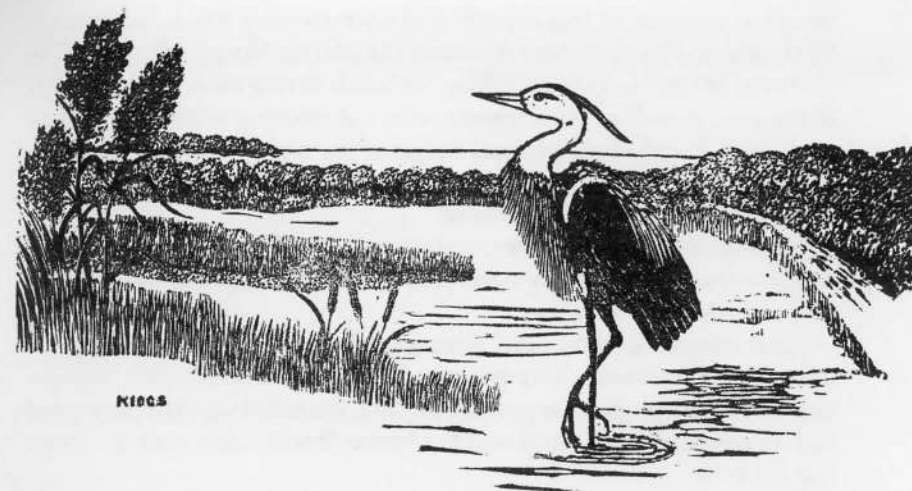
It must not be thought that the Vineyard relies too much upon its good health record of the past. The residents are as anxious to guard and protect their families as are the summer visitors. The health boards of the several towns are composed of men of intelligence; and since the towns are closely related, having similar needs and exposed to the same dangers, these boards have recently organized, for cooperative purposes, as the Martha's Vineyard Board of Health.

Oak Bluffs, with its cosmopolitan population of the summer months, spares no effort to protect her people.

Many illustrations might be cited showing the high opinion in which this region is held by those competent to judge.

The number of physicians' families who summer in the several towns (especially Edgartown) speaks with a silent eloquence.

Dr. D. A. Carmichael, a senior surgeon in the U.S. Public Health Service during the year 1914-1915 had occasion to visit all the marine hospitals along the Atlantic, Pacific, Gulf, inland rivers and Great Lake regions, his



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tour beginning at Portland, Maine, and ending at San Diego, Cal. He told me that in this course of travel he saw no place he liked better than the Vineyard. Dr. Carmichael has since retired from active service, but has made Vineyard Haven his home.

All New England knows that Gay Head, the smallest town on the Vineyard, won the Shield of Honor presented by the *Boston Post*, through the Governor of Massachusetts, to the town or city in New England having the largest proportion of its population engaged in the military forces of the United States one year after its entrance into the European war.

Why, why did Gay Head, a town of only 167 people, win this coveted honor, with about 1500 towns and cities contesting? Like the road to Wellville, "There's reason."

In the mind of every person, long before its birth, there is sown the seed of the spirit of patriotism, needing only an impulse to awaken that spirit into a vibrant and virile force; an impulse, such as caused the men of Gay Head and Chilmark to volunteer the rescue of the survivors of the wrecked *City of Columbus* under conditions too well known to be detailed.

Gay Head with its vari-colored banks of clay jutting boldly into Vineyard Sound (which next to the English Channel is the greatest waterway in the world) seems by its very position to challenge the storms of nature. But Gay Head produces men who, by their physical fitness, offset the force of wind and wave and minimize the dangers of navigation.

The Coast Guard, formerly known as the Life Saving Service, was made a part of the Navy during the recent war, and about two-thirds of Gay Head's military forces were engaged in the Coast Guard. The examina-

tions for entrance to this branch of service are very strict, being made by the Public Health Service (formerly the Marine Hospital Service). The character of their work in patrolling the beach during the stormiest nights of the year, as well as the strenuous effort of rescuing sailors at the time of shipwreck, calls for a physical fitness of the highest type, summed up in the silent question of the examining surgeon, "Will this man be able to stand the stress and strain of storm?"

But whether enlisting in the Coast Guard or the Naval Reserve, or being called to the Army, the Gay Head men were found in good bodily condition and rejections were few.

These men were native born, were reared on the Vineyard amidst conditions purely natural. They possessed the spirit of patriotism, and because so large a proportion pass the physical examination (10.4 per cent of entire population) Gay Head won the Honor Shield, celebrating the event July 13, 1918.

The summer passes: The businessman returns to his desk with a clearer mind and firmer step; the wife finds a new pleasure in her home and social duties; the aged person feels an extension of life has been granted; and the school child, tanned and fit, has stored abundant energy for the winter.

The resident people feel a spirit of contentment, and each class has gained from association with the other.

But the Vineyard itself remains unchanged; justly proud of its past, serenely confident of the future, its attractions and health giving qualities are permanent. It is a great natural sanitarium where tired people get rested, where the sick get well, and the visitor who returns each year still find, as some one has aptly written:

*"The same wind glowing,
The same tide flowing,
Only the beholder
Grown one year older."*



R
Sidney Noyes Riggs

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

Write: Editor, *The Dukes County Intelligencer*
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E-mail: swilson@mvmuseum.org. Put "*Intelligencer*" in the subject line.

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