



VOL. 50, No. 3

50TH YEAR

# THE DUKES COUNTY INTELLIGENCER

FEBRUARY 2009

## TEACHER, FARMER, JUDGE HON. LEAVITT THAXTER

*A look at the life of an important  
Vineyard figure through the lens  
of seven historic artifacts.*



## ALSO IN THIS EDITION:

- *A Teacher's Prize-Winning 1851 Essay  
and the Story Behind It*
- *'Little Visual Miracles' – A Brief History  
of the Picture Postcard*
- *Of Taxes and Tutelage – Historic Notes  
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## TO OUR READERS

It is not without a sense of the mark left on this publication by the men who have preceded me that I take over the editorial responsibilities of the *Dukes County Intelligencer*. Stepping into the very large shoes of E. Gail Huntington, Arthur R. Railton and John Walter, I am, first, humbled, and secondly, inspired. They have illuminated the dense history of Martha's Vineyard with care, holding to the notion that history is something to be savored — and to be told. I am fortunate in that the trail they blazed is a wide one and if I stick to the path of clarity, accuracy and curiosity, my journey will be a successful one.

In this quarter's issue we welcome Jean Cargill and Linda Wilson as contributors. Ms. Cargill has rediscovered one of the Island's quintessential movers and shakers in the Honorable Leavitt Thaxter. Linda Wilson is the assistant librarian for the MVM and has written a brief history of the postcard. Looking back "In the Annals," we see that attitudes about taxes and education have not changed much over the last 125 years.

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— Susan Wilson, Editor

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### Seven Artifacts:

And What They Say About the Legacy of Leavitt Thaxter  
by JEAN CARGILL..... 3

### A Prize-Winning Essay:

Harriet R. Fisher's Essay, and the Story Behind It  
by SUSAN WILSON..... 13

### Centerpiece:

Class Portrait at the Edgartown School, 1911..... 16

### Little Visual Miracles:

On the History of the Postcard  
by LINDA WILSON..... 24

### Documents:

From the Annals of Island Education..... 32

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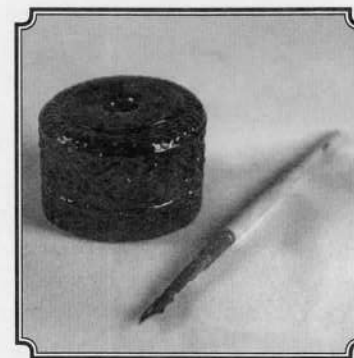
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## SEVEN PIECES

### And What They Tell Us About the Hon. Leavitt Thaxter

by JEAN CARGILL

AMONG THE PORTRAITS that line the walls of the County of Dukes County Courthouse is that of the Honorable Leavitt Thaxter (1789-1863). As the "Honorable" denotes, in 1856 Thaxter was appointed Judge of the Court of Insolvency. Thaxter also held, among other offices, those of Justice of the Peace; State Senator; Guardian to the Indians of "Chabbaquiddick" and Christiantown; and Customs Collector under commissions from Presidents Tyler, Taylor and Fillmore.

Based solely on his record of government service, Leavitt Thaxter is already a worthy figure in the history of Martha's Vineyard. And still, seven pieces in the Martha's Vineyard Museum tell us that there is much more to say about Thaxter's Island legacy.

When sleuthing in the archives, what comes to light is that no account

JEAN CARGILL is an Edgartown resident and Martha's Vineyard Museum volunteer. She first encountered the 19<sup>th</sup> century close-up as a guide at Greenfield Village in Dearborn, Mich. Jean received her formal archival training at Simmons College, Boston.

of Hon. Leavitt Thaxter's life would be complete without mention of his leading role in education. His works benefited both Dukes County youth and its teachers. And Thaxter's most enduring contribution to the Island of Martha's Vineyard is likely the organization he fostered to promote the exchange of knowledge among farmers.

### "The Great Object of Education"

Thaxter's Academy was dedicated in Edgartown, Massachusetts, on November 29th 1825, with oratory and a hymn that survive as a pamphlet in the Museum archives. Ironically, the cover of the dedication pamphlet names the Academy's location as "Edgarton." Was this an accepted spelling variant or a typographic error on the part of Benjamin Lindsey, Printer, of New Bedford?

Leavitt Thaxter's eloquence and educational philosophy are demonstrated in this excerpt from his speech. (Note that what looks to be a paragraph is only one sentence.)

The great object of Education, is to enlighten the understanding, improve the mind, cultivate the virtuous affections of the heart, and thereby fortify it against the allurements, the follies, and the vices of this world; and qualify us for acting our parts on this stage of our earthly existence with honor to ourselves, to our friends, and to society; and for becoming members of the society of angels and glorified spirits, in those celestial regions, in the presence of Him, who is the source and fountain of Knowledge.

Considering Thaxter's rhetoric, it should come as no surprise that he was a preacher's son. He was the second son<sup>1</sup> of Joseph "Parson" Thaxter. The Parson was a well-known and influential Island figure. Those readers familiar with Edgartown may recall a memorial plaque to Joseph Thaxter on the site of the family homestead at the intersection of Cooke Street and Pease's Point Way. It seems that Thaxter's accomplishments have been forever overshadowed by his famous father. Even in death, a large portion of Leavitt Thaxter's obituary<sup>2</sup> was devoted to his father's life history.

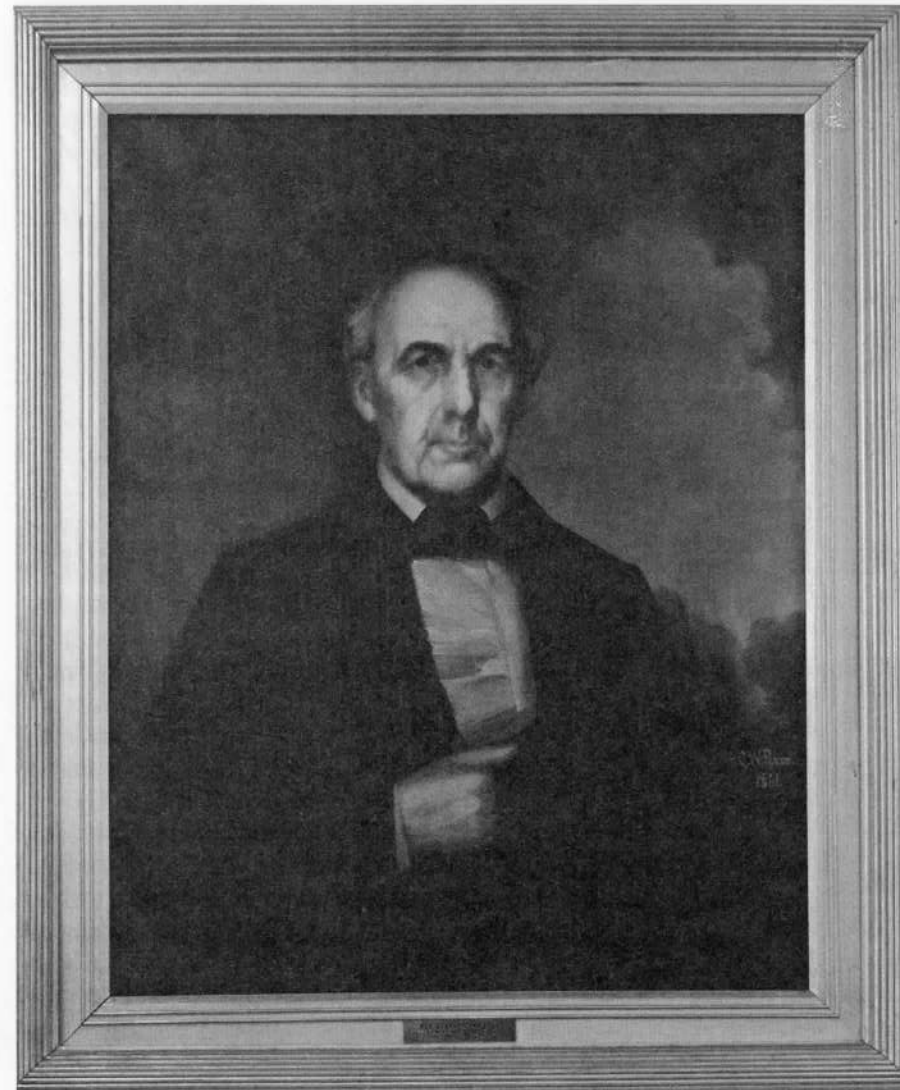
### Sarah Dunham's Album

*For An Album — When looking on a snow-white page/Your Album does contain/Your heart let no vain thoughts engage/Its purity to stain/And when inscribing on each leaf/Some valued precious Truth/Deep in your heart, the thought receive/To guide your wayward youth*

Sarah Dunham's album offers a glimpse into the classroom at Thaxter's

1 Leavitt had four brothers and two sisters. His oldest brother, Joseph, Jr., drowned off the south side of Nantucket in 1815.

2 Honorable Leavitt Thaxter, of Edgartown, Obituary appearing in the *Vineyard Gazette*, Jan. 8, 1864 (see excerpt on page 12).



This portrait of Judge Thaxter, painted by artist Cyrus W. Pease in 1861, hangs in the entry hallway of the Dukes County Courthouse.

Academy. It is filled with poetry she copied down in a delicate hand while a student there. The penmanship is exquisite and all the more remarkable when you consider that steel pens were not known at the time. Sarah's quill was genuine goose.

However, Leavitt Thaxter was not all about prose and poetry. Henry Baylies, who attended the Academy soon after Sarah and published a brief



This building on School Street in Edgartown, now a private residence, was once the original Thaxter Academy.

account of his school days in the *Vineyard Gazette*,<sup>3</sup> wrote that "Squire Thaxter kept a very good school but, according to my recollection, he was rather a severe disciplinarian." As the story goes, in Thaxter's hands, the nib of the quill pen could deliver a painful pinch to the ear of a disobedient student.

From Baylies we also learn that the Edgartown school attracted students from across the Sound: "Boys from Nantucket used to attend this school and board at Mrs. Lydia Coffin's. . . . Under [Thaxter] boys could prepare for college and some were put into the study of Latin Grammar at the age of 6 and 7." Leavitt himself was prepared for college by his father and attended Harvard, but dropped out to join the Merchant Marine and sail to the far reaches of the globe.<sup>4</sup>

Upon his return to American shores, Thaxter took a series of teaching and school administration positions in western Massachusetts and, later, Sparta, Georgia. While teaching in Williamsburg, Massachusetts, Thaxter met and married Miss Martha White Mayhew, and in 1823 the couple finally settled down in Edgartown. Mrs. Thaxter's niece, Martha L. also of Williamsburg, whom they adopted, would round out the Thaxter household.

3 November 3, 1876; reprinted in the *Dukes County Intelligencer* 34(2): 98-104. Nov. 1998.

4 While in Calcutta during the War of 1812, Thaxter is reported to have escaped from a British prison.

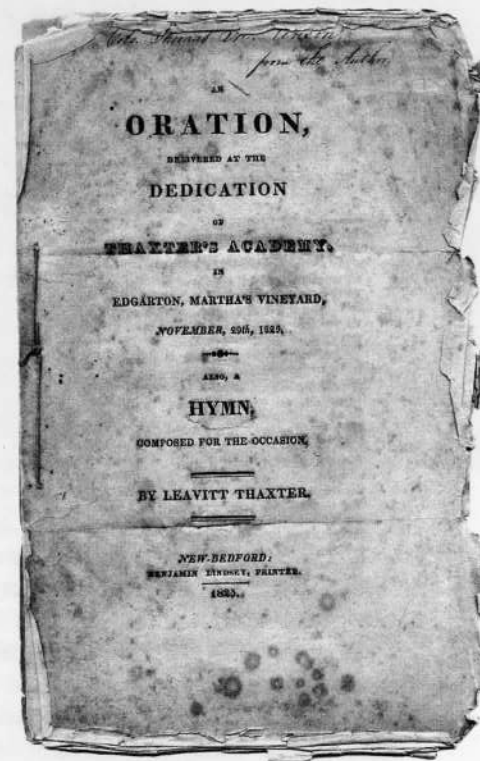
### "...study the higher branches"

The leather-bound Records of the Dukes County Academy, West Tisbury, preserve yet another reference to Leavitt Thaxter's educational endeavors. In this instance, he was called upon by his fellow proprietors to inaugurate lessons at the Academy in December of 1833. Furthermore, Leavitt was directed to "draft By-Laws and make a list of such apparatus as he may want in the school." For this he was paid \$12.50 a week. Classes met for three terms of fourteen weeks a year. Tuition for residents of Dukes County studying the "common branches of an english (sic) education" was \$2.50 a term and \$5.00 for others. Those students aspiring to college or otherwise wishing to "study the higher branches, such as Greek, Latin" paid \$3.50 and \$7.00 a term.

Three booklets of promissory notes also survive among the Dukes County Academy materials as a reminder that the school was funded in part by shareholders known as "proprietors." The Islanders who made good on their promissory notes received 8% (this was soon reduced to 6%) interest on their investment paid out in cash, or if the individual had children, applied towards a reduction in tuition at the Academy. However, not every promise was kept and collection of unpaid promissory notes became an ongoing and troublesome problem for the Academy.<sup>5</sup>

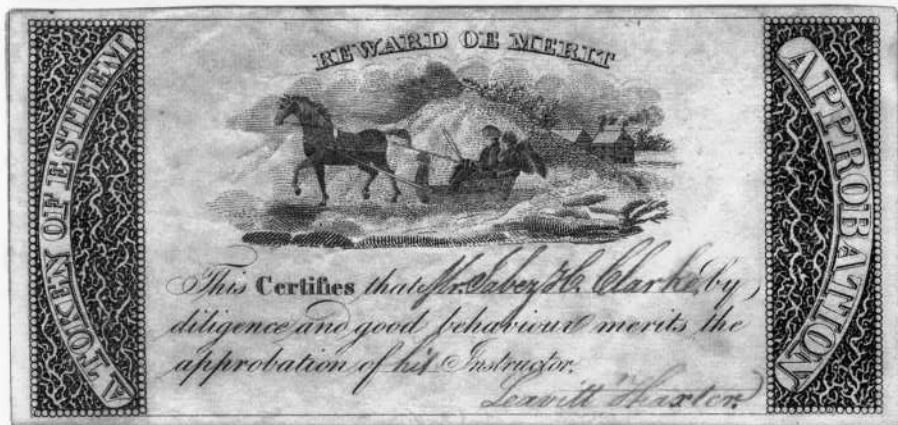
In addition, the Academy had received a grant of \$3,000 from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts that was held in a Boston bank. Because individuals, not "every citizen of the county" were benefiting from accrued interest on the account, the proprietors were advised that the state might take back the money. They responded with an unusual vote, in September 1841, to send the Treasurer to Boston to withdraw the money and "invest

5 Donald Campbell, *Vineyard Gazette*, April 13, 1973. "A Heritage of Education: History of the Dukes County Association Recalled."



This pamphlet in the Museum collection preserves the oration by Leavitt Thaxter that opened his Edgartown academy in 1825.





"A token of esteem & approbation:" This certificate of merit rewarded one of Mr. Thaxter's students for diligence and good behavior.

\$1,000 or \$1,500 in N[ew] Bedford Railroad Stock . . . and the remainder in bank stock or railroad stock."

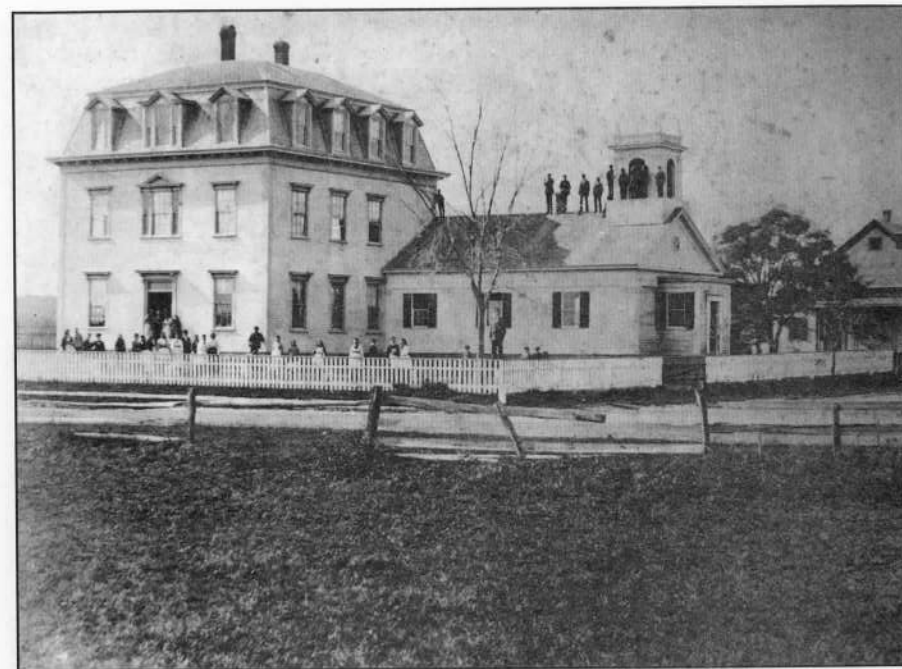
Up-Island today, the name "Dukes County Academy" summons to mind a three-story mansard roof structure on South Road in West Tisbury. That structure was built for the Academy in 1870 (and so, not during Leavitt Thaxter's lifetime). In the coming years, the school's popularity would wax and then wane, to the extent that all classroom instruction ceased by the end of the 19th century.

Meanwhile, an ever larger share of the schoolhouse was leased to West Tisbury for Town Meetings and the West Tisbury Public Schools. And in 1947, the Academy's board voted to "convey to the inhabitants of West Tisbury all the property real and personal of the Dukes County Academy Association." Today, the venerable structure is undergoing extensive renovation to continue service to West Tisbury as its Town Hall.

### "...interesting exercises in Arithmetic"

An interesting lecture was delivered by the president, Hon. Mr. Thaxter, on a thorough education, and its objects. A vote of thanks was given to the Lecturer, after which there were interesting exercises in Arithmetic, led by the same gentleman.

The quote above is taken from an entry in the Secretary's Book for the Dukes County Educational Association on the occasion of its first evening session held at the Methodist Church in Holmes Hole, at 7 o'clock in the evening on September 15th, 1848. Earlier that year, in May, the state legislature had passed an act that granted \$50 a year to associations that held semi-annual meetings, lasting not less than two days each, for the express purpose of promoting the interests of common schools. Dukes County's



The Dukes County Academy building was constructed on South Road in 1870. The main building, at left, is now the West Tisbury town hall. The attached structure at right has been moved, and is currently the studio of artist Allen Whiting.

educators promptly seized upon the opportunity.

Stored within the Museum archives, alongside the Secretary's Books, is a slender volume of Prize Essays, which is explained by an item in *The Massachusetts Teacher*<sup>6</sup> for October 1850. The journal reports that at their fifth semi-annual meeting, this time held in Chilmark, "It was voted that the Association award five prizes of \$5, \$4, \$3, \$2 and \$1, respectively, for the best five Essays, by female members. . . . Each essay to occupy, not less than 10, or more than 15 minutes in the reading." Miss Harriet R. Fisher of Edgartown took the first prize\* with her essay entitled "By what means can teachers secure the best interests of their schools."

The Dukes County Educational Association meetings included, in addition to arithmetic and essays by the female members, lectures and debate (by the male members) on such far-ranging topics as: the selection of schoolbooks; "Defective and Remedial Education"; "Introducing into schools the teaching of drawing and sketching from nature"; and, "What

6 *The Massachusetts Teacher: a Journal of School and Home Education* 3(10): 340-341 1850.

\* See page 13.

are the duties of teachers to the parents of children under their charge?" Leavitt Thaxter played a leading role in organizing the Dukes County Educational Association and was "for several years, its president, mingling in its debates and sharing the labors required to sustain it."

### "...the associated effort of the farmers"

In a note penned by Henry L. Whiting, he recorded what had transpired thus far in regard to forming an Agricultural Society for Dukes County. A "call" had been published in the *Vineyard Gazette* for an organizational meeting to be held on Saturday, April 3, at the Dukes County Academy in West Tisbury that was "well and encouragingly attended." Mr. L. Thaxter of Edgartown had been chosen Chairman (once formally organized, the Society would elect him President) and Mr. Whiting of West Tisbury chosen as Secretary. A vote was taken to adopt the following:

Resolve — That the attainment and diffusion of scientific and practical knowledge in the cultivation of the soil, is a subject of such importance as to demand the associated effort of the farmers of Dukes County.

And so began the Martha's Vineyard Agricultural Society. Leavitt Thaxter, by now 69 years old, had a busy tenure as President. "He was a working member; a pioneer in the cause." Thaxter participated in the writing of a Constitution, and formal incorporation of the Society, which required a vote of approval by the state legislature. He also led the Society in raising funds and purchasing a 2-1/2 acre lot on South Road in West Tisbury. Furthermore, Leavitt sat on the building committee for the design and building of the Society's first Agricultural Hall.

All of this activity was complete in time for the Annual Agricultural Fair & Exhibition in the fall of 1859. More importantly, the farmers of Dukes County had answered the call to join together and share their knowledge, both scientific and practical.

### "...variety beets & turnips — award .50 ... Valparaiso squash — .25"

One of the remaining manuscripts from the first Martha's Vineyard Agricultural Society Fair, held in 1858, is the list of premiums for "Grains, Roots & Vegetables." It reveals that Leavitt Thaxter was not only the President of the Society, he was a full participant in the Fair.

Thaxter did not take a dilettante approach to farming; in fact, he had identified his occupation as farming in the 1850 Edgartown Census. At that first Agricultural Fair he took awards for his sweet corn ("very choice"), varieties of beets and turnips, and Valparaiso squash. Given that the structure we know today as the "Grange" or "Old Agricultural Hall" had not yet been built, the 1858 Fair was held at Dukes County Academy, where Thaxter had taught twenty years earlier.

Grains, Roots & Vegetables			
Allin Tilton, Chilmark,	Best half acre of corn		
	common white & yellow mixed, yield 38 1/4 bushels prize — price — \$3.00		
George D. Cottle, Chilmark,	Half acre of corn		
	yield 1 1/2 bushels ears per rod: (one rod measured) — award, Vol. Ag. Statistics		
Daniel Mantor, West Tisbury	20 rods of corn		
	without any manure, yield 1 bushel ears per rod — " Vol. Ag. Statistics		
Leavitt Thaxter, Edgartown,	sample seed sweet corn, any choice, award —		.25
Edward Norton	Sample field corn		.25
John Vincent	"		.25
Amos Mayhew	"	vegetables & corn	.25
H. L. Whiting, Tisbury	"	"	.25
Wm. Atthem	"	"	.25
Mrs. Mary Luc	"	"	.25
Mrs. Hannah Cook	"	"	.25
John W. Mayhew, Chilmark	"	"	.25
R. L. L.	"	"	.25

Amid the Mantors and Tiltors, Nortons and Vincents, Lucas and Mayhews, appears the name of Leavitt Thaxter, winner of a prize for his sweet corn at the first annual fair of the Agricultural Society which he helped to found.

### "...in perpetual remembrance"

A final archival manuscript for consideration from Leavitt Thaxter's life history is a subscription letter that reads:

The undersigned hereby agree to pay the sum affixed to their respective names, for the purpose of procuring a portrait of our highly esteemed fellow citizen Hon. Leavitt Thaxter, to be placed in some public building in Edgartown as may hereafter be determined by the subscribers.

The portrait to be executed by a native artist, Mr. Cyrus W. Pease, in his best style, and to be kept in perpetual remembrance of one of our most eminent and public-spirited citizens, who has through a long life been closely and intimately identified with this town in its educational and material interests. Edgartown, January 1861.

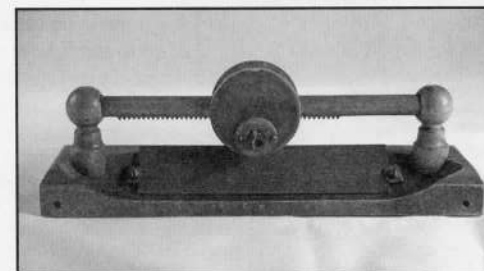
The subscribers, twenty-seven in all, each contributed \$5, \$2, \$1 or \$.50 to commission the oil painting, for which the Honorable Leavitt Thaxter consented to sit as townsman Cyrus W. Pease captured his likeness. The result was arguably the most handsome of the portraits in the Edgartown courthouse today.

In his lifetime, friends and former students joined together to express their gratitude to the Honorable Leavitt Thaxter in a way that would endure. By studying seven pieces from the archives, we gain our own newfound appreciation for this man who held an abiding faith in the power of education to better the lives of the youth, the teachers, and the farmers of Martha's Vineyard.

### Excerpt: From the Vineyard Gazette's Obituary of Leavitt Thaxter

**B**ORN IN EDGARTOWN, March 13, 1789, the second son and fourth child of Rev. Joseph Thaxter — who for nearly half a century was pastor of the church in that town. . . . His father, Rev. Joseph Thaxter, was born in Hingham, May 4, 1744, took his first degree at Harvard University in July, 1768; after making much progress in the study and practice of medicine and surgery, he was induced to study divinity, and commenced to preach in 1771. He was at the battle of Concord bridge, April 19, 1775; and, in January 1776, he joined the army as chaplain of Prescott's regiment; he was at Cambridge, White Plains, and North River, also in New Jersey till March, 1777. In the spring of 1780, the church at Edgartown being destitute of a pastor arrangements were made for a supply, and the services of Rev. Mr. Thaxter were procured; after preaching some two or three months, the town and church each unanimously made choice of him as their minister, and he was ordained as pastor of the church, November 8, 1780. When the cornerstone of the Bunker Hill Monument was laid by Lafayette, June 17, 1825, he was present by request and officiated as chaplain. He died July 18, 1827, full of years and honors; a man of learning, benevolence, and piety, he labored to promote the welfare of his people, temporal and spiritual, and when he departed, left behind him the fragrant memory of the just.

— *Vineyard Gazette*, January 8, 1864



Antique pencil sharpener, from the Museum collection.

## 'The Mother Is the First Book The Child Studies'

Teacher Harriet R. Fisher's Winning Essay  
May Have Had an Edgartown Back Story

by SUSAN WILSON

**T**HE DUKES COUNTY EDUCATION ASSOCIATION was founded by an act of the state legislature 'granting Aid to County Associations of Teachers and others.'

"Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives, in General Court assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows: Section I. Whenever a county association of teachers and others, which has been or may be formed, shall hold semi-annual meetings, of not less than two days each for the express purpose of promoting the interests of common schools, such associations shall be entitled to receive fifty dollars a year from the state...."<sup>1</sup>

In 1848, among the names of the first members of the Dukes County Education Association is that of Harriet R. Fisher, an Edgartown teacher. Essays were a feature of the semi-annual meetings, and were overseen by a subcommittee of the Association. In 1851, Miss Fisher submitted the winning essay.

1 Dukes County Education Association minutes. RU92, Box 2 of 2, folder DCE#1.



From the minutes of the May 9, 1851, convocation of the DCEA:

Voted that the essays now be read — the Essays were then read. . . . Resolved that we have listened with much pleasure to the Essays read this morning; that we regard the introduction of original essays by the Ladies as one of the most interesting exercises of the Association and entertain the hope that we shall hereafter be favored with many more.

Miss Fisher was awarded "the highest prize viz., Five Dollars. Signed: 'for the committee, Leavitt Thaxter."

~

**"Parents: their responsibilities and duties  
in regard to the Education of their Children."**

by Harriet R. Fisher

Dukes County Education Association winning essay, September 1851.

IN CONTEMPLATING this subject, the question involuntarily arises, what is here meant by education? Is it the narrow stricted view of the acquisition of knowledge in our schools, or the wider more exalted view that education consists in all the influences brought to bear upon a child thus forming character for future life and a never-ending eternity? We will, at this time take the latter view and enquire where and from whence does the child first receive impressions; for early impressions are enduring. It is a sad mistake that education does not commence until children enter school; it commences with our existence, and it has been said by a celebrated philosopher that one half our knowledge is gained before six years of our life are passed.

Who, during these years, has most to do in forming the character and stamping their impress upon the mind of the child? The parent, especially the mother, is the first book the child studies and the one most perfectly learned. The influence parents exert upon children must be felt through succeeding generations and may be as lasting as time and wide as the world in its effects.

The seeds sown in early life ripen in manhood and bear fruit in old age. The best and worst such have been made so by early impressions and culture. Go to yonder sandy beach and there make impressions deep and multiform; but pause a moment — watch that wave rolling toward you — see it approaches nearer and nearer; now it recedes to its ocean bed, but where are the lines you there traced? They are gone — washed away by that receding wave. Behold the ravages of the late storm has made stripping nature of its beauty and glory and how would your heart sadden were it not for the hope that time and culture would reclothe it with beauty and fertility. Such many think are the impressions made upon the minds of children as easily effaced and soon forgotten as those upon the sand and



This photograph of the South School in Edgartown is from the album of Mrs. Myra S. Walker. Mrs. Walker, who was the wife of Doctor Thomas J. Walker, kept this album in the early 1900s. Courtesy of Eileen Robinson.

as eagerly do they hope to reclothe with its native beauty the mind that has long been crushed by some untoward breeze.

But, parents let it not be forgotten but written as with the point of a diamond, that the principle that you inculcate in the minds of your children will remain there forever. The human family has been so constituted by our kind and benevolent Creator, that each one must necessarily influence others. This principle in social life as that of gravitation in the natural world we find operating everywhere and at all times. None of us liveth to himself.

There is no one who does not have an influence over others for good or for evil. Our relations to society and social natures render it impossible this should be otherwise.

The mind is continually throwing off its moral and spiritual features to be taken by other minds thus shaping their destiny. We cannot speak or act, and scarcely breathe or think, but a moral electricity moving silently, but with the velocity and power of lightning, effects some of God's created

# South School, Edgartown, 1911: In Miss Coddington's Classroom



SARAH CODDINGTON WAS BORN in 1885 in Osterville, Mass., the daughter of a Methodist minister, Lewis Bates Coddington, whose first assignment after graduation was Trinity Methodist Church in the Campgrounds, where he served from 1882-1883. In a 1973 interview with the Oral History Center, Sarah recalled her summers staying with grandparents in Oak Bluffs, where both sets of grandparents summered. The Coddingtons had a long association with the Camp Meeting, going back, according to Sarah, almost to the beginning.

"My second year out of college I got my first real job which was in the Edgartown Grammar School. The Superintendent was Andrew Averill and his son was Alfred Averill. And I had a very delightful year there.... He was a wonderful person to work under. He just had things going so smoothly. It was a beautiful experience for me. And his wife had gone to

Bridgewater Normal. . . . She met me at the boat when I landed in Edgartown. So I had a welcome and both the church, the Methodist church there, and the Women's Club invited us to all of their meetings. I had a very fascinating experience at 1910-11 in Edgartown."

A graduate of Boston University, Sarah took the position of teacher at the South School in 1910, replacing Miss Helen Gilman of Melrose who had resigned "owing to the condition of her health." After one year Sarah moved on, becoming a governess for the family in New York and later an instructor at Maryland College for Women and then Lutheran College in Marion, Virginia. In 1953 Sarah returned to the Island at the age of 69 to teach mathematics and science for one year at the Tisbury School. "I enjoyed the work very much. But I was nearly 69 and they didn't want me anyway. They wanted a man who came back."

intelligences; and these impressions shall never wear out.

Every person now living is forming character for eternity, but truly has it been said that a mother to whom is committed a mortal immortal, is painting immortality.

Yes, your child is immortal. It may be made happy for time and eternity, or miserable and a parent may to a great extent mould its character and shape its destiny.

The dearest interests of society and the world are in the hands of parents. Can there be a station of greater responsibility? You owe it to your children to promote their welfare by every proper means and how can that be better done than by educating them for usefulness? Let the sons and daughters each be fitted for the stations they are to fill in after life. This is your duty, for you alone have the power. Employ what teachers you may the impressions received at home will have the mightiest influence. Teachers may cultivate intellect, but the every day conversation they hear, the habits they witness, and the people they are taught to respect are busy agents in forming the character.

Let every parent look well to their daily and hourly example for children are often and will be likely to be more deeply impressed by what you do than by what you say. How much truth there is in what we have so often heard from the lips of the venerable President of this Association, "like produces like." In vain will it be for you to warn them from indulgences in which they see you seeking gratification. You must live what you teach; you must be what you desire them to become. If the mother, for example, controls her own temper she will win the love and respect of the child and it will grow up kind and gentle. If you wish your child to be affectionate, upright and true, you must yourself exhibit these qualities; but if on the other hand you are incapable of restraining your passions your child will suffer in disposition and happiness.

'When the oak tree is felled, the whole forest echoes with the sound,' but when the acorn was planted by some unperceived agency, no sound was heard.

So with your child. The influence of that unkind and passionate word may not at first be perceived, but after many years no effort of yours will be able to obliterate it.

Who can estimate the power of the human mind? Is there aught in nature that will bear a comparison? When we contemplate the terrific power of steam, the destruction caused by fire, the startling might of old Ocean's billow and the devastations made by lightning and volcano; we are struck with a feeling of sublimity and enquire what is more mighty than the agencies of matter. But we find upon reflection that these same mighty agencies have, by man's intelligent, immortal spirit have been

made subservient to his convenience and ease. It was the power of mind that discovered the laws that regulate these forces. From what but this power did Franklin receive his fame and where would now have been the name of Morse whose message upon the "lightning's wing" almost instantaneously reaches its destined haven? Who, without this power, would ever have claimed the all powerful steam and rendered transportation over land so rapid and easy?

Think you their names will ever be forgotten who have been engaged in the great enterprises of benevolence and spread of Christianity?

These powers of mind are what you have to mould. Parents, to you is entrusted this priceless gem. Let the physical, intellectual, moral and religious education of your children at home be our chief care and the obstacles now in the way of teachers will be removed.

Then will our schools become what they should be and our country, too, will advance in all that is great and good. This alone is her hope — that the great mass of the people be educated. Was there ever a time, when virtuous, intelligent, educated men were more needed than now? Was there ever a call for more faithful parents?

Who can foresee the events of the coming future? Without an enlightened population, where and of what avail would be our free institutions and improvements in government? Would not American Liberty soon find a grave and the "spirits of the mighty dead" be called upon to chant forth its requiem? We now need and shall continue more and more to need mighty men — men of intelligence and virtue — those who fear God and let come what will we are yet the great, the mighty. But where shall we find such men? To parents alone can we look. They are to be made in childhood, at home and under the ennobling influence of parental instruction.

The child you now so fondly cherish is to fill stations of honor and dishonor. The character, now forming in that child, shall be carried into future life and be exhibited in whatever situation they may chance to be.

What men would you have for future judges, senators, statesmen, ministers and rulers? Would you prefer the ignorant, uneducated, vicious character or persons whose home education has fitted them to confer dignity upon those offices, rather than receive honor and dignity from them.

We might go on to speak of the many calls loud and direct through the world and our own beloved land for men of virtue, wisdom, and power, but time will allow only a hasty glance.

The old world is still heaving and tossing under the effects of that moral earthquake which has threatened to overthrow the institutions which have so long existed.

Throughout these busy nations there is an upward, onward progress. The barriers from around China have been broken down and she is be-





This photograph of the South School in Edgartown is from the Mrs. Myra S. Walker album. The caption, written in white ink on black paper, reads, "School's out, hurrah!!!" — Courtesy of Eileen Robinson.

ginning to take her place among nations and discharge the social duties devolving upon her.

Throughout Asia, too, is a call for labor and although to a great extent darkness yet broods over her plains, the poor benighted African shall yet see better days through the influence of this enlightened Christian nation. Our people have, as it were, had their influence felt throughout the world and still more powerful will it be rendered. Parent! Now is your time to act. We are made the gazing-stock of the world. Shall the important questions now agitating our country cause the overthrow of Liberty? God forbid. Claim it as "woman's right" to have the mother's power felt in the halls of Congress and within walls of our Capitol. Have a voice there by educating your sons that they may by greatness and goodness show to the world that you, at least, felt a parent's responsibilities and remembered that the fate of a child, to a great extent was the work of its mother.

Remember that every inmate of penitentiaries and State Prisons were once gentle, inoffensive and prattling children, and that every criminal who had expiated his crime upon the gallows was once pressed to a mother's heart, and drew his life-giving nourishment from her bosom. Bad moral training, wrong influence, and debasing examples do their work, and transform endearing offspring into ferocious men, who shock hu-

manity by the foulness of their guilt, and the monstrous audacity of their crimes. Educate your daughters; yes, highly educate them with care equal to that bestowed upon your sons. You are to fit them for stations of care and responsibility.

All education is valuable or not as it tends to make the relations we shall hereafter occupy happy or miserable. Mothers, forget not that the daughters by your side are soon to appear upon the busy theatre of human action. Let not beauty and mere superfluities be their only possessions but remember that the duties of woman require strength of character, firmness of principle and strength of intellect; not mere impulse of feeling. Fathers should feel that however great the responsibilities of mothers they, too, have a duty to perform and let them see to it that they are faithful to their trust. Does the parent wish for encouragement in the performance of these duties?

Look at the numerous examples that time will now fail us to enumerate where the children by their virtue have twined perennial wreaths to adorn the memory of those parents who carefully wove a crown for their future life. Let the example of that illustrious man, Washington, suffice. What think you would have been the history of our country had not his mother's love influenced him to "learn to govern by first learning to obey"—had she not enforced diligence, obedience and truth. This subject is so vast in its bearings that we feel as if we had but just entered upon its merits. Of course it will not be expected that the course for parents to pursue will be marked out but if you ask the assistance of the Spirit of God, he will keep and aid you in your work of teaching them to fill with honor and respectability the duties of time and allowing them by your own example to soar upward to a blessed immortality, and, at last, permit you and yours to meet in the Paradise above where the powers now so perfectly infantile (in comparison with what they shall be) shall forever expand and be actively engaged in pursuits that now the mind cannot conceive of.

Edgartown, Sept. 1851

Harriet R. Fisher

HARRIET RIPLEY FISHER was born on November 7, 1829, in Edgartown, the daughter of Capt. Hiram Fisher and Margaret Ripley. In December 1851, she married Calvin Shepard. They lived in Boston until the 1880s when they returned to the Island. Harriet died in 1903 at the age of 74.

The year that Harriet R. Fisher wrote the winning essay, she held the position of assistant teacher at the Higher Grammar School of Edgartown under the principalship of the Rev. Mr. Henry Baylies. In the Report of the School Committee of Edgartown for the year 1850-51 the Rev. Mr. Baylies' resignation is lamented. (The italics are the writer's.)

"At the expiration of that term, Mr. Baylies found it necessary to resign his trust. Mr. Baylies proved himself a competent and successful teacher, and as such his removal was regretted. Had he been in *all* cases sustained by parental authority in the discipline of the school, we doubt not he would have succeeded fully, in maintaining the best of order, and in being highly useful to *all* the members of the school. . . . It is due, to say, that a full share of the success of the school is to be placed to the credit of Miss Fisher, the accomplished and faithful assistant."<sup>2</sup>

The facts of this regretted 'removal' are that Mr. Baylies not only was caring for a chronically ill wife, but all too frequently found himself faced with discipline problems and a lack of parental support. One incident in particular seems to have been the final straw in a frustrating series.

"On Wednesday P.M., the day of sorrows to teachers, as the day of Compositions & Declamations may be styled, the pupils were all prepared except Benjamin Luce, who replied to my question that he was not prepared because he did not choose to be.

"I gave him till close of school to prepare declamation or composition & he was not then prepared. I gave him further time till Friday morning but he absented himself till Monday (yesterday). His reason for absence was, in his words, because he did not choose to be present. I suspended him....

"At close of school, P.M., on being called he came forward with a letter of four or five lines which he read for a Composition. I asked if he expected me to receive that for Composition. He replied insolently "That is my composition." I should hold him suspended until his case should be laid before the School Committee."<sup>3</sup>

To add insult to injury, the 'insolent' lad seems to have been championed by some school chums who 'shouted' at the headmaster from the school yard. Two of the boys refused to admit wrong-doing: 'their appearance was somewhat insolent & their perjury so repeated I was perfectly astounded.' This pair, Thomas Worth and Holmes Smith, were to 'make suitable confession' after he had notified their parents. Baylies backed into a buzz saw with his insistence.

"Capt. Worth has not called upon me & nothing more has passed between us. I today heard through one of the committee indirectly that Capt. W. said to him I told Thomas to go up & get his books & if I refused to let him have them to Knock me down & he would pay the bills. What will such advice from father to son result in?"

2 Report of the School Committee of Edgartown for the year 1850-51. Box RU79. (For this Miss Fisher earned \$31 for the school year.)

3 Excerpted from Henry Baylies' diary, which ran serially in the *Dukes County Intelligencer*, 1993-2001.

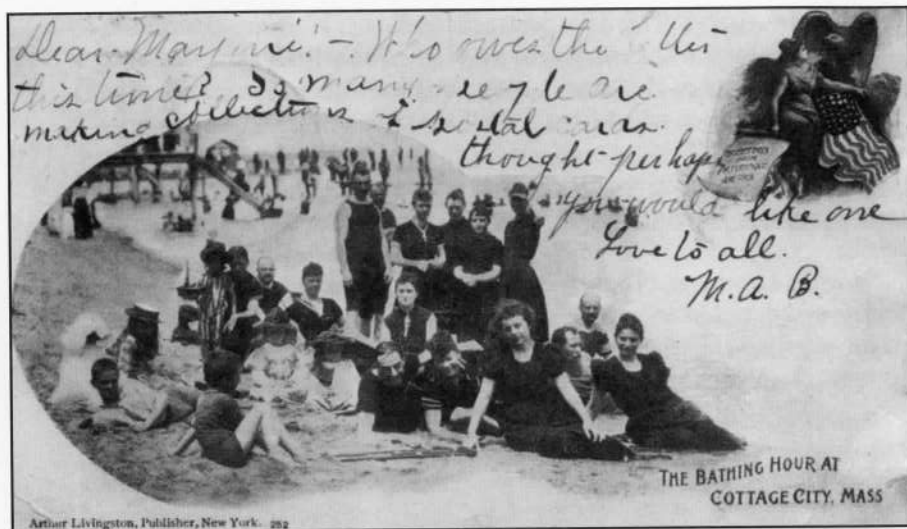
On Friday, August 9<sup>th</sup> Baylies writes in his diary: "Well, thus I have concluded my first term as Principal in the High School in Edgartown. What my reflections are at this time I have not time now to record. Be it so. I have done & when or whether I shall commence another term of this school I know not."<sup>4</sup>

Baylies does, in fact, return to the Edgartown High School in 1852 after six months traveling in the south in a vain attempt to help his wife's health.

So when Harriet R. Fisher writes her essay on "Parents: their responsibilities and duties in regard to the Education of their Children," it isn't out of the question that she has written this at least in part as a result of her principal's unhappy experience.

*Genealogical material for this story was provided by Catherine Merwin Mayhew.*

4 Ibid.



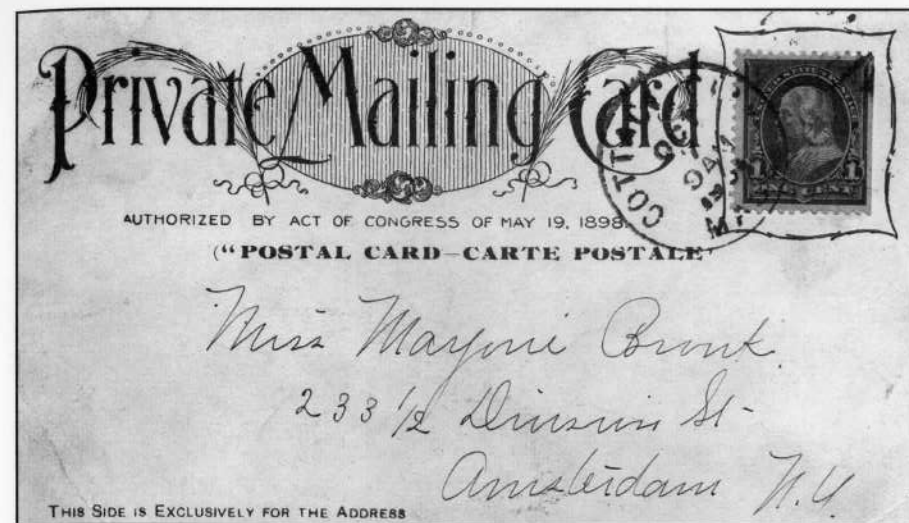
## ‘Little Visual Miracles’

### Postcards, Precious Records of Island History, Have a History All Their Own

by LINDA WILSON

**A**LTHOUGH PICTURE POSTCARDS were used in Europe as early as the 1860s, it took a seminal national event attended by millions of Americans to bring pictorial mailing cards to the attention of American public. Thousands of color lithographed views of the World’s Columbian Exposition of 1893 were printed on mailing cards and sold at the Fair. The potential of this one small, ephemeral form was initially realized during the six months that the Exposition was open to the public.

LINDA WILSON retired to Martha’s Vineyard in 2004 after a long career as a school librarian. She currently works part-time in the Martha’s Vineyard Museum at the Huntington Research Library and Archives. She has experience in rare book librarianship and bookbinding in many formats. Her collection of more than 300 Margaret Armstrong decorative trade bindings is in the teaching collections of the Rare Book School at the University of Virginia. EILEEN ROBINSON, a Museum volunteer, assisted with research for this article.



Linda M. Wilson Collection

Here and on facing page, the two sides of an early pictorial private mailing card. Note the one-cent stamp and the reference to the act of Congress which granted this lower rate.

In the summer and fall of 1893, and in the face of a worsening national depression, Americans flocked by the millions to the Great Fair in Chicago and were influenced and inspired by what they experienced there. The six-month extravaganza was promoted as a celebration of the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Christopher Columbus and his voyages, but the national impact went far beyond that. The Exposition campus consisted of some 600 acres that were architecturally distinguished, well-managed, and worthy of the nation’s pride and fascination.

The Great Fair celebrated American ingenuity through the many remarkable consumer products and services that were introduced to visitors. Demonstrations of electricity and the telephone, new products like Juicy Fruit Gum and Cream of Wheat cereal, and a modest form of mass communication, the picture postcard, reached millions of Americans for the first time.

Remarkable cultural and educational opportunities for the entire family were offered. John Phillip Sousa’s music was often performed by visiting bands. Dvorak composed *The New World Symphony* in honor of the Exposition. Hundreds of works of art by Homer, Sargent, Eakins, and the French Impressionists were exhibited. *The Pledge of Allegiance* was introduced to school children at the Fair.

Each state contributed a building and appropriate exhibits. The Massachusetts building was a reproduction of John Hancock’s home. There was an 80,000-square-foot Woman’s Building designed by a Boston architect, Sophia G. Hayden.





An undivided back postcard, from the Linda M. Wilson collection, dated 1905. Note the message written in the margins of the front image.

In an acknowledgment of the pull of entertainment, as well as “high” culture, the Midway Plaisance proved to be enormously popular with the public. Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show played the Fair. Rides, music, food, and simulated exhibits of exotic foreign cultures pave the way for the modern carnival and, later on, Coney Island, Disneyland, and Epcot.

(Racist attitudes of the day were reflected in those foreign culture exhibits and in an event billed as “Negro Day.” Journalist Ida B. Wells and Frederick Douglass both published stinging essays about this.)

After the Great Fair of 1893, widespread printing and distribution of the cards was hindered by existing postal regulations. Pictorial Private Mailing Cards required the full letter-rate postage of two cents per piece. The demand to use this form became so strong that in May of 1898, Congress granted a concession reducing the postage rate to one penny.

### A Postcard Timeline

**1898-1901:** The U.S. Congress required the words “Private Mailing Card” on the address side of these cards. A small space was left on the image side of these cards for a brief message. Writing on the address side was illegal.

**1901-1907:** Use of the words “Post Card” was granted by federal legislation in 1901. Writing was still not allowed on the address side of these cards, most of which were printed in Germany.

**1907-1914:** This period is known as the “Divided Back Era.” The image



This postcard, from the Linda M. Wilson collection, is an example of cards from the white-border period, and dates to 1918.

filled one side of the card and there was a vertical line separating the address section and the message section of the verso of each card. Most cards from this era were printed in the United States or in England.

**1915-1930:** The images on these cards are not as high quality as those on earlier cards. Often there was a longer description of the image on the address side. The distinctive white border was a printing economy.

**1930-1944:** Cards from this period were printed on a textured paper and were called “Linen Cards.” Humorous cards from World War II were linen cards. These cards can have white borders or be printed edge to edge. The colors are vibrant, flat and gaudy, perfect for a travel souvenir.

**1945-Present:** These cards were first sold at Union Service Stations in the western states around 1939. Some were coated in plastic which tended to peel off. One brand was Plastichromes, which were manufactured in Boston. Sometimes these cards had wavy or scalloped edges. These are not real photo postcards. Today they are called photochromes or chromes. These are the familiar postcards sold today.

### Card Genres

**SOUVENIR CARDS:** This is a catch-all category for humorous cards, “wish you were here” cards, generic cards that are printed with a specific location, much like some generic tee-shirts, cards with glitter on them, leather or wooden cards, special occasion and seasonal greeting cards, and, the most vulnerable of all, cards with moveable parts.



This early (1907) real photograph postcard, from the Linda M. Wilson collection, depicts the Corbin residence overlooking Ocean Park in Oak Bluffs, now known as the Corbin-Norton House.

**PANORAMIC CARDS:** These cards fold in half and present panoramic views. Sometimes they were triple folded.

**POSTCARD FOLDERS:** These pieces open accordion style and have a folder with an address panel attached around the cards. They are larger than standard size postcards.

**HAND-COLORED POSTCARDS:** These distinctive cards are easily identifiable. They have a realistic palette of colors, especially in the sky. Look for the words "Hand Colored" on the address side of the card. Very few publishers produced these cards. They date from the mid 1930s to the 1950s.

**ALBERTYPE CARDS:** The Albertype Company of Brooklyn, N.Y., produced printed products for the tourist trade between 1890 and 1950. Although they published souvenir books and pamphlets, they were known primarily for their postcards. Albertype photographers fanned out all over the United States photographing in great detail nearly every town, city, tourist venue, and geographic feature in the country. They missed very little of local cultural and historic significance.

In the 1930s the company began offering a new product, hand-colored postcards, which caught the public's fancy to the extent that these cards, each a unique work of art in a sense, were rarely mailed. Albertype was the premier publisher of hand-colored postcards. These cards often survive in pristine condition, a tribute to the teams of watercolor artists who sat at long tables and added one color to each card as they passed from woman



From the Martha's Vineyard Museum collection, this real photo postcard dates to circa 1920, when horse-drawn and "horseless" carriages shared Island highways.

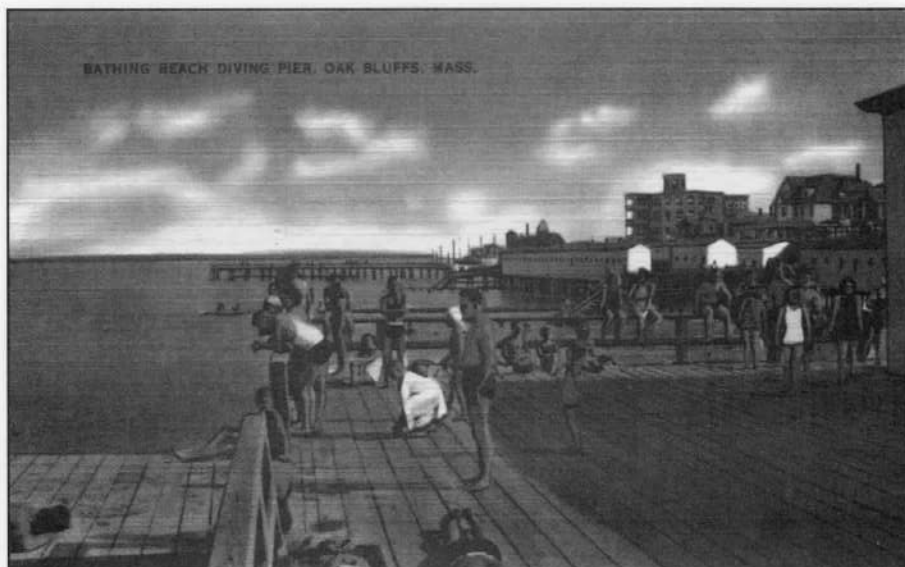
to woman. With different colorists handling the brushes and colors each day, the cards might look quite different. And occasionally one finds evidence of artistic license in the blooms and shrubbery that appear in highly unlikely spots. However, the extravagant displays of color in the skies on these cards are achingly familiar and realistic.

**REAL PHOTO POSTCARDS:** Real photo postcards became a significant genre between 1905 and 1920 when photography itself was becoming a familiar part of American culture. They could be mass produced as could other postcards, but generally the printings were small.

These cards are printed on photographic paper from negatives. Usually the captions were written on the negative and appear as white text on the image side of the cards. Sometimes the photographer's name or logo appears on the cards. These cards can be dated by the paper the card is printed on. The stamp box on the address side of the card included the name of the paper often with obscure symbols that allow for very precise dating. ARGO, AZO, CYKO, DEFENDER, VELOX, and SOLIO are some of the papers that were sold for real photo postcards.

Part of the appeal of these cards is a certain naïveté in the efforts of often anonymous photographers. And yet these efforts often produced elegant formally composed images, fully realized tiny works of art, Rosamond Vaule's "little visual miracles."

Thanks to the World's Columbian Exposition, the loosening of postal regulations, the popularity of tourism, and the growth of consumerism,



This linen card, circa 1940, from the Martha's Vineyard Museum collection is printed in the gaudy colors typical of the era.

the era of the picture postcard, a supremely democratic art form, was born. Despite the seductiveness of modern technology, the postcard still thrives, proving we were actually where we said we were going, an ephemeral trail of evidence and communication. Thus the postcard as we know it has become a chronicle of the nation, nostalgic, ubiquitous, affordable, documentary, and user-friendly to this day.



This souvenir card, dated 1908, from the Martha's Vineyard Museum collection suggests that the attraction of beaches for Island visitors is not a recent development.

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## From Island Annals: Taxes and Tutelage

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"The opposition to public schools arises chiefly....those who think more of the 'almighty dollar' than they do of education. Usually they are small tax-payers, whose proportion of the tax for schools, whether there were raised what the law requires or what is needed for the better efficiency of the schools, would not make the difference in their taxes of fifty cents; possibly to a few this might be increased to seventy-five cents. To save that amount, some of them labor from four to six weeks every year, at about the time of the annual town meeting. If they cannot succeed in their efforts, they feel and try to make all others whom they meet feel that a great financial calamity is about to overtake us; but be it understood, we do not include in this estimate any persons, who usually pay a tax of rising forty dollars. Those among us who pay the large taxes, all the way up to the highest in town, from \$50 to \$500, \$600 or \$800, including their corporation taxes, and upon whom the burden largely falls, are in favor of the requisite sum for school money, be it said to their credit and honor."

—Report of the Edgartown School Committee for the year 1875-6.

Note: The whole of the Edgartown budget for that year was \$35,000.



In 1911, the year that Sarah Coddington taught at the South School in Edgartown, Principal Chesley W. Nelson wrote in his report to the superintendent of schools, A. P. Averill:

"We have only twenty-two pupils, sixteen girls and six boys, enrolled in the High School. It seems to me that more of the youth of this town, the young gentlemen in particular, should take advantage of the opportunity so freely offered to obtain a High School education. Some time, some of them will look back upon their wasted opportunities with much regret."

He goes on to echo Miss Harriet R. Fisher's 1851 winning essay:

"The influence of our homes in forming the character of our future men and women is of vastly more importance than the influence of our schools; no matter to what degree of excellency or efficiency we may raise the standard of our schools, this has been and will continue to be true."

And: "Punctual attendance, coupled with faithful and constant labor is the only way to successfully complete a course of study."

—Report of the School Committee, included in the Edgartown Annual Report for the year ending February 21, 1911.

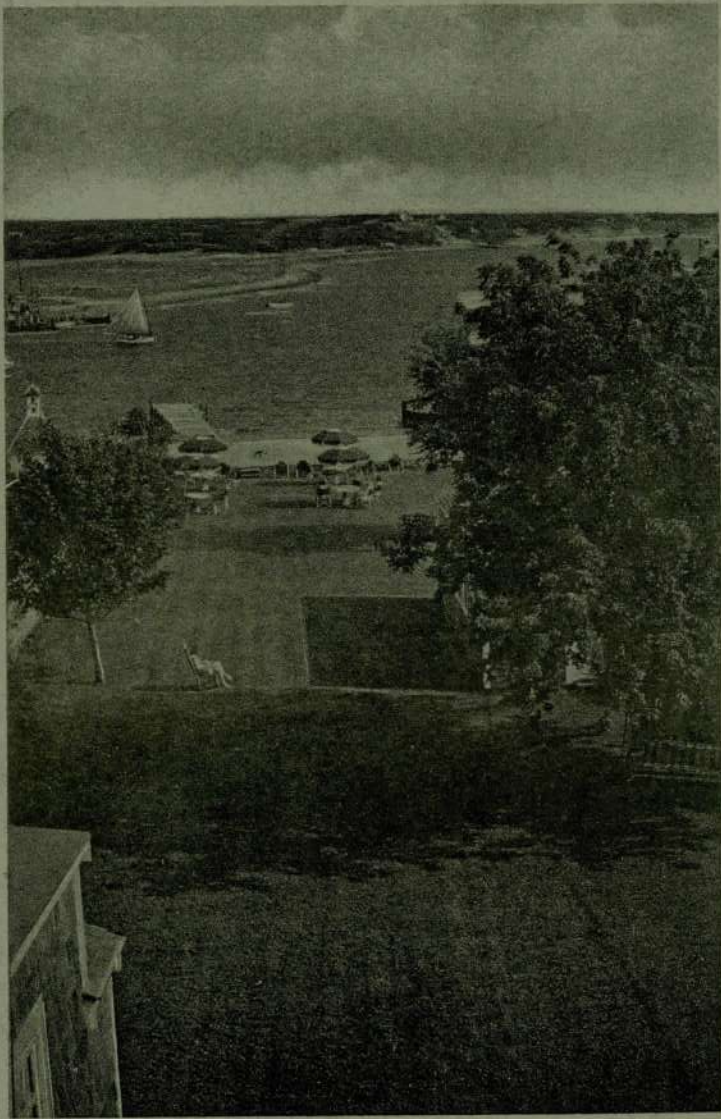
The *Intelligencer* welcomes contributions. Letters to the editor intended for publication are also welcome.

Write: Editor, *Dukes County Intelligencer*  
Susan Wilson  
P.O. Box 1310  
Edgartown MA 02539

E-mail: [swilson@mvmuseum.org](mailto:swilson@mvmuseum.org). Put "*Intelligencer*" in the subject line.

### Errata:

The November 2008 issue of the *Intelligencer* incorrectly identified the woodcut by Sidney Noyes Riggs on page 33 as the steamer Mattapoisett. It is the Monahanset.



The Daggett House Garden Edgartown, Massachusetts

A view to Edgartown harbor; circa 1940; picture postcard from the collection of Linda Wilson.