

Journal of History of Martha's Vineyard and the Elizabeth Islands



THE DUKES COUNTY INTELLIGENCER

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FALL 2010

WRECK & RESCUE: The Mertie B. Crowley

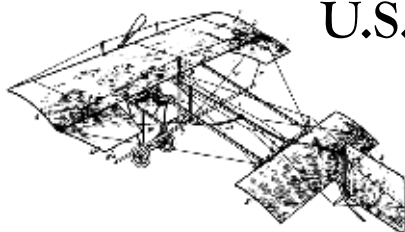
by HERBERT R. WARD



INVENTIVE ISLANDERS

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TO OUR READERS

This issue of the *Dukes County Intelligencer* especially fulfills one of the key tenets of the mission of the Martha's Vineyard Museum: to add to the historic record. Two articles cover new ground as Herb Ward writes about the wreck of the Mertie B. Crowley with passion and a personal connection and Chris Baer, a frequent contributor to these pages, brings to light the unusual number of inventors who have had a Vineyard connection. We are delighted to be able to again offer three pieces of student work, on three very different topics: a history of Main Street, Vineyard Haven; the evolution of medicine on Martha's Vineyard; and, a short biography of Polly Hill.

Submissions to the *Intelligencer* are welcome. For guidelines, please contact swilson@mvmuseum.org. Letters to the editor intended for publication are also welcome and may be emailed or mailed to:

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Rescue of the Mertie B. Crowley: Heroism at Skiff's Island Shoal



Capt. Levi Jackson and His Brave Crew Saved Fourteen Souls from Wrecked Schooner

by HERBERT R. WARD

"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." John 15:13

THE MERTIE B. CROWLEY was a six-masted schooner built by Cobb, Butler and Company in Rockland, Maine. Launched on August 20, 1907, the Crowley was built to transport coal from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, to Portland, Maine. The vessel, owned by the Coastwise Transportation Company, was named for general manager John Crowley's wife, Mertie B. Crowley. The schooner would be in service for only two and a half years.

It was the era of the six-masted schooners, ten having been built between the years of 1900 to 1909, as well as one seven-masted schooner, the

HERB WARD was born and raised on the Island, with a local family history dating to 1642. He is known as an amateur genealogist, quilter, and singer with the Island Community Chorus and Federated Church Choir. He is a great-grandson of Capt. Levi Jackson.

Thomas W. Lawson. At the waterline, the Mertie B. Crowley was 296.5 feet long, just shy of the length of a football field. She had a beam width of 48.4 feet and depth of hold of 23.8 feet. The jib boom was 75 feet long, and from jib boom to spanker she was an impressive 412 feet long.

The masts of the Mertie B. Crowley were made of Oregon pine. The six masts were 122 feet long, the topmasts 58 feet. The masts from bow to stern were named: fore, main, mizzen, jigger, driver and spanker. The crosstrees, just below the junction where the main mast and the topmast were fastened to each other, would be equivalent to a ten-story drop to the deck below.

Carrying loads of coal to Maine, with a return load of ice, the Mertie B. Crowley and other large schooners would sail past the Vineyard on each leg of the route. As the size of the schooners kept increasing, it became more and more difficult to pilot them. Vessels did not have radar to rely upon. In good weather the Captain relied on the position of the sun by day, and the position of the stars by night. Lighthouses at Shinnecock and Montauk, on Long Island, and the Block Island light were needed to guide the vessels on their paths to pass on the north side of the Vineyard. In cases of bad weather and heavy fog, you could only hope for the best.

On Dec. 19, 1909, the Mertie B. Crowley ran aground off Tuckernuck Island, Nantucket. Not damaged, she was floated off on Dec. 23, 1909. It was reported that the light from the Edgartown Lighthouse too closely resembled the light at Block Island. Due to poor visibility and being off course, Captain Emmons Babbitt mistakenly thought that the Edgartown Light was the Block Island Light, and changed his course to east by north, grounding the vessel in the shallow water of the shoals. That same confusion would soon have a far more serious consequence for the the new captain of the Mertie B. Crowley, Capt. William Haskell.



The Mertie B. Crowley left Newport News, Virginia, early on Tuesday morning, Jan. 18, 1910, bound for Boston with a full load of coal. Capt. William Haskell, his wife Ida, and a crew of twelve were aboard. By Friday, the weather conditions had deteriorated to thick fog and rain. On Saturday, Jan. 22, the seas were rough with winds of 50 to 60 miles an hour and visibility very poor. When the crew saw a lighthouse beam, they, like Captain Babbitt, thought it was the Shinnecock Light on Long Island. The direction of the vessel was changed to east by north in order to make clear passage between the Elizabeth Islands and Martha's Vineyard. However, the Crowley had made more headway during the storm than they realized. The next light the crew saw they believed to be Block Island Light—but it turned out to be Edgartown Light.

When a ship of that size, with a registered gross weight of 2,824 tons, a cargo of 4,796 tons of coal, and a depth of hold of 23.8 feet, hits a shoal



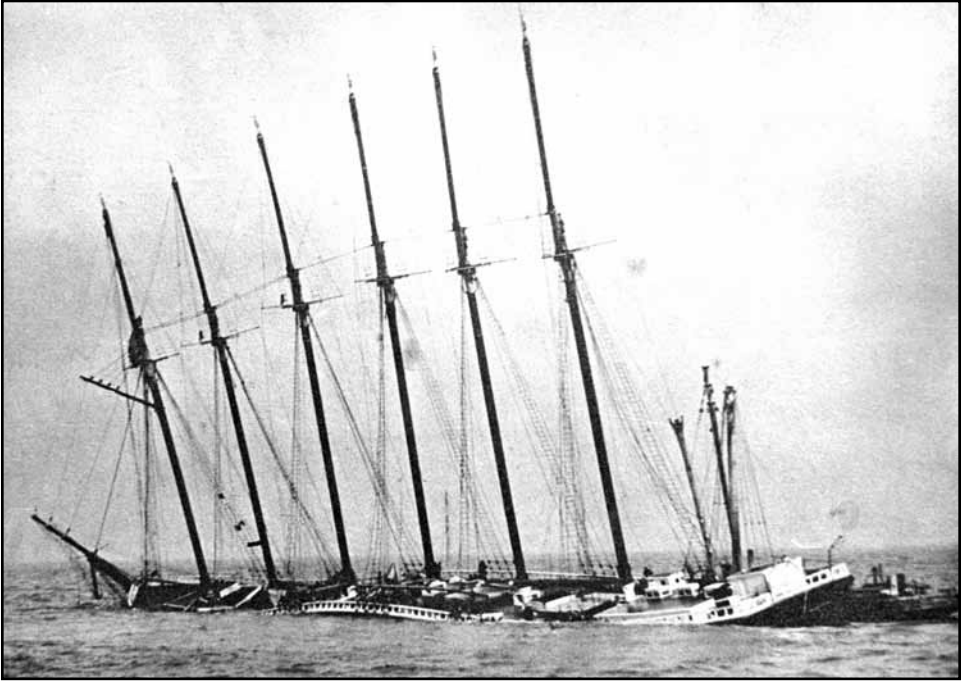
The Mervin B. Crowley under sail.

with average depths of only eight to 16 feet, she will be grounded. There would be no mistaking the abrupt stop that the Mervin B. Crowley took at 5:35 on the morning of Jan. 23, 1910. She grounded on the west side of Skiff's Island Shoal about four miles offshore of Katama. The vessel was then forced broadside by the mighty ocean waves, with the stern facing toward the south shore of Martha's Vineyard in a direction 180 degrees from where she had been moments before.

The seas had been kicked up by several days of heavy winds from the southwest. Although the winds were not as bad at the time of the wreck, the waves were still large, estimated at 10 to 20 feet. The area of Wasque Shoals, being so shallow, only intensifies the size of the waves and the intense energy thrust up from the ocean into the shallow areas. Like a tsunami, the energy at sea lies beneath the crest of the waves. As the waves approach shallower areas, that energy is pushed up into higher waves and creates a massive undertow.

As soon as the crew gathered their senses, it was "all hands on deck." The waves were breaking over the deck of the Mervin B. Crowley. The life boats and yawl had been torn off the vessel and washed overboard. Everything not secured was washed over the decks while sea water spilled down, filling up any space it found below decks.

The first priority was to get Mrs. Haskell up from below where she was sleeping. The crew found Mrs. Haskell asleep in her berth, which was now floating on the water that had come below decks. As reported in the New



In an image from the Martha's Vineyard Museum archives, the Crowley aground, battered and broken on Skiff's Island Shoals.

Bedford Morning Mercury, Jan. 24, 1910, “Mrs. Haskell was awakened by her husband...” She was barely able to grab a few items of clothing before the cabin was flooded. The crew first took her to the engine room, but the strong waves broke through there as well. The crew took her up on deck. Her husband helped her put on a pair of his rubber boots, a winter hat and an overcoat over her nightgown. Mrs. Haskell was then taken by the crew up the ratlines of the foremast, into the fore-rigging where she was lashed to the crosstrees, some one hundred feet above the deck. One of the crew continued up to the topmast about 150 feet above the deck, where he tied his shirt as a distress signal.

Some of the crew secured for themselves a place to cling to in the ship’s rigging. Five of the crew took refuge in the jib booms. Another two of the crew went to the mainmast crosstrees. Finally, Captain Haskell joined his wife and lashed himself to the mast. The only thing they could do now was to wait, and hope that local fishermen could come to their aid.



The wreck of the Crowley was first discovered about an hour and a half later, at 7 a.m., by Manuel K. Sylvia, the pilot on board the steamer, Uncatena, that was anchored in Edgartown harbor. Sylvia sent a message to Vineyard Haven to alert the revenue cutter Acushnet. The Acushnet was

assisting the stranded schooner Haskell at Handkerchief Shoal when the wireless message from Vineyard Haven was received at 9:30 a.m.

The Acushnet made way for Edgartown Harbor so as to pick up Abram Osborn, Jr., a local pilot who would help the Acushnet navigate the waters around Chappaquiddick. Mr. Sylvia found Eugene Benefit, a local fisherman, on the docks that morning and asked him to notify Capt. Levi Jackson, a local fisherman with a successful track record of rescues at sea.

It was a short, brisk walk to the tenement rental next to the Edgartown National Bank on South Water Street where the Jacksons lived on the first floor. Mr. Benefit knocked on the kitchen door. Sarah Jackson could not have been happy to hear the news of the shipwreck. She knew what her husband would do. Her son George was only 18 days old, and she had to care for her other children, May, Jane, Sam, Hiram and Levi, Jr. The skyline of Edgartown was full of homes with widow's walks, even though the whaling industry had long since disappeared. She hoped she would not be added to the lengthy list of Edgartown widows.

Capt. Levi Jackson had a nickname, "re-di-do-die" (ready to die), and a reputation for risking his life to save others at sea. He had served at the lifesaving station at Gay Head in 1901 and performed sea rescues in 1902 and 1904. It was a foregone conclusion that he would agree to risk his life once again to rescue the crew of the Mertie B. Crowley. Jackson and Benefit took the short walk from South Water Street to the wharf where Jackson's boat, the Priscilla, was tied up.

Captain Jackson had purchased the Priscilla in 1903 from Israel Swain of Nantucket. At the time, the Priscilla was considered one of the largest cat boats, with a length of thirty-seven feet, a width of fifteen feet, and a weight of ten tons. Levi had it modified to be an auxiliary fishing sloop, with an added bowsprit from which he could harpoon swordfish.

In addition to the sail, the Priscilla had a sixteen-horsepower engine. She drew only three and a half feet of water, and worked well in shallow areas not deep enough for larger vessels. There were four cockleshell dories on board, seventeen feet long, thirty inches wide at the middle, with a depth of twenty-four inches. The dories could accommodate up to five people in an ideal situation. Additional equipment onboard included seven kegs with 150 feet of line, which served as drags when swordfishing. The Priscilla had no life preservers on board.

Crew members of the Priscilla would vary over the fishing season. On the morning of Jan. 23, 1910, Patrick Kelly, his brother Henry Kelly, and Louis Doucette were all part of the regular crew of the Priscilla. Eugene Benefit, who had been sent to fetch Jackson, was down at the docks that morning, but the Edgartown resident was not part of the regular crew. Louis hailed from Revere, Patrick from Everett, and Henry from East



Captain Jackson's catboat Priscilla.

Boston. The Kelly boys were originally from Nova Scotia. As soon as they heard of the wreck, they knew what to do. The Kelly boys and Doucette prepared the Priscilla for Captain Jackson.

Captain Jackson and Eugene Benefit arrived at the wharf around eight in the morning. Captain Jackson devised a plan, and with his crew and Benefit aboard, set off from Edgartown Harbor aboard the Priscilla, half an hour later. Captain Jackson's plan was to take the Priscilla out of the Edgartown Harbor, travel northward to the tip of Cape Pogue, and then head southward down the coastline of Chappaquiddick. Although there was a breach opening at the eastern end of Katama Bay, it was only four to six feet deep.

Given that the conditions were far too rough, it would not be safe for the Priscilla to navigate through the cut.

It was after nine in the morning before the Priscilla was finally able to make it out through the breakers to Cape Pogue. Only able to travel about six miles an hour, they eventually reached an area called Point Rip, which had a good vantage point from which Captain Jackson could assess the feasibility of his planned rescue attempt.

John Slater, master of the fishing schooner Viking, having heard of the wreck, also made his way to Cape Pogue. At 27 tons, and a depth of hold too deep for the clearance that the Priscilla had, the Viking was limited in its options for making its way down the eastern edge of Chappaquiddick.

At 10 a.m., the Mertie B. Crowley split at the middle into two pieces, with the stern section settling a bit toward the starboard side. All of the crew were in the mast and the bowsprit. As breakers continued to smash into the Crowley, the fore and main masts became loosened and began to swing wildly, but remained in place, with the crew still lashed to them.

The seas were rough, with eight to ten foot waves. The Priscilla reached

an area west of Skiff's Island Shoal, about two hundred feet south of Kata-ma Bay, to an area where the seas were slightly calmer. On the east side of Muskeget Channel, waves were ten to twenty feet high, and the Wasque Shoals, in between, was a mass of breakers. The Mertie B. Crowley lay grounded just to the east of where Captain Jackson was, and just to the west of the Muskeget Channel.

It was now eleven in the morning, and Captain Jackson and his crew had already been at sea for over two hours, but now they were in a position where they could see the extent of the wreck, and could see the crew of the Mertie B. Crowley up in the rigging. The decision was made to proceed with the rescue.

Further offshore, the revenue cutter Acushnet, piloted by Abram Osborn of Edgartown, had arrived, having received the wireless distress call originated by Manuel Sylvia. Due to the depth of her draft, the Acushnet was able to get no closer than about a quarter of a mile from the Crowley. The captain and crew could only watch, just as the crew of the Viking watched.



By now the tide had changed, and the seas were not as bad as they had been. At 5' 6" and 145 pounds, what Levi Jackson lacked in height, he made up for with muscle, courage and determination. The final, and most difficult part of the trip lay ahead. Reducing sail and relying on the engine, Captain Jackson maneuvered the Priscilla back and forth around the waves in a serpentine movement, continually getting closer to the wreck. It took another hour, until Captain Jackson had the Priscilla one hundred and fifty feet to the lee side of the wreck, near the midsection. Captain Jackson dropped anchor. The winds were from the southwest, and the breakers were being broken up by passing over the Crowley's deck. It was noon, and the Crowley crew had been lashed in place for seven hours, whipped by twenty-mile-an-hour winds and freezing salt spray.

A dory was lowered, and rowed by Louis Doucette. The dory was set out with a line in the hopes of setting up a breeches buoy from the Priscilla to the Crowley. In this way the dory could be pulled back and forth from the Priscilla to the Crowley, until everyone was rescued. However, the seas were too rough and Captain Jackson was left with no other options but to perform each rescue by dory, one person at a time, with one of his crew rowing out and back. Captain Jackson and Eugene Benefit would stay aboard the Priscilla, while the Kelly boys and Doucette would each row a dory single-handedly.

Henry and Patrick Kelly were the next to go out in the dories. Patrick was first, but encountered breaking waves which rendered his dory all but useless. He was forced to return to the Priscilla to have his dory bailed out. In the meantime, Henry Kelly rowed to the Crowley successfully. Mrs.

Haskell was unlashd and made her way down the ratlines from where she had been lashed in the crosstrees, over one hundred feet above the deck. She came down the ratlines as far as she could without being swept away from the waves. She had a rope tied around her shoulders as a safety line. In January, the temperature of the water surrounding the Vineyard is generally in the upper thirties. Falling into the water even for a short time could have fatal consequences.

As the wave brought the dory up toward the deck of the Crowley, Mrs. Haskell would need to jump just in time to land into the two-foot deep, thirty-inch-wide bottom of the dory. At just the right moment she was commanded to jump, and she did without hesitation. She jumped from a position in the ratlines at least twenty to thirty feet from the deck. She landed in the center of the dory. Henry Kelly quickly rowed his passenger to the Priscilla, with a breaking wave trying to overtake them the entire way. As the dory returned, Captain Jackson and Eugene pulled Mrs. Haskell up onto the deck of the Priscilla. It was one o'clock in the afternoon, and the first rescue had just been completed.

By now Patrick was back out in his dory and he picked up Captain Haskell. The process was the same: Captain Haskell unlashd himself from the crosstrees, climbed down the ratlines, and took the leap of faith to the dory below. Patrick returned to the Priscilla, where Captain Haskell was pulled aboard, and then headed back out for the next rescue.

And so it was a rescue by Henry Kelly, then a rescue by Patrick Kelly, then by Louis Doucette. Each one took his turn, saving one crew member at a time. After rescuing Captain Haskell and another crew member, Patrick went back for the next. The ships' steward, Mr. Whalen, was reticent to jump, and when he did, he missed the dory. Patrick did not hear the Crowley crew yell to him to let the man go. Instead, Patrick rowed towards Whalen, and when he got close enough, the crewman held on while Patrick tried to row back to the Priscilla. Whalen was weighted down with rubber boots, a heavy coat and oilskins. Eventually Patrick's dory was filling up with water and had strayed under the 75-foot jib boom of the Crowley. Seeing a large breaker coming towards him, Patrick was able to grab hold of some of the chains on the bowsprit of the Crowley just as his dory was washed under. When he looked around, Patrick saw that Whalen had also managed to grab hold of the chains.

In a return trip to the Crowley, Doucette rescued Patrick Kelly. After resting for about five minutes, Patrick took the fourth dory, went back out, and rescued Whalen, whom he had first attempted to rescue, and who was still hanging on the chains of the bowsprit. In the meantime, Doucette rowed back to the Crowley and rescued the cabin boy, who had also been afraid to jump, but finally did. Doucette would make four more trips.

Henry Kelly, who had rescued Mrs. Haskell, made three more trips, each time rescuing a crew member. He was responsible for saving four lives. Louis Doucette made seven trips altogether, rescuing Patrick Kelly, the steward (Whalen), the cabin boy (Charlie Bridgewater), and four other members of the Crowley crew. Patrick Kelly rescued Captain Haskell and three other crew members.

It was around three o'clock in the afternoon, after two hours of grueling work, that all fourteen souls had been saved from the Mertie B. Crowley. The Priscilla with her crew of five, plus the fourteen from the Crowley, could now head back to the safety of Edgartown Harbor. Within minutes of turning about, a large wave approached and threatened to wash over the Priscilla. Captain Jackson shouted out for everyone to hold fast as a large wave came over the stern. It did not take long for the wave to clear out through the scuppers. To the crew and rescued alike, it must have seemed an eternity, but as the water cleared, everyone was still aboard. It would take another two hours for the Priscilla to make the return trip around Cape Pogue and reach the port of Edgartown.

From the time of the wreck until everyone was safe on shore, twelve hours had transpired. It was after five in the evening when the Priscilla landed at Osborn's Wharf in Edgartown, greeted by a cheering crowd that had formed during the day to await the success — or failure — of the Edgartown fishermen.



Captain and Mrs. Haskell were entertained at the home of Dr. T. J. Walker. Frank W. Beetle of Edgartown cared for the first and second mate. Two other crew members were housed at John Prada's home. The remaining seamen were cared for by the Edgartown Fisherman's Association, which had rooms on Main Street. Food and clothing were brought by many of the generous residents of Edgartown.

The names of the rescued: Mrs. Ida Haskell; Capt. William Haskell; Patrick Norcott, the First Officer; Fred Shea, the Second Officer; Fred Heilbrodt, Engineer; J. W. Whalen, Steward; Charlie Bridgewater, cabin boy; Joseph Cornish, Phillip Brookins, Samuel Chinn, Edward Miller, Charles Quarliss, Theodore S. Ries, and Mr. Hunt.

The following morning, Jan. 24, 1910, an enveloping vapor lifted off the ocean surface to reveal the six masts of the Mertie B. Crowley, her battered deck just above sea level. It seemed likely that some of the material and rigging would be able to be saved. Later that day, the wreck was revisited by Captain Haskell and his first mate. Belongings of Mrs. Haskell were retrieved, including a sealskin coat, two bracelets and a diamond ring, as well as money belonging to Captain Haskell. Officers' clothing was also recovered. Curiosity seekers and photographers from New Bedford made

trips out to see what was left of the Mertie B. Crowley.

The sight must have been unnerving for Captain Haskell. The Mertie B. Crowley without her load of coal was valued at \$160,000, and was a total loss. By Tuesday, Jan. 25, Captain Haskell was at the Marine Hospital in Vineyard Haven, suffering from nervous shock. He had survived being lashed in the rigging for almost ten hours, but the loss of the Crowley had a more crippling effect on him. His wife Ida, twelve years younger than her husband, had no lingering effects whatsoever of her wreck and rescue at sea.



Five heroes, in a clipping from the New Bedford Standard-Times. Captain Jackson is at front, center. Around him are his crew from the day of the rescue: Eugene Benefit, Louis Doucette, Henry Kelly, and Patrick Kelly.

A petition was circulated among the crews of the Acushnet and the Viking, attesting to the bravery of the crew of the Priscilla. Meanwhile, most of the crew of the Mertie B. Crowley headed off to Boston, to make their way back home to Baltimore or to be reassigned to other vessels. Walter S. Beatty of Edgartown wrote to the Carnegie Hero Fund Commission recommending Captain Jackson and each of his crew to be recognized as heroes and awarded Carnegie Medals.

On Tuesday, Jan. 25, Captain Jackson visited the wreck. The Coast Guard from Nantucket had arrived at the scene. The Coast Guard had picked up the yawl of the Mertie B. Crowley at sea, about a mile away from the wreck. The Coast Guard asked Captain Jackson if he wanted the yawl, and he graciously accepted their offer. Captain Jackson towed the yawl to shore with the Priscilla, and later sold it to Capt. Benjamin Cromwell for \$176.¹

On Wednesday, Jan. 26, Mrs. Haskell left the Island early in the morning, heading for Boston, along with the officers of the Crowley. The wrecking tug Tasco had arrived at Osborn's Wharf in Edgartown after visiting the wreck, where they were able to salvage a miscellaneous list of property.

A week after wrecking on the shoal, the hull of the Mertie B. Crowley was battered to pieces. On Jan. 30, the three aftermasts went overboard, followed by the three foremasts. The final mast to go was the one to which Captain and Mrs. Haskell had been lashed.

1 The yawl from the Mertie B. Crowley is at the Mystic Seaport Museum, along with a nameboard, and a swallowtail flag.

On Feb. 7, 1910, Capt. Levi Jackson and his brave crew were recognized by the Humane Society of Massachusetts for their actions in saving the crew of the Mertie B. Crowley. Jackson and each member of the crew received a silver medal as well as a cash award of \$40. The medal is hung from a bar which has the name "Priscilla" on it, with a pin on the reverse. The medal face is inscribed "Humane Society of Massachusetts." On the back of Captain Jackson's medal is inscribed: "To Levi Jackson for bravery in saving life. Shipwreck at Martha's Vineyard, January 23, 1910."²

On Feb. 17, 1910, an auction of items salvaged from the wrecked Mertie B. Crowley fetched \$1,000. Items included salvaged sails, rigging, and other items not lost during the wreck. That same week, numerous letters from the survivors of the wreck were received in Edgartown, thanking the people of Edgartown for the kind treatment following their ordeal and rescue.

The honors weren't over for the indomitable crew and their captain. On January 18, 1912, the Carnegie Hero Fund in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, announced award recipients for acts of heroism over the past two years. Levi Jackson, Henry Kelly, Patrick Kelly, Louis Doucette and Eugene Benefit all received a bronze medal. Jackson received a cash award of \$2,000, and each of his crew members received a cash award of \$1,000.

On the front of the medal is a portrait of Andrew Carnegie, and the wording, "Carnegie Hero Fund, Established April 15th, 1904." On the reverse of Captain Jackson's medal is printed: "Awarded to Levi Jackson, who helped to save William H. and Ida M. Haskell, and twelve others from drowning, Edgartown, MA. January 23, 1910."³ Around the edge of the medal is inscribed:

"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."

2 The Humane Society Medal for Patrick Kelly is part of the holdings of the Martha's Vineyard Museum.

3 The Carnegie Medal for Captain Levi Jackson is part of the collection at Mystic Seaport Museum, and from time to time is loaned to the Martha's Vineyard Museum. Patrick Kelly's award is part of the collection at Martha's Vineyard Museum.

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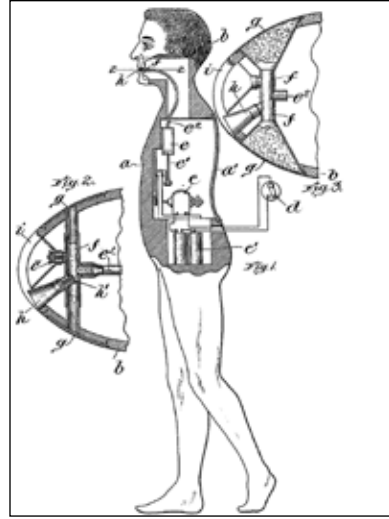
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Androids, Aeroplanes & Ears

Chronicles of Early Island Inventors

by CHRIS BAER

WHEN YOU IMAGINE nineteenth-century Martha's Vineyard, whaleships and widow's walks might come to mind; or perhaps fishermen and farmhands. Androids may not. Yet an android was patented in 1883 by an Edgartown inventor, as was an "artificial ear" in 1902, and a cigar-smoking automaton in 1904. And in 1910, an Island Broadway actor filed a patent for a one-seated "aeroplane." The Vineyard has long been home to eccentric tinkers, basement experimenters, ingenious artists, ambitious dreamers, and even corporate engineers. Here are a few stories of the Island's first patented inventors.



Elmer Bliss' 1904 cigar-smoking, humanoid "advertising device."

The Chandlers: Holmes, West, Eldridge, & Chadwick

During the late 1700s and early 1800s, the principal landing terminal and business center in Vineyard Haven was not at our familiar wharf at the bottom of Union Street, but rather an ancient pier and store at the bottom of what is now Grove Avenue (formerly "Horton's Lane") on the road to West Chop. Here is where steamers from the mainland tied up for many decades, together with whalers, mail packets, and European and Caribbean freight ships, met by ox-carts loaded with wool from up-Island and the horse-drawn stage to Edgartown. This vital wharf and ship chandlery were operated by several generations of the Holmes family, from which

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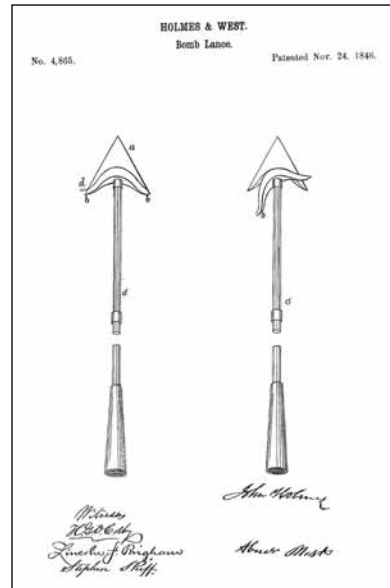
the village of Holmes Hole inherited its spelling.¹ “At this store,” according to a 1933 *Vineyard Gazette* retrospective, “a vessel captain could purchase provisions, cordage, sails, anchors and cables, and a thousand other articles necessary aboard ship. ... People from all parts of the Island came to Holmes’ store to trade farm produce, knitted woolen goods and other items for groceries.” Or as a 1926 *Gazette* article put it, “Everything necessary for the maintenance of mankind ashore or afloat could be purchased there.” A telegraph office received dispatches upstairs, a Notary’s office processed paperwork in the back, a busy repair shop mended sails in the loft, and the store itself sold cigars to the new steamer arrivals and served as a popular hangout for local men and boys.

This shop also housed the first patented inventors of Martha’s Vineyard: John Holmes, Esq., and Capt. Abner West. In 1846, while operating under the name “Holmes and West, Shipchandlers and Merchants,” they filed the Island’s first patent, #4865: a flexible whaling harpoon, thrown by hand or launched by gunpowder. Their secret weapon had a second set of barbs which rotated upon penetration into a whale to prevent withdrawal.

The 1926 *Gazette* article recalled the team:

Holmes was a humorist and loved a joke above all things, while West was an irritable man much given to profanity. When the pranks of the boys had reached a point where he could no longer endure them he would exclaim with explosive adjectives; ‘You boys leave this store or I’ll dart you half-way to the beach!’

Thirty-five-year-old West, son of the West Chop lighthouse keeper, was an experienced whaling captain who had just returned from an ocean voyage as master of the bark *Chase*. Described as a “stalwart, fearless seafaring man,” he had been employed at sea since the age of ten. Although



The Vineyard’s first patent: Holmes & West’s 1846 Bomb Lance Harpoon.

1 In the earliest records, the village was more commonly spelled “Homes Hole” or “Homses Hole.” It is believed to be derived from a Wampanoag term meaning “old man.” Holmes Hole officially changed its name to “Vineyard Haven” in 1871.

his first voyage as the young captain of the whaler *Pocahontas* ended in mutiny, he had since had a successful whaling career. But now, Captain West was settling down in a new position ashore as John Holmes' partner at the chandlery, while he prepared to be married to his fourteen-year-old fiancée Sarah, a girl from upstate New York whose father had recently committed suicide with his own policeman's pistol.

Holmes was a middle-aged, life-long merchant who also served as notary public and local insurance agent. His chandlery business was slowly losing the competition with the Union Wharf, built at the head of the harbor in 1832. He had been working on the harpoon idea for at least two years.

Like most Island inventors, Holmes' and West's invention didn't lead to fame or fortune. Although written up in *Scientific American*² magazine and heralded in some newspapers, their harpoon design was not without its flaws, and it failed as a commercial success in an industry that was in decline anyway.

Abner West's career as a Chandler was relatively short, and he returned to whaling after a five year hiatus on dry land. Holmes continued to tinker at the store, however, and two of his inventions — a method of constructing fiddles and an emergency backup anchor — also appeared in *Scientific American*, although ultimately the patents were evidently not issued. The magazine editor wrote about Holmes' anchor design, "As the inventor is a person long and intimately acquainted with the danger of a vessel being on the lee shore and dragging her anchors, it is hoped for the sake of humanity, that it will arrest the attention of the Underwriters."

In 1863 Mayhew Adams of Chilmark corrected some of the design flaws of Holmes and West's invention, and patented his own improved two-fluked harpoon with a rotating head. He was the first patented inventor from Chilmark, as well as its second — in 1868 he also patented a



Inventor Moses Adams' famous daughters, Lucy and Sarah Adams.

² This is the same magazine found on newsstands today. *Scientific American* has been in print since 1845.

self-clearing chock, to keep a whaleboat's rope from getting tangled after harpooning a whale. His brother Moses Adams, a Chilmark farmer, became a three-patent inventor as well. Better known as the father of the two famous tiny circus performers who starred in the General Tom Thumb company, Moses patented a combination lock (1869), a seed-planting machine (1869), and a belt buckle (1870).

Eventually chartmaker George Eldridge took over the Holmes ship Chandler's business, one of the longest operating businesses in Vineyard Haven history.³ Like his predecessors, he was also a patented inventor, and was issued at least four patents between 1889 and 1913, including a sound-based navigation system and a railroad rail support.

Edgartown's first patentee was William P. Chadwick, namesake of the former Chadwick Inn, whose blacksmith shop, grist mill, hardware store and cordage shop were Edgartown landmarks for more than sixty years. He patented three inventions between 1852 and 1858: one for a chimney flue, and two for shipboard blubber presses used to squeeze oil from whale scraps. Like most early Island inventions, his commercial success was limited at best; but like many, his second blubber press design earned a legal tip-of-the-hat by later inventors — in his case in a 1993 Canadian patent for a machine that crushes car oil filters to collect dirty oil.

The Carpenters' Wives

The Island's second patent was filed in 1849, #6015: a Machine for Sharpening Saws. The patentees were another odd Holmes Hole duo: Presbury Norton and Franklin D. Cottle, and they also earned mention in *Scientific American*. Curiously, both men share unusual stories involving their marriages and old age:

Cottle was a young carpenter and housewright who operated a tiny shop on a sixteen-foot-wide property on Main street, about where the tattoo parlor stands today. A year after his saw sharpening patent was filed, Cottle married Hepsa Andrews, a young widow whose first husband had died some years earlier at a tiny isle near Fiji while on a long whaling voyage. Franklin and Hepsa followed the Gold Rush to San Francisco in 1852, where he spent the rest of his life and had a very successful career as a builder and contractor. But long after Franklin's death, 97-year-old Hepsa's life took an unexpected turn when the 1906 San Francisco earthquake devastated the city and burned her house down "almost about my ears." After a brief recovery in the hospital she travelled to New York City and then by auto with her daughter and great-grandchildren to Boston. A

3 Many tales of his years in business here can be found in the book written by his four children, *The Captain's Daughters of Martha's Vineyard* (1978).

97-year-old driving nearly two hundred and fifty miles as an automobile passenger may not seem unusual today, but in a 1906 horseless carriage wobbling over turn-of-the-century country wagon trails, it was highly notable. Newspapers from the *Washington Post* (“*Women Laugh at Father Time*”) and the *New York Times* to the *Oakland Tribune* (“*One Hundred Years Old, She Races in an Auto*”) covered the event.

Cottle’s partner Norton was an elderly boatbuilder and a deacon of the Baptist church, and like his patenting partner, he too got married the following year. His third wife Eliza was forty-four years his junior, and together they had a son, Francis. But when little Francis was just four years old, Eliza died of lung disease. The 1860 census lists the 84-year-old inventor caring alone for his six-year-old son. A year later, probably on his deathbed, Norton married his 42-year-old fourth wife, Matilda, and then died of bronchitis three days later. Young Frank was raised by his new stepmother, eventually growing up to be the owner of a popular Vineyard Haven men’s clothing store.

“Cocoanut” Cakes and “Grotesque” Figures

The Island’s fourth patentee was Capt. Elisha Dexter, Holmes Hole candy maker, who was issued patent #14,857 in 1856 for a “Self-Counting Measure” which aided salesmen measuring cloth by the yard. Five years later he also patented an inexpensive, ventilated refrigerator. “It is a fact well known” he wrote, “that in order to preserve meat and various articles of food in a sweet normal state during the summer season that such articles must not be placed in an air tight box.”

According to a *Gazette* account, Capt. Dexter’s “eccentricities and sudden changes of lease, on the ocean and the land, were marked characteristics of the man, and whose exploits in whaling voyages as narrated by him in lectures were highly enjoyed by numerous audiences in the old times.” Dexter was a sea captain who was shipwrecked in the middle of the Atlantic in 1840 after a violent gale sank his brig. His book *Narrative of the Wreck and Loss of the Whaling Brig William and Joseph*, ghost-written by James Athearn Jones of West Tisbury, tells the tale of Capt. Dexter and his crew of eighteen wrecked and drifting on makeshift rafts without water or food for seven days. Fourteen survived.

The book, expanded and republished in 1848, ends:

“I am now penniless. I put every thing I had afloat, hoping to receive it all back, with large profits, for my adventure, besides something for my ‘lay.’ But I have lost it all; and with gray hairs, and a shattered constitution, I am now compelled to commence life upon the land, anew. And now, being no longer able to follow the seas, I am trying to turn even my bitter misfortunes to some account, by the sale of this ‘Narrative.’”

Dexter, at one time a Honolulu candy store owner, decided to open an ice cream “saloon” and confectionery store with his son, Ben. It was located on Spring Street and later moved to the corner of Centre Street and Main Street — where Café Moxie is being rebuilt today. “Oh! what delicious ice cream and cocoanut cakes were sold by the Dexters to us girls” wrote Mrs. Howes Norris in 1921.

Elisha Dexter’s son, Ben Dexter (or “Ben Chuck” as he is usually known), was not a patentee, but he was a unique innovator. Gratia Harrington, in her 1978 memoir *The Captain’s Daughters* recalled Ben: “He



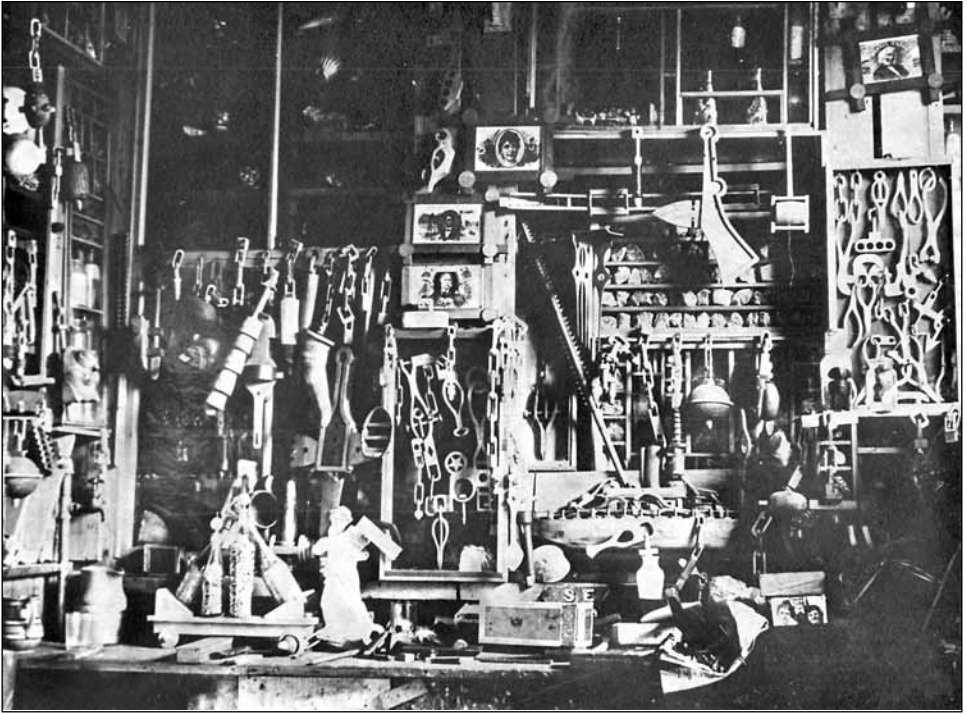
Artist and confectioner “Ben Chuck” Dexter.

was a short, thick-set man with bowed shoulders who had once been a whaler. In his youth he had scarlet fever, and it affected his speech so that only those who knew him well could understand him.” Deaf and illiterate as well, Ben nevertheless found success as a Vineyard Haven confectioner, store-owner, and artist. His ice cream saloon and “museum,” which also doubled as a billiard hall, burned to the ground in the great August 1883 fire which destroyed all of Vineyard Haven.

In a 1933 article the Gazette recalled that during the great fire,

“[Dexter] stood at the front door with his axe, keeping people away. Several boys, [George] Dean among them, ran around to the back and climbed in. They removed freezers of ice cream and some of the famous coconut cakes Ben Dexter was famous for, and served refreshments in a vacant shed to everyone who came along. ‘Anyhow,’ said Mr. Dean in narrating the incident, ‘we saved the cans, and that’s more than Ben would have done.’”

Ben was well known for his carvings of life-sized “grotesque human figures” which he placed around his shop. The *Gazette* told another story of the devastating 1883 fire: “Great was the lamentation when it was discovered that human figures were being burned in Ben Dexter’s store. They turned out to be nothing but wooden Indians made by Ben, who



Ben Dexter's Vineyard Haven workshop.

was one of the most famous jack knife experts of all time.”

His shop was quickly rebuilt. My grandfather Stan Lair was a fan of Ben Chuck's artwork. He explained:

“Ben Dexter his actual name was, Benjamin Dexter. Everyone called him ‘Ben Chuck.’ He lived in the back of the building and did all of his wood carving there.... Old Ben was famous for his crazy wood carving. Some of it still is around today — I have a few pieces here. I recall mounds of earth in the rear of that building with a full-size wooden Indian on each mound. I lived on Center Street, so I went right by there as a kid. I remember that wooden Indians out there. ... He did a lot of crazy wood carving, putting stuff through holes that seemed impossible. And no joints — and the holes were much smaller than the pieces he put through there, so it was always a mystery to people how he did it.... He built a few models, too, boat models. Pretty complicated things.”

William Peakes' Rainbow Fuel

Mr. Lair, himself an aspiring-but-unfulfilled patentee of a toilet part, remembered another eccentric local innovator, William Peakes, and his home on William Street:

“Mr. William Peakes, he operated a wood yard. He had machinery in a shed or a barn in the back that would split wood and all that sort of thing, and that was his business. He also had a patent on a type of wood he called ‘Rainbow Fuel,’ which would burn in the fireplace with pretty colors. I remember seeing him cooking that stuff. He had a great big, it looked like a - I think it was - a copper kettle, almost like a tripod as they used in the whaling days, outside of the building. He’d build a fire and put this stuff in there - whatever it was - and boil the wood in it, and pack it up in little boxes, called ‘Rainbow Fuel.’”

The “whatever it was” was a mixture of sawdust, salt, blue vitriol (copper sulfate), charcoal, sulfur, and copperas (iron sulfate) which Peakes patented in 1902 as “Artificial Fuel” to simulate the colors he often saw when burning driftwood. The powder, as patented, was sprinkled over ordinary firewood just before burning. Copper Sulfate (“blue vitriol”) it should be noted, is a poisonous compound which gives off toxic fumes when burned and irritates the skin when handled. It is particularly toxic to sea life and is today considered an environmental hazard. Peakes’ powder was simultaneously patented as a disinfectant.

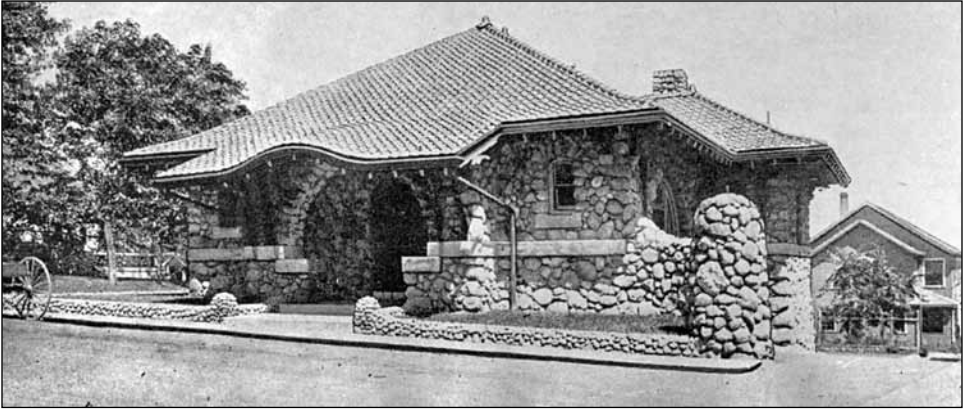
Zithers, Talking Machines and Luxemoor Leather

Of all the Island’s early inventors, John Crowell was easily the most prolific. He patented at least seventeen inventions (and possibly as many as twenty-five), including four fountain pens, a bottle opener, a socket wrench, two presses, and a fingernail cutter. A mechanical engineer and machinist, in his later life he became a civil engineer and surveyor as well, and served as Master of the Vineyard’s Masonic Lodge.

Early in his career, Crowell worked with the Blair Camera Company of Boston, manufacturer of the “Hawk-Eye Detective Camera” and a stiff competitor to Kodak in the growing amateur photography market. Crowell and Blair patented a camera in 1890 which punched notches in the roll of film with each exposure, as well as an 1891 camera shutter. The company and its patents were ultimately bought out by Eastman Kodak.

Stan Lair, Tisbury’s one-time assistant plumbing inspector, remembered his home as well:

“I recall in John Crowell’s house the stair rail going upstairs from the first to the second floor - actually the rail was part of the heating system, one of the pipes. It went right up and acted just like a regular stair rail, and it was heated of course. Keep your hands warm going upstairs or something. But John Crowell was a surveyor. Had a little Maxwell. He always wore leggings, I suppose so the bushes and stuff wouldn’t snag on his pants when he was in the woods. His helper was Lyman Vinto, a little bit of a man that was always with him and the two of them together were quite a team, going along in that old Maxwell.”



William Barry Owen's Vineyard Haven bank, at left, and the leather factory, at right.

In the 1890s Crowell began a long-time association with fellow Vineyard Haven native, lawyer William Barry Owen. Together they patented a stringed musical instrument — a zither with damper bars for producing chords — for the C. F. Zimmerman autoharp company in 1895.

Crowell continued his musical patent work — probably in connection with Owen — with his 1899 patent of an “Automatic Stop Mechanism for Sound Reproducing Machines” for Thomas S. Parvin. Parvin was the founder of the Berliner Gramophone Company, which held exclusive license in most of the United States for the patents of Emile Berliner, inventor of the phonograph. They produced gramophone records; it was the world's first record label. In 1900 the company was merged into the Victor Talking Machine Company and Parvin soon became an officer and director.

It was Owen, not Crowell, who truly profited by this connection to the gramophone business. He moved to London and became a top European salesman for Victor. From a local artist he purchased a painting of a dog with its head cocked listening to a gramophone, which became the trademark image of Victor and later of RCA. In 1903 he retired to his native town of Vineyard Haven extremely wealthy — a millionaire, by some accounts.

Owen spread his wealth quickly and broadly across the Island. He became the first year-round Island resident to own an automobile. He bought controlling interest in the Martha's Vineyard National Bank (a long-time Edgartown institution) and built a new fieldstone bank in the shape of a Greek cross, complete with separate men's and ladies' waiting rooms, as a monument to Vineyard Haven. (It angered many Edgartown residents.) He created a new park at Tashmoo's overlook.⁴ He built a farm for breeding

⁴ Owen Park, named for William Barry Owen, has a later origin; it was donated and named by his family after his death.



Luxemoor's Powerhouse. *General Electric Review* (GE's company journal) wrote an article about this outbuilding titled "A Model Small Isolated Plant." It begins: "Dreamy, picturesque Vineyard Haven! – probably the last place one would naturally expect to find an installation of man's latest and greatest development in the steam engineering line – the Curtis steam turbine."

prize-winning "fancy" poultry he imported from England, and his inventing partner Crowell patented three new poultry-related inventions: a "mash feeder," a "water feeder," and a "scratch grain-feeder."

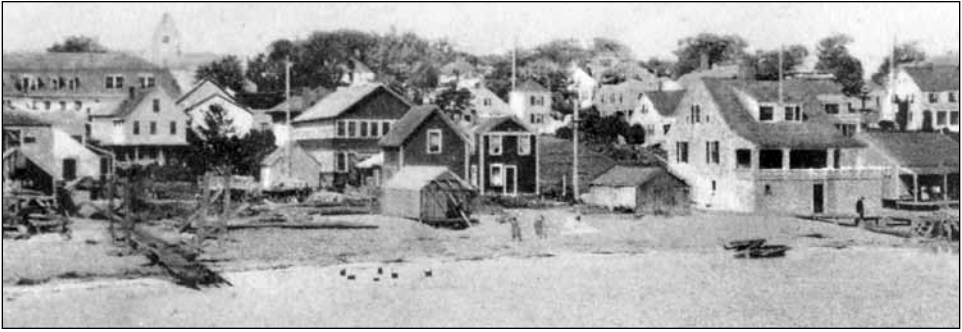
But Owen's boldest investment involved another set of patents he became involved with in 1905 which concerned a new technique for embossing leather. The patents were issued to Owen's new partner, Lynn shoemaker Fred W. Moore, but Owen secured the rights to manufacture and distribute these

decorative leather items nationally. He invested \$75,000 to build and equip a two-story, 100' by 30' factory plant behind his new bank — about where the drive-in bank stands today — with a separate building for the state-of-the-art Curtis steam turbine, and about two or three other small buildings stretching to the beach. By some reports he hired as many as seventy-five workers. "The factory is to employ every one at all acquainted with leather work" announced the *Gazette*, and they included Herbert Bradley, George Merry, John McDonough (later known for his filling station), A. H. Look, and many others. William Robinson served as treasurer and secretary for the company, and E. J. Nutter the bookkeeper. Fred Holdsworth, a recent Harvard graduate, became a travelling salesman for states east of the Mississippi. The Tisbury School's Supervisor of Drawing, Sarah Felter, became a designer at the factory. Patentee Fred Moore checked into the Mansion House to supervise.

The factory began production in the spring of 1906, manufacturing leather draperies, upholsteries, pillow covers, wall panels, book covers, ladies' slippers and belts, travelling bags, screens, table covers, gift novelties, and other ornamental leather items in every color, and distributed them to "high class stores and decorators throughout the country."

The Craftsman magazine trumpeted:

"To the lovers of fine leather work 'Luxemoor' is a revelation as an entirely new decorated leather combining exclusive artistic effects with almost unlimited possibilities for practical application. The best leather which can be bought, tanned by the most approved scientific processes, is the basis of 'Luxemoor' decorations. In general, 'Luxemoor' effects may be divided into two classes, embossed and carved. The embossed effects are obtained by cutting



View from Vineyard Haven harbor. The Luxemoor factory is visible near the center, behind some outbuildings. Tilton's lumberyard and Lane's Block are visible on the left; the Nobnocket Club and wharf are seen on the right.

the surface of the leather on the reverse side, leaving the design in relief. The embossing is thereby made permanent and the figures are more sharply defined by the use of the glazing machine. At all points on the pattern there is a greater thickness of leather than at any point on the background; the glazing will therefore bear more forcefully on the raised portions which take a high polish, resulting in a handsome two color effect. This method of embossing is wear-proof, in fact the effects are only emphasized by wear. In the carved work a two color shaded effect is produced by cutting the pattern in intaglio on the leather. The brilliant greens, reds, blues, etc., of modern tannage lend themselves admirably to this class of work, the shaded effects being a result of the different depths to which the dyes penetrate the leather during the tannage process.... The many and beautiful designs are prepared by their own artists. Customers may, however, submit their own special designs and will be protected in the exclusive use of the same for their own line of goods. 'Luxemoor' leather is a genuine article of unquestioned artistic merit combined with exclusive decorative effects which cannot be obtained elsewhere."

Vineyard Haven's new industry didn't last long. The plant closed in the autumn of 1908 - barely two and a half years after opening. The factory's spacious salesroom became a community basketball court for many years. Stan Lair recalled:

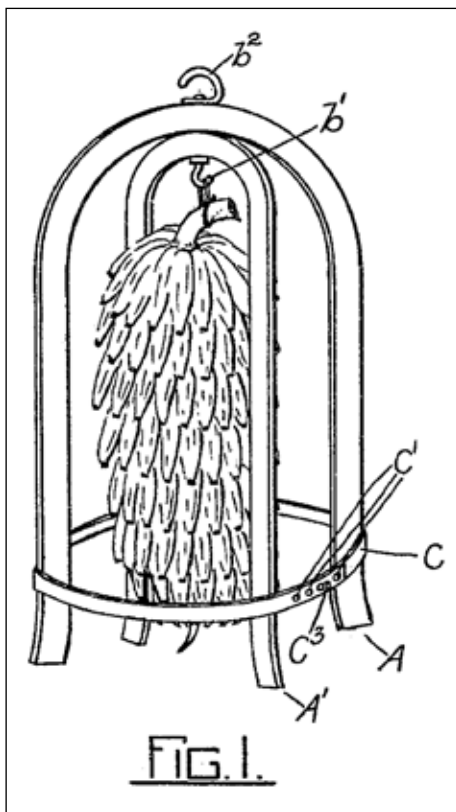
"We used to play basketball in this building, a good many years ago. It's none too good a place to play basketball, but we had to play there. The timbers ran right across the hall and we had to shoot the ball over them, and on each end there was like chicken wire, to protect the spectators from getting hurt, but it didn't help the players much 'cause plenty of them were hurt on that chicken wire - cut fingers and so forth. Also on the second floor was a Customs Office, operated by Howes Norris."

In 1923 the Luxemoor building was moved to Five Corners, where it stands today, housing the Tropical Restaurant and other businesses.⁵ One of the Luxemoor outbuildings was moved and rebuilt as John Conroy's fish market. The building containing the boiler and engine room was the only one left behind; this small fieldstone building can still be found where it was built, nearly forgotten at the bottom of the hill behind the bank.

Fred Moore took his patents and what was left of the company, moved the Luxemoor offices to Manhattan, and established a new manufacturing plant in Newark, New Jersey. Although the new plant was nearly destroyed by a fire in 1912, the Luxemoor company existed until at least 1914, and Fred Moore and his wife continued to summer on the Vineyard until their deaths.

Albert Look's Banana Carrier

Patentee Albert Look was a butcher and grocer for what later became SBS, the Vineyard Haven grocery which still operates today as a gardening and pet supply store. His family had owned and operated a very successful meat business since the Civil War. Every week his father John Look would go to Brighton to buy ten or twelve big steers, bring



Albert Look's 1908 banana carrier.

them to New Bedford, load them onto a steamer to Vineyard Haven, and finally drive them to their Lambert's Cove farm. As the Gazette recalled in a 1932 article, "It took several men to manage them and prevent them from dodging up the various village streets as they left Vineyard Haven." Their slaughterhouse provided meat to the entire Island, and even shipped surplus to the mainland. The Look's meat business eventually became the grocery store of Look, Washburn & Company, and then Look, Smith &

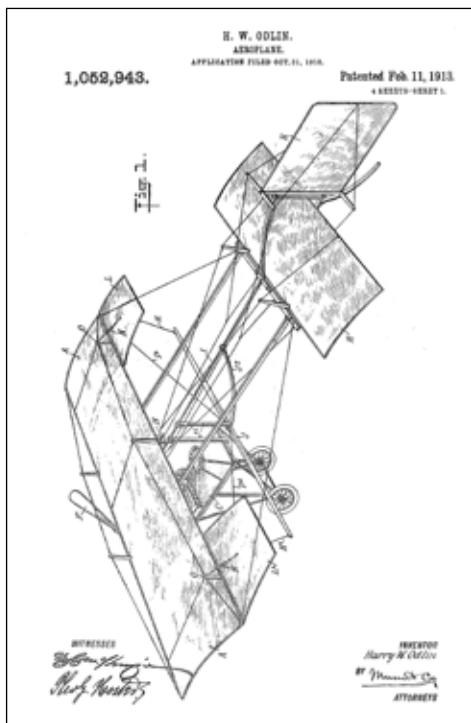
⁵ The Dukes County Garage used it for many years as a Buick and Chevrolet showroom, and the second floor was leased to the Navy during World War II to house personnel.

Company. In 1908 Look filed a patent for a “new and useful Banana-Carrier” to accommodate the insatiable American appetite for the imported tropical fruit. His device “can be conveniently handled and transported, will protect the bananas from being bruised, broken or otherwise injured, and which can be folded to small compass when not in use,” he wrote. He died less than six months after his patent was issued, and his grocery merged with Bodfish & Call’s grocery and the Swift Brothers’ grocery to become SBS — “Smith, Bodfish and Swift.”

The Ear, the Aeroplane, & the Android

John Holmes (fiddle patentee), John Crowell (gramophone patentee) and William Barry Owen (autoharp patentee) were not the Island’s only musical inventors. Another early musician-inventor was German immigrant Ulrich Kleiner, a Brookline piano teacher who filed his patent for an “Artificial Ear-Drum” while summering in Cottage City in 1902. He described a tiny cone of cotton, silk, and wax which fitted inside the ear; he claimed it successfully treated the hearing of those with injured eardrums, and that it did so without irritation. Another musician-inventor was summer resident Julian W. Vose of Edgartown, owner of Vose and Sons Piano Company of Boston, which had been founded by his father. A talented piano designer, in 1907 Vose patented a “Piano-Key Base” - a flexible, slotted frame below the piano’s keys designed to keep the piano in tune through swings in temperature and humidity.

Patentee Harry W. Odlin of Edgartown was a professional performer as well, although not a musician. A career actor, he shared the stage for nearly two decades with one of the most famous comedians of the American theater, Joseph Jefferson. Odlin and his wife, actress Jessie Sweet, toured the country as part of the Joseph Jefferson Company, with Odlin playing the role of “Seth” for more than a dozen years in the stage adaptation of Washington Irving’s “Rip Van Winkle.” His career also included a 22-night performance of the hot-air-balloon comedy, “The Aero Club” starring Lulu Glaser, at the 1700-seat Criterion Theatre on Broadway in 1907. But his ca-



Actor Harry Odlin's 1913 Aeroplane.

reer took a strange detour in 1910 when he filed a patent from his Edgartown home for a “new and improved aeroplane, arranged to automatically maintain its equilibrium and thus prevent capsizing in heavy winds.” He shared the rights of his patent with his partner (and probably financial backer), Frank Burke Jr., New York City soap manufacturer. Burke was the son of the millionaire founder of the Manhattan Soap Company, best known for its very popular “SweetHeart Soap.”⁶ It’s doubtful whether this soap-financed, actor-designed vessel ever left the ground. Odlin patented one later invention in 1919, a carburetor for the Stromberg Motor Devices Company of Chicago, mass-producer of carburetors for boats, tractors, automobiles, and airplanes.



C. H. Shute & Son's photography wagon, on a visit to Nantucket.

Yet another musician-inventor was Richard G. Shute of Edgartown. A snare drummer in the Civil War, he was discharged with a pension after a belly wound ended his infantry service, and he returned to the Island to join his father in the photography studio he had opened above his dry goods store on lower Main Street. His father Charles Shute, a Nantucket native, was a musician-inventor himself; he was the leader of Edgartown’s town band as well as the Island’s seventh patentee. He was issued patent #46503 in 1865 for a “Rotary Photographic Plate Holder” which allowed six images to be separately exposed on the same glass film plate.

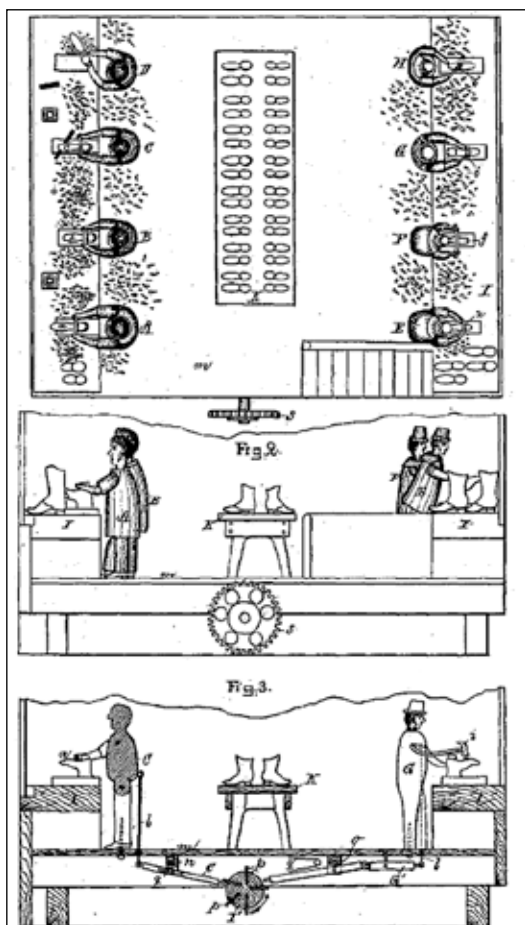
Like his father, Richard had broad interests outside of photography. In 1883 he filed patent #284338 with the U.S. Patent Office for a set of eight miniature “android” shoemakers. “Android” was a very unusual term

6 Manhattan Soap was eventually bought by Purex which was later acquired by Dial.

in the nineteenth century, and referred to an automated humanoid toy. Shute's "Androides or Automaton Shoe-Factory" consisted of eight tiny factory workers with moving arms and bodies who labored over shoes at their benches, buffing tiny soles and swinging miniature hammers when the spring was wound. In 1885, he also patented a bicycle bell.

Just down the street from the site of Shute's studio, the Edgartown Yacht Club was built with money made in actual women's shoes by the inventor who brought the first automobile to the Island: Elmer Bliss. Said to be a look-alike of President Harrison, Bliss founded the Regal Shoe Company, a major ladies shoe manufacturer based in Boston with four massive factories and a chain of international shoe stores. He continued to summer in his childhood home of Edgartown, and justifiably caused a stir in 1900 when he drove through town in a steam-powered "locomobile" which he had brought down from Boston. He patented seven inventions between 1904 and 1912: six related to manufacturing, selling, and advertising shoes, and one for a life-size mechanical cigar-smoking mannequin. With his shoe fortunes, Bliss purchased Osborne Wharf, revived the yacht club, funded and built the clubhouse, and served as its Commodore.⁷

Innovation certainly hasn't stopped on the Island. According to the USPTO, in the last twenty years some sixty patents have been issued to Island residents. Recent in-

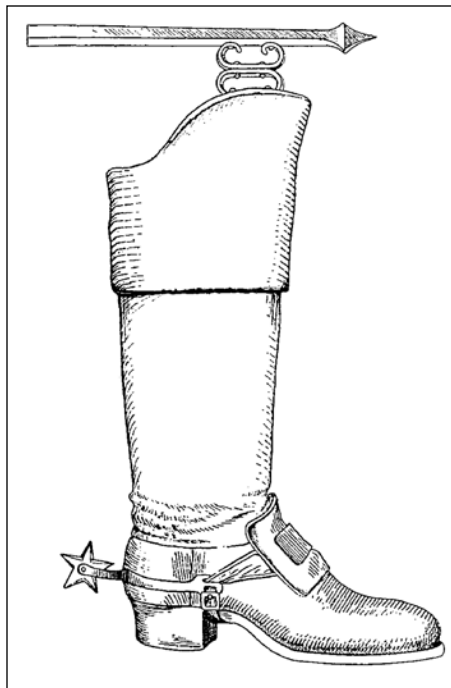


Richard G. Shute's 1883 Androids.

⁷ Harold H. Mills, the Governor of the Vineyard Haven Yacht Club at about the same time, is said to have invented GravyMaster in the 1930s and became president of GravyMaster Co. His original formula was a liquid sugar used to make rock candy on a string. Stan Lair remembered, "Looked like a lot of large white buttons spaced about a half inch apart on the string. I think it was used principally in the barrooms for some kind of drinks."

ventions include a shopping list holder, a toy smoke-ring gun, a diaphragm for clearing toilet obstructions, a roller blade braking system, pacemaker software, a piano key balancing system, a three-part modular automobile, and a spring-tipped cane.

To learn more about these inventions and many more, such as #637,889, an 1899 pencil-holder invented by the Island's first female inventor Linette Parker; or Theodore Strater's 1909 picture puzzle frame (#932,512); or Samuel King's 1882 windmill (#257,496); or William Mayhew's 1871 folding settee (#115,010): visit the complete online archive of US patents at <http://www.uspto.gov/> or <http://patents.google.com>.



Elmer Bliss' 1908 street sign.

Student History Essays:

A Special Section

ONE OF THE PRIVILEGES of being the editor of the Dukes County Intelligencer is to be able to encourage article submission from a wide variety of writers, about a wide variety of topics. To that end, being able to include student work in these pages is not only a way to encourage young people to discover the rich heritage of their Vineyard roots, but to enlighten our audience with new perspectives and new areas of Island history. The following three articles are the work of ninth-grade Honors English students at the Martha's Vineyard Regional High School. All three writers not only utilized the resources available here at the Museum, but added to the body of knowledge by using resources elsewhere, i.e., being children of the New Millennium, they used the Internet. Bear in mind that these pieces are the work of ninth-graders, and be prepared to enjoy this collection of stories.

— Ed.

Medicine on Martha's Vineyard

by CARTER D'ANGELO

THE ADVANCEMENT of medicine on Martha's Vineyard has now reached farther than ever before with the construction of the new state-of-the-art hospital that opened in June 2010. This multi-level, efficient new hospital is a symbol for how far Martha's Vineyard has come medically since the earliest days of habitation.

Medicine on the Island began, far before colonization by European settlers, with the Wampanoag medicine man. Most early medicine was centered around religion, but many herbal concoctions were actually successful at curing minor maladies. Unfortunately, once English settlers came to the Island, they brought diseases that the Wampanoag people were incapable of curing and acutely susceptible to.

Although the Wampanoag tribe knew little about medicine, the settlers who came here knew only a little more. However, they knew how to use what little knowledge they possessed to manipulate the indigenous people



From the Museum collection, an early medicine chest.

into converting to Christianity. The Mayhews convinced a small group of Wampanoags to convert, and told the rest that God would punish them for their lack of faith. Just weeks later a deadly plague struck the Island and many Wampanoag people died. Those who had converted, however, escaped unscathed. This prompted many more to convert under the assumption that God had saved those who believed in him.

There is very little recorded about hospitals and medicine

before the 19th century. This is most likely due to the fact that things like medicine and hospitals had little to do with life on the Vineyard at that time. Martha's Vineyard escaped many of the diseases that hit the rest of the nation hard because of how secluded it was from the rest of the world. But this also meant that when disease did strike, people, including doctors, often had little idea of what to do. Doctors themselves were scarce and "the practice of medicine in the Island's early history is said to be carried out for the most part by the clergy, midwives, and even lawyers."

The first recorded organized hospital was in 1776 after a smallpox outbreak on the Island. The disease was the most serious and deadly in Edgartown. By the end of the summer of 1776 it was so serious that it became the main debate of the town meeting set for September first. Whether or not a temporary hospital should be set up to treat smallpox victims was put to vote. On Sept. 9 the vote was tallied and the plan for a makeshift hospital was supported hugely. Not only was the hospital arranged, but it thrived and was kept long after the bout with smallpox was won. In the next several years a couple more of these thrown-together hospitals sprang up, along with quite a few self proclaimed doctors.

By the end of 1779 the better part of the community was sick of it, claiming they had more hospitals and doctors than an island with a population as small as Martha's Vineyard would ever need. On top of that, residents were paying taxes for the "services" of these doctors and medical centers when most preferred to treat themselves, and when one did call upon a doctor they had to pay for every visit. The final straw came in the form of Dr. Samuel Williams who was accused of not properly treating patients and, in one case, poisoning a woman. These accusations were

never proven, but they forced the community to reevaluate the situation. A town meeting was called to discuss the fact that “the hospital on Cape Pogue and others have become contrary to their original intention.” This vote was close, but the final result was to shut down the hospitals and to appoint a subcommittee to designate doctors for the Island.



Not all of Martha's Vineyard's great medical achievements happened in the orderly halls of a hospital or even in the safety and security of the home. Many happened in big, rickety boats crashing through immense seas. Whaling was an important part of Martha's Vineyard economy. Though accidents and illness were common, they were surprisingly less common than on merchant vessels. This can most likely be accounted for by the fact that whale ships were legally required to dock every five to six months. It was never recorded that a doctor ever stayed aboard a whale ship for an entire voyage. However, doctors were often taken aboard whaling ships for days to weeks at a time if a crewman had a specific ailment or to vaccinate the entire crew for smallpox. With no doctor aboard, captains doubled as doctors and surgeons. Often they just worked to ensure they could keep the individual healthy enough, long enough, in order to get moribund patients professional attention. Very early whaling ships had no medical supplies at all. Later on nearly every captain had a very thorough and organized medicine chest. Along with the chest, captains usually had information booklets about medicine, which informed them on how to deal with anything from seasickness to amputations, and a meticulously kept captain's log, containing records of all illnesses and accidents aboard their ship. The captain's logs, however, did not record the treatment of the ailments or even if it was successful, so as a result it is impossible to say how often these remedies actually worked.

The size and contents of the medicine chest depended on the length of the voyage and the wealth of the vessel's sponsorship. Because they had to treat everything from the most common flu to rare diseases picked up at foreign ports, many “chests” had over 50 types of medicine and even more supplies. Everything from mild poisons to rhubarb and olive oil, to opium was included in most medicine chests. Each medicinal jar was labeled with a number to tell them apart and instructions on how to use them. People often used the number as opposed to the name. This way inexperienced seamen could use them easily and each treatment could be carried out flawlessly. Unfortunately, it was not uncommon that a jar used for some common ailment would run out, and when this situation occurred captains would often mix the contents of two other jars that added up to the missing one. For instance, if jar 10 was used to cure a cough, and so ran out quickly, they would mix the contents of jars 4 and 6 or 3 and 7,

and expect the same result.

At that time, and especially in the conditions of a whaling ship, very few of the methods used had a high percentage of success. It was common that little or nothing could be done. Without the technology and recent medical discoveries that we enjoy today, people were often not only unable to be cured, but unable to be diagnosed. Captain Joseph Whiteside died suddenly and mysteriously after many years of minor sicknesses. The cause is still a mystery. Even more deaths were result of accidents related to whaling, or other exploits. As a result, medical treatment consisted of a lot of quick thinking and improvisation.

Many seemingly average voyages ended in miraculous medical adventures. After several typical months at sea Captain West, along with officers Mckenna, Bodfish, Leavitt, and Cook took their large crew ashore to a deserted harbor. Captain West went off with a small hunting party in search of fresh meat. Meanwhile, Cook was left to help set up the camp. He picked up a gun from where it lay on the ground and as he brought it towards himself, it went off suddenly, going through his left arm. There was a mutual decision among the captains that amputation was the only option. West, however, feared that the operation would kill him. Cook told West "You may die if we operate. You will certainly die if we do not." West finally agreed. They had all read and studied about the amputation process but no one had ever performed it. But with makeshift medical equipment, they were able to successfully amputate his arm and staunch the bleeding enough to get him to a safe harbor.



In 1816, *Every Man His Own Doctor* was printed and included information on the treatment of all types of maladies, and those plants that could be used medicinally. The major thing about this book that sets it apart from medical books today, is that, intermingled with cures for rashes and fevers, were instructions for household chores such as dying yarn, making glass and killing vermin. For this reason, it not only became particularly popular on the Island, but exemplified the state of medicine on Martha's Vineyard at that time, where medicine was ranked in importance next to ridding your house of rats. This was also one of the first books that focused largely on veterinary medicine, an important concept for the large percentage of Vineyarders who worked on farms.

The first true practitioner of medicine in Tisbury was Thomas West. After him, all three of his sons followed in his footsteps. Dr Benjamin Trask came to the Island from Sandwich in 1800. He was quickly followed by Dr. Rufus Spalding who opposed Dr. Trask in every matter, including religion, politics, and medical technique. Their rivalry continued until Spalding's sudden death in 1812.



The Marine Hospital was built on a hilltop overlooking the Lagoon, on what was then the outskirts of Vineyard Haven.

Dr. John Pierce was a prominent doctor for almost half a century, from 1836-1879. He was born in Lebanon, Connecticut, on November 25, 1805. His primary education was in Monmouth, Maine, and he graduated from Bowdoin Medical School in 1833. He worked a few years in Maine, but quickly gave that up and moved to Edgartown. He worked as a war surgeon for the US Marine Society out of Holmes Hole. By 1840 he was a member of the Massachusetts Medical Society and he worked as Dukes County Medical Examiner from the establishment of the position to his death in 1885. He was an extremely valued member of the community as well as a skilled physician, a Mason and a Methodist officer.

By 1850, five physicians lived in Tisbury: George N. Hall from Baltimore; Moses Brown from Kensington, New Hampshire; Ralph K. James, a young man from Stockbridge; and Nathaniel and Charles Ruggles, a father and son from Rochester. In Tisbury (and what is now West Tisbury) doctors were scarce in the early 1860s. Doctors themselves had very little medical experience, if they had any at all. One who stood out during that era was Dr. George T. Hughes who was best known for his generosity and dedication. He advertised in the *Vineyard Gazette* that he “will be pleased to attend to all calls, day or night.”

Three years after this advertisement was printed, his wife died suddenly. Hughes was overcome by grief, and he left the Island. But he could not leave medicine behind and he became a surgeon in the Civil War.

When the Civil War ended many doctors returned to the Island along with some from other places who wanted to settle in a small town after the horrors of war. As a result there were 26 doctors on the Island by 1896, eight of them in Vineyard Haven. This was a rather large excess of medical personnel considering that by 1900 the Island population was only 4,560. Due to the unnecessary number of doctors, those who were less popular or less experienced began to branch off into other forms of medicine, such as veterinary.



One of the biggest differences in doctors in the mid-1800s is the development of obstetrics. Up until the 1860s midwives were the norm when it came to birthing assistance. Women used the assistance of a female friend or midwife and nothing more. But as medicine became more advanced doctors started being called if an emergency arose during the birth or in the case of a particularly wealthy woman who wished to have a flawless birth. Midwives became much less common and valued.

One pioneering obstetrician was Dr. Winthrop Butler. A true Island man, he was born in Holmes Hole in 1838 to Martha and Matthew, a fisherman. He attended Dukes County Academy, a tiny school not far from his house. At 21 he began to practice medicine with nothing more than a primary education and nothing close to a medical background. But at age 23 patriotism called and he joined the Navy during the Civil War. By 1862 he declared himself a doctor and worked as a surgical assistant in the war. He took a short leave of war to marry Adelaide Howland, a childhood friend with whom he had kept in correspondence during the War. After a short honeymoon he returned to war where he saw it out till the final victory.

Of 549 babies Dr. Butler delivered, 36 were stillborn. That was 10 times the normal rate, although this was most likely because Dr. Winthrop Butler was called only for emergencies as most women felt more comfortable being assisted only by their closest female friends. This was understandable because while a normal doctor's visit was about a dollar, which at the time was equal to a day's income to a working man, there was a ten dollar fee for obstetrics. Because telephones were not available on the Island till the late 1880s, and even then they were rare and used mostly by police officials, by the time Butler got there he was often too late to assist with the birth. Along with the 36 stillborn, nine babies died within a couple days of their birth due to infections from unsanitary birthing conditions. Pregnant women received almost no prenatal care. They were expected to continue work and live their lives normally right up till labor.

Dr. Winthrop Butler, like many doctors back then, was very orthodox and religious. He kept a meticulous diary of his opinions as well as his medical exploits. Often he would calculate the distance between the mar-

riage of a young couple and the birth of their first child and record his many suspicions. Sometimes he even refused to deliver a baby if he believed its conception was “unholy.”

Dr. Leroy M. Yale was a distinguished doctor who broke every rule set in place by those before him. At age 29 he graduated from Harvard Medical School, and through his thorough diary entries spanning 1829 to 1849, we get a peek at the true life of an American doctor in the 1800s. Few other works can give anyone such an insight on not only the medicine of the times but ideals on life, politics, religion, and what people expected from the future. He worked mostly out of Holmes Hole. It was well known that he took a personal interest in all patients and so he was called into service shockingly often for a time when doctors were only considered necessary in extreme cases. But there were also periods of time when he was barely needed and worked little. His methods were new and radical, but the way he often jumped to a conclusion based on sharp visual observations and patient complaints only was sometimes described as medieval. For example, although the stethoscope was invented at that time, he refused to use one. However, an incredible percentage of his patients were cured. He was left in shock and despair every time he lost a patient. “This is the first death of this disease which I have witnessed in my own practice — a time of 3 and a half years and I have treated several cases.” Dr. Yale writes after his two-year-old patient Charlotte Downs died after fighting croup for three days.

As with many good men, Dr. Yale’s kindness was his undoing. In 1849 he boarded a vessel of sick Irish immigrants whom no one else would take care of. Aboard the ship he contracted typhus which killed him two weeks later, leaving behind his wife Maria. On his way to be buried, a gathering of friends and patients stopped the march and insisted the casket be opened so they could say a last good bye to the beloved doctor.



Medicine and health have hugely impacted life on the Vineyard. But is it possible that life on the Vineyard had an impact on the health of its residents? George Washington Eldridge was not only the main advocate for the Island’s health benefits, but also living proof of his own beliefs. Eldridge was born in Chatham in 1844. His grandfather was a fisherman and his father was a minor local celebrity known as “Chart George.” He gained his nickname and legacy from creating a chart titled “The Vineyard Sound and Nantucket Shoals” followed by thirteen similar charts that were often used by fishermen in the area.

As a young man G.W. Eldridge worked at sea, but when he injured his leg in a sporting accident this seemed impossible. He became a business man and sold schooners around the Massachusetts coast. He saw Mar-



From the MVM collections, early surgical instruments used at the Marine Hospital.

tha's Vineyard as nothing more than a business opportunity. However, after just years of living on the Vineyard his leg, that doctors had declared hopeless, began to heal. He had seen many doctors and all had claimed he would never walk properly again, but in a matter of years Eldridge was almost completely healed. He was from then on convinced that Martha's Vineyard was a place of medical

miracles and he would devote the rest of his life to spreading the benefits of living on the Island. "I owe my life, as it were, to the healthful atmosphere of the Island."

As far fetched and presumptuous as his theory may seem, it had a large basis in reality and he was not alone in believing so. He and others believed the climate to be ideal because its temperature varied less than the rest of New England. Also, many strongly believed in the healing powers of the ocean currents, and that swimming in them regularly helped heal wounds and injuries. Drinking the fresh water of Tashmoo was said to have monstrous health benefits. Furthermore, there was substantial evidence toward the argument. Very few of the epidemics that were currently hitting the rest of the country even reached the Vineyard. There was no diphtheria, and malaria was uncommon. The Island was praised as the "Gem of the Atlantic" because of its medicinal potential. In the fourteen years Eldridge lived on the Island he recorded only six deaths of people between the ages of five and fifteen. This was remarkably few for a time when children were greatly prone to sickness, even when accounting for the minute population of the Island. But more so, Eldridge recommended the Vineyard to those with mental illnesses or nervous disorders.

Eldridge was his own personal advertiser for Martha's Vineyard as a health resort. He was often known to claim that, "In looking here no one will be disappointed." He himself lived out this belief to the fullest, refusing to raise his family anywhere but the Island. In 1889 he produced a booklet called *Martha's Vineyard: Its History and Advantages as a Health and Summer Resort*. It was the closest thing to a travel guide to the Vineyard that there was at the time. He greatly emphasized the significance of

the air, describing it as “mild and balmy air and cool breezes, fresh from the domain of Neptune.”



Last November (2009) Martha's Vineyard Hospital received one of the most prestigious awards attainable in the field of medicine: the Summit Award. Every year at the Press Ganey National Client Conference, awards are given to different hospitals across the nation as a reward for excellence in the field of customer satisfaction. In these medical Oscars no award is more valued than the Summit award. The winning hospitals must be in the 95 percentile for three consecutive years in order to be considered and only six hospitals in the country receive this honor. Martha's Vineyard won the award for its emergency department services. For the past several years every MVH patient has received a survey in order to determine how their customer services can be improved. Tim Walsh, President and CEO of Martha's Vineyard Hospital, recalls the hospital's goals set back in 2002:

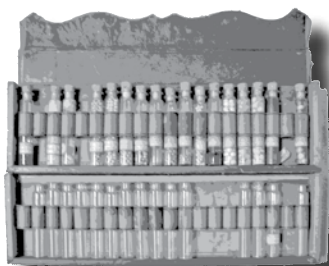
We were going to commit ourselves to being one of the best rural hospitals anywhere. That pursuit of excellence is a never-ending process here, and continually reviewing the quality of our care is an important part of being the best we can be.

After years of dedication, their hard work has finally been revealed to the public. Mr. Walsh concluded that the hospital is truly gratified to have been given the award but they won't be “resting on our laurels” and they plan to work just as hard as ever in the pursuit of excellence.

Nothing shows the change that Martha's Vineyard has gone through more thoroughly than the evolution of medicine. The doctors of the Vineyard, throughout history were made up of the very substance, the gumption and charisma, that Islanders still pride themselves with today. From tribal grounds, to rickety ships, to makeshift hospitals, to pristine hallways medicine is sewn into everything the Island is and has ever been.

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Main Street, Vineyard Haven

by DANA JACOBS

AS ONE OF SIX towns on Martha's Vineyard, Tisbury has had a fair share of its own history, heartbreak and growth. It's made an impact on the Island and the people who live here today. It's known as a place of social bustle and the hub of a major tourist destination. Until the late 1850s, Vineyard Haven, or Holmes Hole as it was then, consisted mostly of houses, a few shops and its most important feature — the harbor. After the Civil War, the whaling industry began to decline and the small town of Vineyard Haven was forced to turn to another revenue source. It was during the years following the Civil War that Vineyard Haven's Main Street built the foundation upon which the Island thrives today — tourism.



This single place on Martha's Vineyard has been known by three different names: Tisbury, Vineyard Haven, and Holmes Hole. Even before that, the Wampanoags were the first to give the area now called Vineyard Haven a name, 'Nobnocket,' in the Algonquin tongue. Before being incorporated as Tisbury, this mainstay town was known as Holmes Hole by its first European settlers around 1646. Holmes Hole it was until 1871, although nothing about the name was official — "The name of Holmes Hole is not mentioned in the town records from 1673 to 1737, nor is there any reference to it indirectly." The town was officially named Tisbury in 1783 for "The English Parish of governor Thomas Mayhew at the New York conference..." The first time 'Tisbury' is found in the town records, [it is] referred to as "that tract of Land Called Holmes hole." Tisbury encompassed what is now known as West Tisbury and Tisbury. The current name, Vineyard Haven, actually only applies to one section of the town, but is often used in place of 'Tisbury.' The name Vineyard Haven also advertises the safe harbor that is the central focus of the town and a trusted port for the numerous visitors that arrive by sea. No matter what one may happen to call the town of Tisbury, Islanders and visitors alike all know one thing for sure, this little town has evolved through the years, while staying faithful to one thing — the harbor.

In terms of town importance, Edgartown definitely held its place at the top for many years because of the whaling industry. A significant transition occurred around the late 1850s, when the Civil War delivered a severe blow to the whaling industry. With Edgartown's decline, Vineyard Haven became

the commercial center of Martha's Vineyard. The harbor was the main attraction, and was growing with maritime traffic — by the 19th century, over 200 boats could be found in Vineyard Haven's harbor at any one time.



One of the lasting impacts on old Vineyard Haven and Main Street was the “Great Fire of 1883.” August 11, 1883, was a day to be remembered. The fire started in the Crocker Harness Shop, though every building from Main Street to Beach Street burned to a crisp under the southward winds.

“All the picturesque little stores that had grown along its margin and the great trees under whose sheltering shade they nestled went down before the onslaught.”

The fire killed no one — quite surprising considering the devastating damage that was done to the village. That night, townspeople had gathered in Oak Bluffs for Illumination Night, which is somewhat ironic as their village burned. The news spread quickly as a man announced to the crowd: “Fire!”

In total, 32 houses, 26 stores, and 14 barns were destroyed. In addition, the very first public library on the Island burned, a building owned by Dr. Rufus Spalding.

One Islander recalled the fire and its devastation: “...fifty seven buildings were destroyed, many of them dwellings with their accumulations of personal belongings that mean so much to the owner and so little to the insurance adjuster.”

Rebuilding began immediately for the small village, but the fire had thoroughly “cut out the heart of [the] beautiful village”

Spurred on by the fire and the lack of adequate fire-fighting methods, O.G. Stanley founded the Vineyard Haven Water Company in 1887. Investors in the money-making opportunity included some of Mr. Stanley's “wealthy friends in Boston.”

Some of the investors included well known names such as Peabody, Weld and Forbes. Together, the investors bought 30 acres of spring-fed ponds at Lake Tashmoo (called Chappaquonset Pond). On December 15, 1887, five years after the fire, Vineyard Haven celebrated the new water system in a unique and uplifting way. While the townspeople watched, firemen sprayed two columns of water on the roof of Rudolph Crocker's the new harness factory, where the fire started.



There were a number of important people in the 1800s who lived on Main Street, influencing the Island from the prime view of the harbor and town. Many of the houses were architecturally unique, boasting wealth and power on the outside and a comfortable ocean view from the inside.



Scorched earth: aftermath of the 1883 Tisbury Fire. Photo from the MVM collections.

The town was not without change, however. None of the houses on Main Street can be found today due to the devastating fire of 1883. The uniquely designed houses gone, never to be reconstructed with anything except words and memories.

“Memory turns back to the times long ago and the quaint old homes, the low-roofed houses and sanded kitchen floors and deep brick ovens that yield such delicious things to eat; the pantry door stands open and on the shelves are the pewter platters burnished like silver, the silver porringer which was brought out every night before retiring to warm the coffee, handsome lustre pitchers and dainty bits of china.”

Most houses in the 1800s were located on Main Street and Beach Street — the only two streets there in 1871. The location of the streets are, of course, the same now as then. Another prime spot for houses was on the harbor itself. The harbor and its surrounding area were known as a prestigious place to live and visit. Influential figure, Peter West, had a large and elegant home which he himself built quite close to the harbor. It was his “emblem of success” in 1796 when he was only 28 years old.

In 1851, John Merry was fortunate enough to own one of the three houses where Owen Park is now. Mr. Merry was a young mariner who moved from his house on Main Street to one block north. Others who lived on Owen Park were Mr. and Mrs. Robert Scott. They owned apartments right on the harbor, great for mariners and captains. The apartments also catered to the growing tourist business in the 1850s. The Scott’s building was built by John Hursell in the early 1800s.

“Through the years it [had] been so remodeled and rebuilt that no vestige of the old house [was] left. In the mid-19th century, it became the home of Mrs. Christaline Johnson, who kept there one of the earliest boarding houses for summer visitors.”

Also near Owen Park was a house owned by Mr. John Andresen; the structure was built between 1801 and 1805 by Benjamin Allen.

“He was a rank Tory, and not at all popular in the village. Rev. William C. Hicks, rector of the Episcopal church in the village from 1894-1898, was the last owner before Mr. Owen purchased it and moved it to its present location.”

In 1720 Mrs. Marian Warner Trotter owned the grandest house in town. It stood where the town parking lot is now, next to the Stop & Shop. The Great House, as it was called, was built by Abraham Chase.

“It was quite the grandest house, and its owner was quite the most important man in the village.”

In 1922, the structure was moved to West Chop.

Another notable house is the Alphonso Smith House which was located on the south side of Owen Park, the second house down after Main Street. It is quite unfortunate that the beautiful houses that once stood there did not survive, all destroyed by fire or hurricane. Had they survived, they would be historical landmarks, perhaps, instead of a parking lots or post offices.



If you were to live in downtown Tisbury in the 1900s, you would know some of the important landmarks. One would be the windmill. Originally, it stood on Spring Street.

“The lot is now owned by Mrs. McAdoo.... Since its original location in town over one hundred years ago, the windmill moved twice – first to Mr. Donald Tilton’s home property on Main Street, then to the current Mr. William Snow’s home property.”

The mill was owned by Mr. Tristram Luce until purchased by General Carey. Likely the tallest structure around at the time, the windmill served as both a landmark and source of power for grinding grain. Another important landmark and business was the Saltworks Company in 1804. It began with Peter West and his brother-in-law Captain Lot Luce, who bought the Chase Homestead Meadow from Abraham Chase. The lot is where the current Post Office and Memorial Park are located, stretching over a large part of the town. Mr. West and Mr. Luce formed a partnership with two more master mariners, William Worth and William Cottle. Together, they built five evaporation vats plus two storage barns at the western shore of Bass Creek.

“Salt making was one of the earliest industries of the town and was carried on until 1850. The salt was used in curing fish to be shipped to foreign



Postcard view of Main Street, Vineyard Haven, in the 1930s.

markets.... Their venture gave the name “Company Place” to that section of the expanding village...”

Peter West, a grandson of Major Peter West who fought in the French and Indian wars, was only 36 years old and was the fifth generation of Wests raised in Tisbury. West was certainly dedicated to the Island, remaining there his whole life while gaining remarkable success. Not only did West own one of the nicest houses on the harbor, but he also was involved with matters outside of the Island as well. He participated in transatlantic shipping, and the many struggles that came with the task. From 1807 to 1811, he was detained in France while Napoleon “attempted to counteract British interference with transatlantic shipping.” West was soon released and returned to Martha’s Vineyard.*



Among other important buildings on or near Main Street, the churches and town halls were largely used during the 1800s. The Grace Church Association was formed in 1882, and the cornerstone of Grace Church was laid in September of that year. There was also Capawock Hall on Church Street (called Methodist Street back then); it was built in 1833 by William Daggett Jr. This public meeting place was originally one story, but was raised to two in 1855 to accommodate a market. In 1895, the building was remodeled and became the Masonic Lodge. In 1922 it changed hands again to become the

* The embargo of the War of 1812 dealt West’s saltworks a death blow.



From the 1950s, a view of Owen Park and the harbor.

movie theatre, and is today the home of the Vineyard Players. This was one of the buildings that narrowly escaped the Great Fire of 1883.

Another public meeting place was the Proprietors Meeting House. The building was built on the northwest corner of Main and Spring Street. This building became a Baptist church in 1804. However, it did not escape the fire and burned to the ground. The burning of the Baptist Church was most unsettling for the citizens of Vineyard Haven.

“At the time of the fire, when many people were losing their property, one citizen returning to his home in another locality was asked by a neighbor what had burned. He replied: ‘All of Main Street has gone.’ ‘Oh! Mr. Smith,’ the woman exclaimed, ‘Did the Baptist church burn?’ ‘Yes,’ he answered. She began to cry and said: ‘Oh! my hymn book, my new hymn book; why did I leave it there last Sunday?’”

A devastating loss for much of the village: Vineyard Haven was not just a place of business — it was a place for the people to live, to pray, to shop. Many of the churches and halls were what brought them together, uniting them with the other townspeople. In 1885, the present Baptist church was built on the corner of Spring and William Street.



Upon walking down Main Street today, one can find a large variety of novelty shops, boutiques, and unique stores. Back in the 1900s, it would look very different. The road was first laid out in October of 1798. The Norton Family Livery Stable was then located where former Bowl & Board is today, “looking much the same as it did when horses were billeted on

the lower level and carriages displayed on the apron leading to the upper level from the street.”

The building housing Mosher Photo used to be owned by Judal Brickman, who began working as a cobbler in the building. The first movie theatre was the Capawock in 1919 which featured “Goldwyn Plays and Capitol Comedies.” It’s still operating today. According to Stan Lair in a oral history interview: “...what they called Jenkin’s Paint Shop...is now Brickman’s. The “Stone Bank,” now Bank of Martha’s Vineyard, a division of Sovereign Bank, is found next to the Green Room. The building was designed by J.W. Beals in 1905. William Barry Owen bought a major interest in Martha’s Vineyard National Bank becoming the director in June 1905. This bank was built on the lot where the Crocker Harness Factory fire started. It was built of stone to “assure safety and to symbolize the recovered town”

This shift from being a sleepy, secondary town to one focusing on tourism built an economic foundation that the Island still relies on today. What was so attractive to tourists — then as now — was the location: right on the harbor. Many visitors to the Island, find themselves strolling in Owen Park, enjoying the beautiful views of the harbor and its come-and-go activities. Not only does the park present a lovely open view to the harbor, it gives people access to the beach. “[It] portrays the changing character of the harbor and the community over the course of time, both by the vistas it allows and by what is no longer there.”

Though the times and trends have changed, many of the same building structures and the spirit of the town remains. The evidence of our ancestors and history is clearly written in the foundation of our town. The same salty, Island air is still being blown in from the harbor and the warm Island vibe still beats in the heart of our town, Main Street.

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Polly Hill's Arboretum

by CLARE BOLAND

POLLY HILL WAS a horticulturist who learned from trial and error. Her experiment with plants, beginning at the age of fifty, turned into what is today the Polly Hill Arboretum located on Martha's Vineyard. Polly was modest; she never really thought she was remarkable, but she leaves behind a legacy, a plant collection holding over 2,000 species, and around thirteen awards for her achievements. She tested the boundaries of plant hardiness by gathering seeds from around the world and growing them so they could thrive in climates much colder than where they were originally grown. Polly's plant introductions are now grown in gardens all around the world. More than anything, Polly was an observer. She encouraged people to see the beauty in the world around them: "Study your land. Study what is natural here. Walk around the fields. Walk in the Woods. Walk along the beaches. Walk everywhere. Study what you see."



Mary Louise "Polly" Butcher was born on January 30, 1907, in Ardmore, Pennsylvania. Both of her parents shared a love of trees. Her father was Howard Butcher, Jr., a senior partner of a brokerage firm in Pennsylvania. Her mother was Margaret Butcher. Mrs. Butcher was described as "a short feisty woman with consuming energy." The six-acre property where she lived while growing up was chosen by her parents for the twenty-six large chestnut trees in the front. Though the chestnut trees died from chestnut blight soon after the property was bought, the property was still bursting with plant life. Every spring the dogwoods would bloom, and Polly and her mother would go up on the roof to get a better view of the trees; looking up from the ground just didn't do the trees justice.

Polly was named Mary Louise Butcher, but was soon nicknamed Polly by her family for being "... such a terrible Pollyanna." Polly said that growing up, "I was such a stuff-budget. But I did have a sense of humor about myself."

Though Polly grew up in Pennsylvania, she spent her summers on Martha's Vineyard. Originally, the family stayed at the Cedars in West Chop, until Mrs. Butcher was told by a friend she played bridge with that a sheep farm had gone up for sale in West Tisbury. The old farm had forty acres of woods and fields lined by old stone walls. The property also held five old buildings that were falling apart. The family bought the property in 1926. The land



Polly Hill at the wheel of her golf cart at the arboretum. Photo by Linsey Lee.

had not been used in over thirty years. It had a dug out water pump, out-houses, and no electricity — electricity hadn't even reached up-Island yet.

Polly's mother took on the task of modernizing the old farm and quickly got to work. She enjoyed taking the dilapidated houses and making them into pleasing, comfortable environments. As for the farmland, Mrs. Butcher planted some trees, bushes and shrubs, but after she was done planting she wouldn't give them a second thought. "She just planted them and walked away. That is *not* the way it's done," Polly said later of her mother's growing tactics, and with a successful garden to her name.

In 1928 Polly graduated from Vassar College, where she majored in music. After graduation, a friend persuaded her to move to Japan, and she began teaching English and Physical Education at an all-girls school in Tokyo. Though Polly spoke no Japanese she still described it as a difficult, but excellent, experience. Polly's students loved her. Girls in Japan never had much fun. After a year spent observing the roles of men and women in Japan, Polly came back to America, thinking "... American woman were the most spoiled and American men were the most wonderful." One thing Polly enjoyed about Japan was the plants. In her year there she learned *ike-bana*, the art of Japanese flower arrangement, a skill she went on to teach in later life. She maintained a fondness for Japanese culture, especially the people and the plants, for the rest of her life.



In 1931 Polly Butcher met Julian Hill. Julian was a chemist who was hired straight out of M.I.T by the DuPont Company. Polly and Julian shared a love of music. Julian was passionate about violin as a hobby, and Polly played the piano. Some of the couple's earliest dates were duets, though Polly says that she wasn't fast enough to keep up with Julian's violin. By 1932 they were engaged. Once married, they moved to Wilmington, Delaware, and began to raise a family. They had three children: a daughter, Louisa, and two sons, Joseph and Jefferson.

When in Delaware Polly began to become increasingly fascinated with plants. She spent much time at Longwood Gardens in Pennsylvania and at the Winterthur Gardens in Wilmington, Delaware. Before long she was able to combine her new interest in plants with her longstanding interest in Japan. It was a tradition in the Hill family that when one turns thirteen he or she gets to go on a trip of their choice. The youngest, Jefferson, choose Asia. Polly



Polly's Play Pen, fenced against hungry deer.

began planning a trip to Japan; it would be her first time back in over twenty-five years. Because she spent so much time at Longwood Gardens, she asked if there was anything she could do for Russell Siebert, the Garden's director, while she was in Japan. It turned out there was something she could do. Longwood had received a letter from a Japanese Physician, Dr. Rokujo, requesting that they come see a very special *psilotum*, a rare fernlike plant. Though Polly knew nothing of *psilotum* at the time, she wrote back telling Dr. Rokujo that she would come see the plant for Longwood. After their meeting in Japan they stayed in touch. Dr. Rokujo became a big influence in Polly's career as an amateur horticulturist. The two exchanged seeds for many years to come.

After her trip to Japan, Polly began studying botany at the University of Delaware. Polly was not taking the classes for credit. She said she did it, "So that I could understand and use the language of plants."



Polly and her family still returned to the Vineyard every summer. Over the years her mother had fixed the farm up into the perfect summer home. When both her parents died the farm was left to Polly, and she was left to decide what to do with the land:

I was doing too many things as they occurred. To what end? Many women resonate to 50: and then what? ... I was awed by both Longwood Gardens and Winterthur and the possibilities and each. I opted to live for plants.

So, at fifty years old, Polly decided to change her life, proving that you're never too old to start over. In 1958 she plowed up a spot of land and began experimenting with plants. One thing Polly was known for was her detailed plant records. Everything she planted could be traced back to a file. Some plants were sent to the dead file, and the ones that survived were reviewed with daily, weekly and monthly descriptions. Polly took the time to individually look after each one of her plants. Polly cared for a rare Rhododendron plant for over twenty-nine years before it bloomed.

You've just made a nice place for a plant to achieve. You know? It's just like a baby. You just care for it, you love it, and you push it on. You find out whether it's interesting in something, whether it's good at something, and you promote it. You don't have to envision it as a grown man.

Polly began to set goals for herself. One of her first ambitions was to replace the pines on the Vineyard, which were dying. She believed that evergreen trees were needed by Martha's Vineyard residents to be used as windbreaks. Even though her first try died within twelve years, this did not discourage her. She kept on experimenting. Polly used a variety of Japanese black pine, *Pinus thunbergii*. Though the pines were usually grown in a much colder climate Polly proved they could thrive on Martha's Vineyard.

After the pines Polly began propagating more plants that were originally grown in warmer climates to see if they would thrive in the harsher New England climate. She would sow lots of seed and see what would survive — a kind of "survival of the fittest." For example, Polly grew *Araucaria araucana* tree (known as monkey puzzle tree), a tree with pointy leaves, native to Chile and Argentina. She also grew camellias (native to Asia), hybrid azaleas (native to Japan), and broad-leaf magnolias (native to southern U.S.A.). All these plants were from warmer climates, and Polly discovered they would survive through the cold New England winters.

Polly introduced many plants to the world of gardening, such as mul-

multiple cultivars of dogwoods, stewartias, and magnolias. Polly would often name plants for the location where she found the plant from which she collected seed. Other names were descriptive, like the stewartia selection Sky Rocket, named because “it just went shooting up.” But most of the time Polly named the plants after family members. For example, her azalea cultivars are named after her children. Polly named two plants after her husband. She named the kousa dogwood, Julian. The second plant is the big-leaf magnolia (*Magnolia macrophylla*), named Julian Hill, and was planted in 1961. The plant, traditionally southern, now thrives on the Vineyard with blooms that are eighteen inches wide. Polly says of her plant names, “The children got excited about it [the garden], especially as the new plants were named after them. They’d bring their friends to see ‘their’ plants.” Polly introduced over 83 plants with distinctive characteristics, some you can even find at your local nursery, like the Michael Hill rhododendron.

Polly loved sharing her plants. She sent out her seeds to other horticulturists and received seeds from others around the world. Not only did she continue to obtain seeds from Dr. Rokujo in Japan, she also got seeds from the American Horticulture Society, the Arnold Arboretum (in Boston), the Morris Arboretum (in Philadelphia), Longwood Gardens, the Chollipo Arboretum (in Korea), and many other societies and private gardens. She loved to show off her garden to visitors and talk to them about plants. With her love of sharing plants, when the opportunity arose to make her private garden a public garden Polly was very enthusiastic.



The offer to make the garden public was made by Dr. David H. Smith. The two met through the Vineyard Conservation Society. Polly offered to show him around her gardens, and Dr. Smith was so impressed with her collections he later made an offer to purchase the property to preserve it. And henceforth the Polly Hill Arboretum (PHA) was created; a not-for-profit organization dedicated to keeping Polly’s legacy alive. Stephen Spongberg, a longtime contact of Polly’s, became the first PHA executive director, and in 1998 the visitor center was built. In 2001 Polly commented on her garden becoming public:

I rejoice in the future of the Arboretum and all my plants growing there. They are in the best hands. I consider its future to be whatever this splendid group on the board of management can make of it. The number of growing visitors young and old is proof that something important is being done. People come, children are being educated. You have no idea how much input from people writing me from Delaware.¹

1 “Glancing Back and Looking Forward: An Informal Interview With Polly Hill”

Polly continued to receive great feedback from visitors. They raved about their favorite plants. Some of the visitor's favorites include the conifer rows, or my personal favorite, the dogwood allée which blooms out in white flowers in the summer then changes into bright red berries with the fall. Some love the vividly colored azaleas, or the Arbor, also called the "tunnel of love," named because Polly grew the trees so that they would intertwine, making a beautiful tunnel. The Julian Hill Magnolia is also a sight to see when it blooms into giant white flowers in the summer, with its leaves which are as big as most people's forearms.

One of the biggest attractions of the PHA is Polly's Play Pen. The Play Pen is a 35 by 300 foot fenced in area with gates at either end. This is where Polly kept her special plants, which needed to be protected from harmful rabbits and deer. The inside holds camellias, azaleas, rhododendrons, dwarf conifers, hollies, and many other evergreens, making it a vibrant green sanctuary. What other visitors enjoy most is just coming to relax and walk around in the beautiful environment.

As Polly grew older she still came back every summer to see her plants, staying active in the PHA all the way until age 100. The PHA continues to grow and preserve Polly's legacy. In 2001 Polly said of the future of the Arboretum, "Yes, it is going in the right direction. It needs land, a greenhouse, and an educational laboratory. Ask each volunteer. They are making it happen. Ask the staff ... Good people bring good things."

Today the Arboretum is continuing to meet Polly's goals. On January 30, 2007, Polly Hill's 100th birthday, the PHA officially opened their new greenhouse, nicknamed the "Polly House." In the greenhouse they're continuing to propagate plants obtained from recent collection trips from Japan, Alabama, and other southern states. According to Tim Boland, Executive Director, since 2004, and former curator of the PHA, "Other goals of PHA include continuing to bring educators in horticulture, botany, and garden interest topics for the summer lecture series, and building a horticultural library."

Polly Hill died on April 25, 2007, and the age of 100 in her home in Hockessin, Delaware. But the PHA still carries out her legacy today:

Her legacy is a strong one of experimental horticulture and power of keen observation and determination. Our mission through our various programs follows through her footsteps to connect people with the beauty and mystery of plants and their natural habitats and how we should protect them ... The Arboretum begins a new growth phase with a recently developed five-year plan that extends her inspirational message in our local community, our region and nationally. - Tim Boland.

Polly Hill was an inspiration to not only gardeners, but also anyone who wants to take a chance and turn their life in a new direction. What



The Julian Hill magnolia is named after Polly Hill's husband.

started as just a little experiment is now a not-for-profit public garden, historical site, educational institution, as well as a beautiful landscape for all to enjoy. “The love of the land caused me to do it,” Polly said. “There is an enduring bond between people and plants and the land. I wanted to keep it and protect it and make it look right. The second generation will see what I started.” Polly’s words ring true as today the PHA is open to the public and continues to educate a new generation about her legacy and the magnificence of plants.

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FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Following in the footsteps of the late Ann Allen (see below), the Museum has opened these pages to welcome the papers of students assigned to research Island history.

This is the second edition featuring student work and we are hopeful that this new tradition will become a fixture in the growing collaboration between the Museum and the Martha's Vineyard Public Schools. One of the objectives of the Museum is to strengthen our relationship with the schools, to have a more active participation in curriculum development, and to be a greater resource for all grades and subjects. The Museum's collections are an unparalleled asset to scholars of all ages and educational levels, and we especially enjoy having the youngest scholars delve into our archives. Indeed, I am here partly because of a formative experience I had with a painting in a museum while I was in junior high school in western Massachusetts.

Students benefit by understanding how their Island connects to the greater world. The Museum benefits by being a partner in the excitement of their discoveries.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "D. Nathans".

David Nathans

IN MEMORIAM ANN COLEMAN ALLEN 1934 –2010

Ann Coleman Allen served as Librarian and Archivist of the Martha's Vineyard Historical Society (now MVM) from 1988 until 1993. During her years with the Museum she worked to share her passion for Vineyard history. Through the Regional High School Historical Essay Contest, which called for "research to be done to a significant degree in the Gale Huntington Library," she encouraged many high school students to find the excitement of exploring Island history using the resources of the Museum archives. The contest became a part of the American Heritage curriculum at the High School. When Ann left the Museum, she worked with high school juniors on the Community History Project, "CHiP," researching local history. She also taught a popular course on Island history to adults. She will be remembered for her passion for collecting Vineyard history.

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(See Open Door for Description)

STANLEY G. H. FITCH
TREASURER

Kindly mention *The Craftsman*

This advertisement for Luxemoor leather products, produced in Vineyard Haven, appeared in the 1905 edition of *The Craftsman*. Wrote the magazine: "Luxemoor' leather is a genuine article of unquestioned artistic merit combined with exclusive decorative effects which cannot be obtained elsewhere." (See story, page 15)