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THE PASSING OF AN ERA ON THE VINEYARD
BY JOSEPH B. ELVIN

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Your gift or bequests will be deeply appreciated and should be made to the "Dukes County Historical Society, Inc." All such contributions are deductible under Federal Income Tax Law.

SOCIETY NEWS

Our president, Mrs. George Reid is recovering from her recent illness. She hopes soon to be supervising the care of her herb and old fashioned flower gardens on the Society's grounds.

Seventeen enthusiastic students and their teacher from the Stockbridge School recently spent an afternoon in the Museum Building and on the grounds.

Bishop and Mrs. Lewis B. Whittemore have presented the Society with three old account books kept by Thomas Barrows and his brother, who ran a general store on Main Street in Holmes Hole in the 1830's. Thomas Barrows was Bishop Whittemore's great grandfather.

Mason Mayhew is making prints from the Society's collection of glass negatives of the late 1800's, and uncovering some pictures of very real historic interest in the process.

Stuart Avery has given the Society a decoy black duck carved and polished by the late Keyes Chadwick. And it is a beauty.

The curio room in the Cooke House is being painted and repapered. The paper shows an attractive small yellow and white patterned print.

G.H.

THE PASSING OF AN ERA ON THE VINEYARD

The following item from the Vineyard Gazette, under the date line May 5, 1871, was shown to me by Capt. Norman G. Benson of Lambert's Cove on an occasion when we were talking about the days when trap fishing was at its height in the region around the Vineyard.

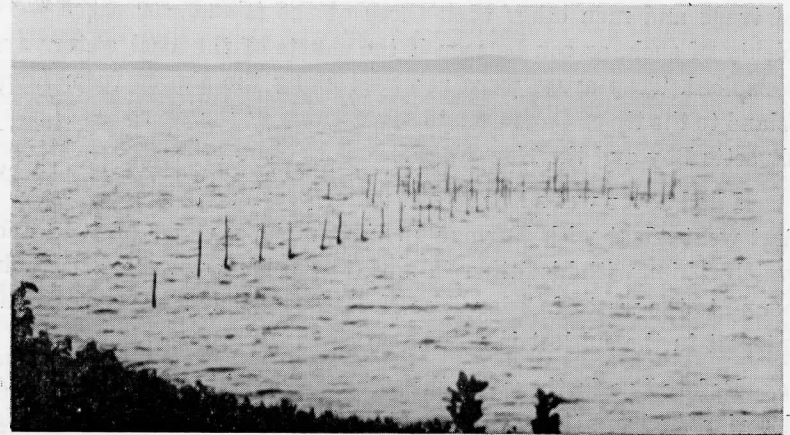
"The pounds of the North Shore are pounding the life out of every poor fish which comes within reach of their insatiable maws. Since their introduction along the coast the sight of scup, tautog and blackfish in our harbor is as rare as silver and gold money. The pounds have been to these poor fish what the white men have been to the aborigines of the soil of this country. Their hunting grounds have been invaded and 'Lo', the poor scup is no more."

In the light of the evidence of the tons of scup that have been landed at Sam Cahoon's from the trap at Quisset in the years since the above item was shown to me, as well as the full fares of that same fish brought in by the draggers to Woods Hole and New Bedford, there seems to have been something wrong with the calculations of the writer of the ancient lines. The bulk of the fish now goes to the port of New Bedford since the business at Woods Hole has been curtailed following the death of Sam Cahoon, Sr.

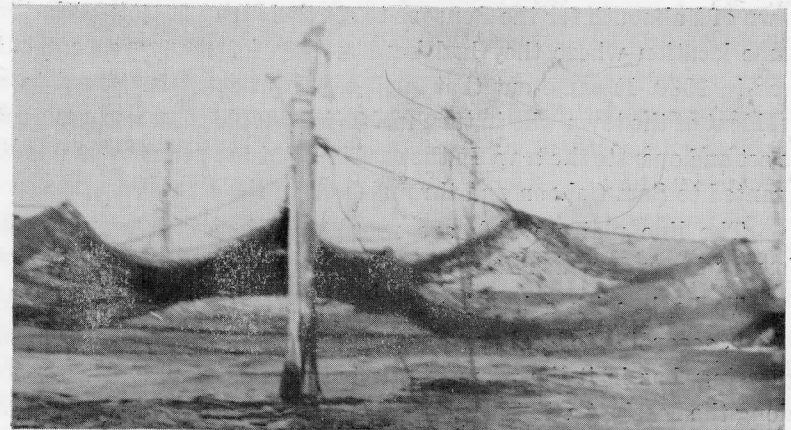
The Benson trap at Quisset is the last of the traps south of the Cape and is subsidized by the Oceanographic Institute at Woods Hole for the taking of fish for scientific purposes.

However, the item, plus my own part-time experience around the traps for many summers, aroused my interest. As a result I have thumbed through my files for old negatives and into the memories of such men as Norman Benson, Donald Poole and others for information to go along with the pictures and cuts which are reproduced here.

If I have missed some of the names of Vineyard pound fishermen and some of the trap locations I am sorry, but there seems to be



Trap at Lambert's Cove
Naushon in the distance



The trap at Quisset
Up on the stakes for drying

no written record available. Also, I regret that there is no mention of traps and men other than those of the island, for there were plenty of such, as can be seen if the charts of the local waters are consulted. Trap areas were reserved along the shores from Long Island to the tip of Cape Cod, to say nothing of the shores of Massachusetts Bay and the New England coast clear to Eastport, Maine.

I had never wet a line in salt water previous to the day when I first went afloat with Norman Benson in the summer of 1919 and watched him, with his father-in-law, George Hervey Luce, haul their pound to the west of Cedar Tree Neck. From that trip my personal interest in the subject is dated.

Before I go further with the story of the fishing it seems best to describe the traps themselves and the circumstances governing their location and setting.

For the benefit of those who are unfamiliar with such things, the law requires that a fisherman shall apply for a permit from the authorities of the town off whose shores the trap is to be set. My interest in this phase came about when a permit was refused by the town of Falmouth for the Bensons to set their trap at Quisset in the same location where they had been setting for many years. That was in 1960. It came out that such a permit must be issued to a resident of the town who in turn makes it possible for a non-resident to set and operate the trap. In the case in point the permit was finally granted to Sam Cahoon and through him to the Bensons.

The line plates which are reproduced herewith show three forms of pounds which have been used along Vineyard shores.

To begin with a location in relation to the shore is selected which, according to local practice, tradition, experience, or just good guessing, has in it the promise of plenty of fish running in shoals along the beach at a distance offshore sufficient to hit the leader and so be caused to turn offshore, as fish always do when they meet an obstruction, and be guided along the leader into the hearts and thence into the body of the trap. It will be necessary for the reader to spend a little time looking over the cuts to become familiar with the names of the parts of a trap.

Given the permit and the location, the first problem of the fisherman was to find thirty or forty oak trees about ten inches through the butt and tall enough to yield stakes from thirty-five to fifty feet long, which could be cut for spiles.

In a day when permission to roam through another man's woodlot, select suitable, straight trees, cut them and get them out, was freely granted, or at least easy to come by if some sort of barter could be arranged, this problem did not present too great a difficulty. After this the spiles, stakes if you prefer, or poles, according to the local usage, had to be barked, the big ends pointed with an axe, holes bored for the various lines that would later be rove through them and the whole given a coat of creosote. Stakes are driven with the big end down and the first hole is bored four feet above the point for the downhaul, which is the line that hauls the net to the bottom of the stake when the trap is set for fishing.

A considerable piece of labor was the getting of the sets of stakes onto the beach and the reeving of the lines after the other parts of the process were finished.

The driving of the stakes and the setting of the traps was usually calculated to coincide with the blooming of the wild pear even as the shad fishermen of the rivers got their gear together for the coming into bloom of the shad bush, which is one and the same shrub. It was the time when the early run of herring and scup was to be expected. The scow was rigged and made ready for towing to the site of the trap. There is no need to go into detail concerning a scow rigged for driving spiles for they are a common sight in most harbors. There was a difference in the older rigs. Some did not have gasoline engines to run the hoisting rig for getting the stakes into the gallows and for operating the pestle. In some of the old rigs the pestle was raised by a group of men heaving on the line. The timing of such a method must have been a matter involving a lot of practice. Another method was to pump the stakes down by means of a pipe triced to the stake with its outlet at the bottom of the stake. A stream of water was pumped through the pipe and it washed the mud away from the foot of the stake and so settled it into place. Some of the

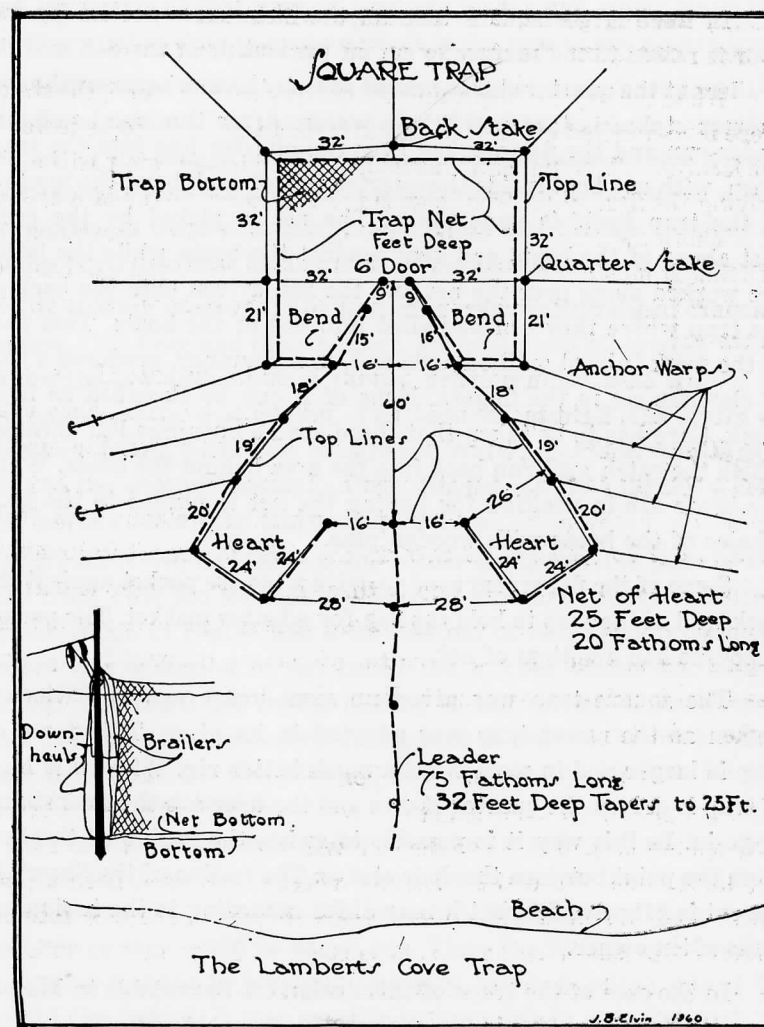
pumps were large hand force-pumps which were worked by two or more men after the manner of the ancient fire pumps.

When the day for beginning the driving came around, the stakes were man-handled off the beach and lashed into rafts to be towed to the location. Then the scow was launched and towed into position for driving the first stake. The scow is positioned by means of a system of anchors the warps of which may be lengthened or shortened for shifting from stake to stake. Usually the first stake to be driven for a square trap was the stake in the middle of the back which is shown in the cut.

With the scow in position a stake is pulled up into the gallows by means of a light tackle and pulled into place by hand. This is an operation requiring plenty of human effort. One of the photos shows this part of the operation with Norman Benson working the stake into position. Next a "weejie," which is a clamp with forks to run on the gallows, is clamped to the stake to keep it in line with the pestle which may weigh up to three hundred pounds. A mark is made on the stake four feet above the water line and the driving begins. From then on it is a matter of thump, thump, thump until the stake is driven to the mark. Then they do it over again for each stake in the trap.

All this is relatively simple when the crew is blessed with a flat calm but spring weather is not always accommodating and a breeze may spring up and a swash develop which makes the work hard if not impossible. When this happens, what might have been a good day's work, seeing up to a dozen stakes driven, is changed into one wherein the fishermen have to be content with one or two followed by the towing back of the scow into harbor and the run home, with the hope that tomorrow will bring better weather.

The stakes are driven in order according to the established pattern for the type of trap being driven. One method of driving a square trap (follow the drawing) is to start with the back stake and then to drive one side. The operation is repeated for the other side. Next, the door is driven, with its stakes in line with the quarter stakes. Next the hearts are driven and then the leader.



The sketch of the stake, in the line plate, shows a hole at the bottom for the downhaul, another half way up for a line to bring the net to the stake and a third at the top for securing the net. There is one downhaul at each trap stake and certain other stakes in hearts and leader. There are brailers at each stake for raising the net to the surface when hauling the trap to take out the fish.

In hauling the square trap all the downhauls are let go, the door is raised to the surface to cut off the escape of the fish and the brailers at the quarter stakes hauled so that the line between the two quarter stakes is taut and at top water. After this the bends are under-run and the fish worked over the quarter line into the trap. Then, with one boat inside the quarter line of each bend the hauling of the trap itself is undertaken. The net is picked by the crew just ahead of the boats and kept against the boats while the latter are worked along over the net and the fish driven onto the back of the trap where they can be bailed into one of the boats. This part of the work is hard on the hands and, in a beginner, produces a sort of clawlike set to the fingers. None of it can be classified as light work. Care has to be taken that there are no openings left through which the catch may run back into the area behind the boats. When the boats are in position for bailing the net is pinned to the gun-
whales of the boats with wooden pins.

Some of the fishermen used to drive a square pocket against the back wall of the trap to hold the fish for a better market. The pocket of course had a bottom of net.

The square trap was given up some years ago and what is known as the round trap was adopted in its place. This form of trap is larger and in most ways a much better rig. When this kind of trap is driven the quarter stakes and the door are the first stakes to go in. In this way it is possible to swing the radius of the bow from the point between the door stakes. The radius of the "bow" in the cut is fifty-five feet but it may differ according to the individual ideas of the owner.

In the case of the traps of this design off Barnstable in Massachusetts Bay the radius is greater and the door wide enough to allow a good sized power boat to be brought inside the trap and the fish bailed into the boat with a bull net. The latter is a dip net holding about three bushels and is handled with a gaff and winch. The net is dumped by giving a solid yank to a line which puckers the bottom of the net. The latter is known as the "cod line" and it allows the bottom of the net to open and release the fish. The cut illustrates the fact

that the hearts of this form of trap are longer and wider while the bends are not so deep in proportion as in the case of the square trap.

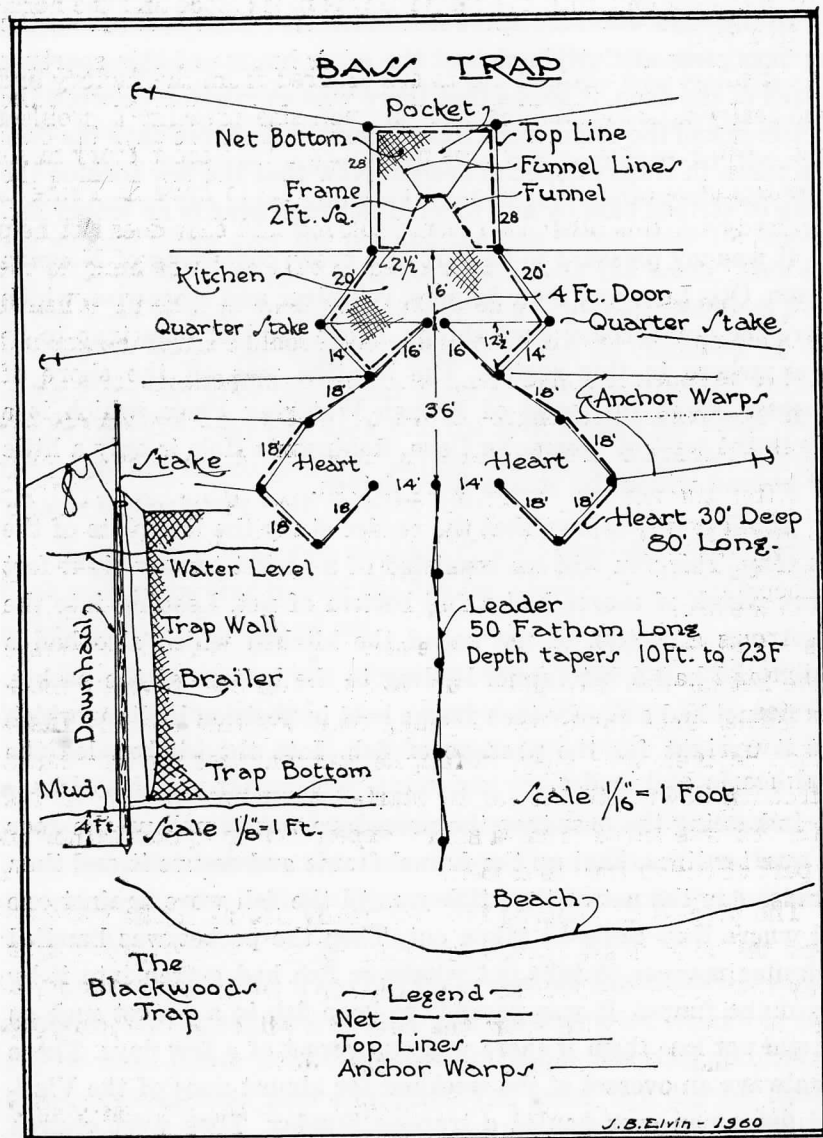
In the days when the sport fishermen cast their lures from the long bass piers at Cuttyhunk and the other haunts of this sporting denizen of the deep, it seems that there was no friction between the sportsmen and the commercial bass fishermen. In those days the bass were taken in traps of special design. Now that the law forbids the taking of striped bass by any form of net such gear is no longer set.

It was my pleasure to be part of a crew, consisting of Norman Benson, Otis Luce and their helpers, volunteer and otherwise, which before the law forbade such things, drove the last bass trap to be set anywhere in this region. The location was off the shore of Naushon Island just west of French Watering Place, which is a little to the west of Tarpaulin Cove. Robinson's Hole is only a little way beyond where the stakes were driven.

Again it will be best that the reader study the line plate of the bass trap. This you will see consisted of a pocket twenty-eight feet square which of course had a full bottom of net. Leading into the pocket was a section of net called the kitchen which also had a bottom and had a net funnel leading to the bottom of the pocket. This funnel had a square iron frame held in position by lines which kept it upright for the passage of fish. Into the kitchen led the usual hearts and leader.

In hauling the bass trap the procedure was to pull up the door and quarter lines, haul up the funnel frame and secure it and then to under-run the net of the kitchen until the fish were against one wall where they could be taken out. Then the pocket was handled in similar manner to take out whatever fish had gotten into it by way of the funnel. It was possible to keep fish in a pocket such as this and not lose them if there was an overset of a few days. There was always an overset at the weekend for almost none of the Vineyard fishermen ever hauled a trap on Sunday. They were church going men with church going families.

In the matter of Sunday worship, the service in the Lambert's Cove Methodist Church was at two in the afternoon, as it always



was until 1962. Anyhow, the bell was rung before service and it was kept ringing until Obed Daggett's horse could be heard plop, plopping along and until the carriage was in its place and the horse tied to a tree.

At the present time the nets are ordered from the factory and come ready to hang. Making nets of such size presents a problem of no mean proportions and it is not unusual that the factory made net does not hang as the fishermen would like to have it. There is no remedy for this other than some cussing and that does not help much. In the past the net was ordered in bulk and was hung to the ropes by hand with the womenfolks often lending a hand. When it was made up this way the men and women could control the amount of net to be roped to a given length of line to compensate for shrinkage in the water. The lengths of net at the top and bottom are not the same but are said to be made "to hang" to such and such a size.

After the net was hung it had to be tarred before use. This was accomplished in a big kettle in the woods, in the case of the Lambert's Cove operations. The kettle can be seen now for it still sets in the brush just inside the gate to the path by which the neighbors walk to the Cove beach in the summer. The net was immersed in the hot tar and then pulled up over a drain board with a block and tackle. Once there was a young man working for the Luce-Benson partners and when, in fun, he was told that the net had to be trodden down into the tar he started to mount the rim of the kettle but was saved from a sticky experience by quick action on the part of one of the other men.

The process of hanging the nets really begins in the net field where the bundles are spread and then rolled into bundles in such a way that when the bundles are loaded into the boats to go to the trap they can be pulled from the boat and attached to the stakes smoothly and without bunching or other difficulty.

When there were traps in Lambert's Cove the net was loaded into a truck wagon in the field and drawn to the beach by either horses or oxen. Oxen were still in use by Otis Luce in 1917.

In the case of the square traps the net was made fast at the

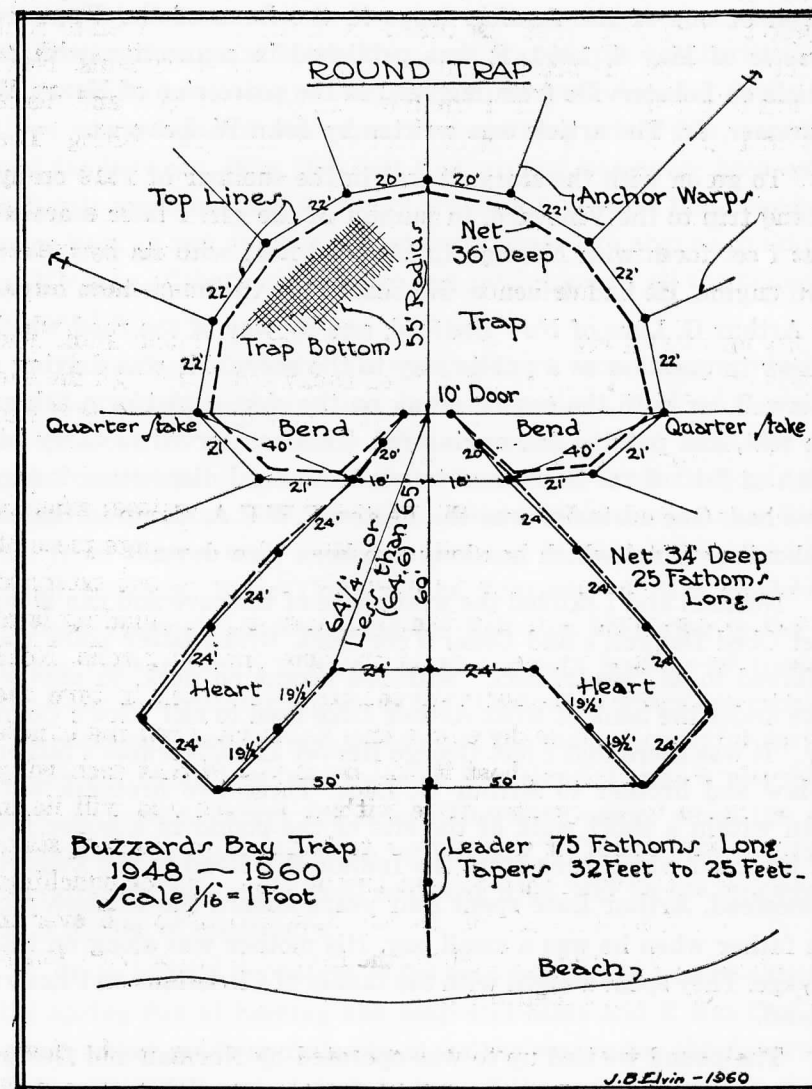
door and the boat pulled towards the back of the trap by hand on one of the lines of the trap. As the boat moved the net was payed out and pulled to the stakes and secured temporarily. When it was all out of the boat the usual procedure was to follow the top line around the trap and make fast the stops on the net and then to haul up the net with the brailers and make fast the downhauls. Next the brailers were let go and the downhauls pulled taut and made fast with the net on the bottom and in position for fishing. The brailers are on the net when it is still in the field and so are ready for the raising of the net for tying in the downhauls. The downhauls are made fast to the eyes in the bottom of the net by means of a knot which I have heard Otis Luce call a Stun-si-sheet hitch.

In this uncolorful era it goes by the name of downhaul knot. The knot is nothing but a clove hitch "tied backwards" through the eye on the net but it has the virtue of being easy to untie after it has been under water for a long time.

The bundling of the net for the round trap at Quisset when it is in the field, is a carefully planned affair for it is a huge piece of net by any standards. The big semi-circle of net lies out extended as smoothly as possible in the field. The first step in bundling is to work the two halves either side of the door into long rolls. Next the center or door is loaded onto the truck and then in turn the two wings. This must be done in such a way that when the bundle is transferred to the net boat it will be so placed that each wing can be pulled to its quarter stake without a hitch and will lie in the water in a way that will allow it to be pulled out to each stake in succession and made fast without any undue rolling or bunching. On rare occasions a bundle of net has been known to roll over in this process and there results about the hardest piece of work imaginable to get it straightened out.

After the net is in position the process of tying in the downhauls and setting the trap is about the same as for the square trap.

In addition to the stake traps, pole weirs if you like, there were floating traps which were similar in form but which were floated



on barrels and held in position by a system of anchors. James Look set one such trap off Squibnocket. Anchors were used to hold the stake traps in position as is shown in the cuts. There is a photograph of one of the floating traps in the issue of the *Vineyard Gazette* of May 6, 1960. It was published in connection with an article on Lobsterville from material in the possession of Henry M. Plummer, Jr. The article was written by John W. Leavens.

To go on with the story, it was in the summer of 1919 on my second trip to the Vineyard, in pursuit of the girl I later married, that I set forth with Norman in his yawl boat with its new Hartford engine. He had driven to the beach past the house then owned by Arthur G. Luce of New Bedford, and by way of the road which is now in question as a public way to the shore. He was driving a Maxwell car with the engine crank on the side, a platform behind the seat, and painted fire engine red. This car served to carry his catch of fish off the beach and to whatever final disposition it may have had. One customer was the Boston Y.W.C.A. Camp in the old Makonikey Hotel which has long ago been torn down.

Norman and I skirted the west shore of the cove and ran along past Obed Daggett's and Cedar Tree Neck, which latter point was referred to as "see-tri-neck" with the accent on neck, to another cove under the bank of what Arthur Luce used to call "God's Country." It was there that I met George Hervey Luce, Norman's father-in-law and brother to Arthur G. Luce. These two brothers were born within a short walk of the site of the pound in a house just off the road which runs from the Indian Hill Road to the Daggett homestead. Arthur Luce spent four years aboard the whaleship of his father when he was a small boy. His mother was along on that voyage. They spent a night with the family of Christians on Pitcairn Island.

The pound we tied up to was operated by Norman and George Hervey as partners. I was not initiated into the mysteries of the downhauls, brailers, hearts and leader to say nothing of the pound itself on that trip but never-the-less it was interesting to watch. After the trap was hauled and reset Norman ran the boat offshore

and made a number of drifts. He caught a goodly number of flounders (he was always high hook anyhow) while I do not remember whether I caught anything or not. The drifts from Cedar Tree Neck, or just west of it on the east side, carried the boat towards Makonikey to a point better than half way across Lambert's Cove. These drifts have always been favored as good flounder drifts but there was a lapse of many years when these prized fish were few and far between. Why they left that ground has never been satisfactorily explained and it is only within a few years that they have come back in any number. About forty years ago anyone could row a little way offshore in the Cove and catch himself all the flounders he could eat.

In the days of which I am writing there were six camps including the Luce house which was more pretentious, back of the beach in the Cove. It was a happy little community but it went the way of so many bits of heaven. Mont Kendrick of New Bedford, Mrs. Mary Austin from New York City, Bessie Howard and Annie Stratton from Boston way, a shack belonging to Nelson Luce and two small cottages, Briar Cottage, the property of Mrs. Sophronia Benson, Norman's mother, and the Salt Box belonging to the Alpheus Parker family. There was also a path leading off towards the Point to a building known as the "Casino" to which one repaired "on occasion," and beyond that one of the many wonderful springs which are found here and there on the island. It was a marvelous spot. It passed, except for Bessie Howard's camp, when the surrounding land was bought up by William M. Butler. Now in 1964, the property has again been sold and what will be the outcome is all a matter of conjecture.

Even in 1919 the height of the trap fishing had passed although the spring run of herring and scup still came and it was that run which either made or failed to make the season for the fishermen. This with a fall run of scup to top off the summer usually meant a good solid income from the traps.

The great shoals of squiteague, the sea trout, had dwindled by the nineteen twenties to a point where they were becoming more

or less a rarity. It was these latter fish that had been largely responsible for the setting of the great number of pounds in the waters around the Vineyard.

Still and all, the squiteague was and still is considered to be a top ranking fish and this fact reminds me of an experience that came about some years later when I was going pretty regularly with Otis Luce and Norman Benson to "help" with the work. I put the help in quotes for the simple reason that in the beginning I was possibly more of an encumbrance than a help; however, these two men were most patient and charitable towards me as they were to so many others and as Norman and Franklin Benson still are. They taught me the mysteries of the downhauls and brailers and all the rest as well as the tricks connected with putting patches into net in the field. The traps have afforded more genuine pleasure to a great number of summer visitors than perhaps any other contact they may have made with the sea. It is seldom in these days, when there is only one pound in the region, that there are not at least four visitors aboard the Judy Sue when she sets forth in the morning from Lake Tashmoo bound for Buzzards Bay.

On the occasion I started to tell about, I had agreed to stay ashore with the women folks instead of getting up and going along with Ote and Norman. When we got home from our gallivanting it was late and the cook who was my wife, did not feel the urge to undertake the preparation of a strange fish that we found tucked inside the back screen door of the Lambert's Cove Parsonage where we were spending the summer. She decided on chowder, which has forever been the reliable mainstay in so many island homes, and into the pot went the chunks of fish. As I remember, it was only a mediocre chowder for it lacked the flavor of sea bass.

The next morning, when I heard the rattle of Otis' truck wagon coming down the hill from his house, I hustled the rest of my breakfast into me, got my gear together and went out to sit on the stone wall by the parsonage and wait. There were times when this turned out to be a long session for there were days when Otis had to make a trip from his house to Seth's Pond to get a couple of

hogsheads of water to replenish a fast drying cistern in the midst of a summer dry spell. (I could comment at length on cisterns but Ote is coming along and I had better save that one.)

However, that morning the wagon rattled along and up the grade past the house, Otis sitting on a board across the low sides of the wagon with Norman beside him working on the first cigar of the day and Brett Stokes squatting in the bed of the wagon. While I climbed in over the tail of the wagon Otis asked, "How did you like the fish?" All innocence, I replied, "We had a good chowder." Otis' scorn was searing as he remarked, "You darned chump, *that* was a squiteague!" I don't think we were favored with another sea trout right away and if we were, later, it was always with the comment, "That is no chowder fish."

Speaking of getting afloat with Otis, there was a hitch. If you were not at the roadside he kept right on going and you had to walk to the shore, boots, lunch box, oilskins and all, a hard pull. Also, if you were just a little late on the shore and the boat was just afloat on its way to the Riverside, you stayed on the beach, for the fishing came first in Lambert's Cove.

In the days of good railway express service and horses, the travels of the sea trout were slower than they are today with fast truck shipment and air transport, but still the squiteague managed to range quite a distance inland, thanks to the railroads and the fish carts. Once a week the fish cart came over the dusty road past the Worcester County farm, where I spent so many summers in my boyhood, and drew up in our dooryard. To those who have never seen one, a fish cart was just an ordinary democrat wagon with a box set on its tail end. The box was usually painted white with a fighting fish depicted on its sides and it had a cover which could be lifted up to provide shade from the sun or shelter from summer showers. Inside, buried in a pile of crushed ice there was a moderate assortment of fish: cod, haddock, flounder and sea trout along with scup and sea bass. The peddlers did not use the name Squiteague.

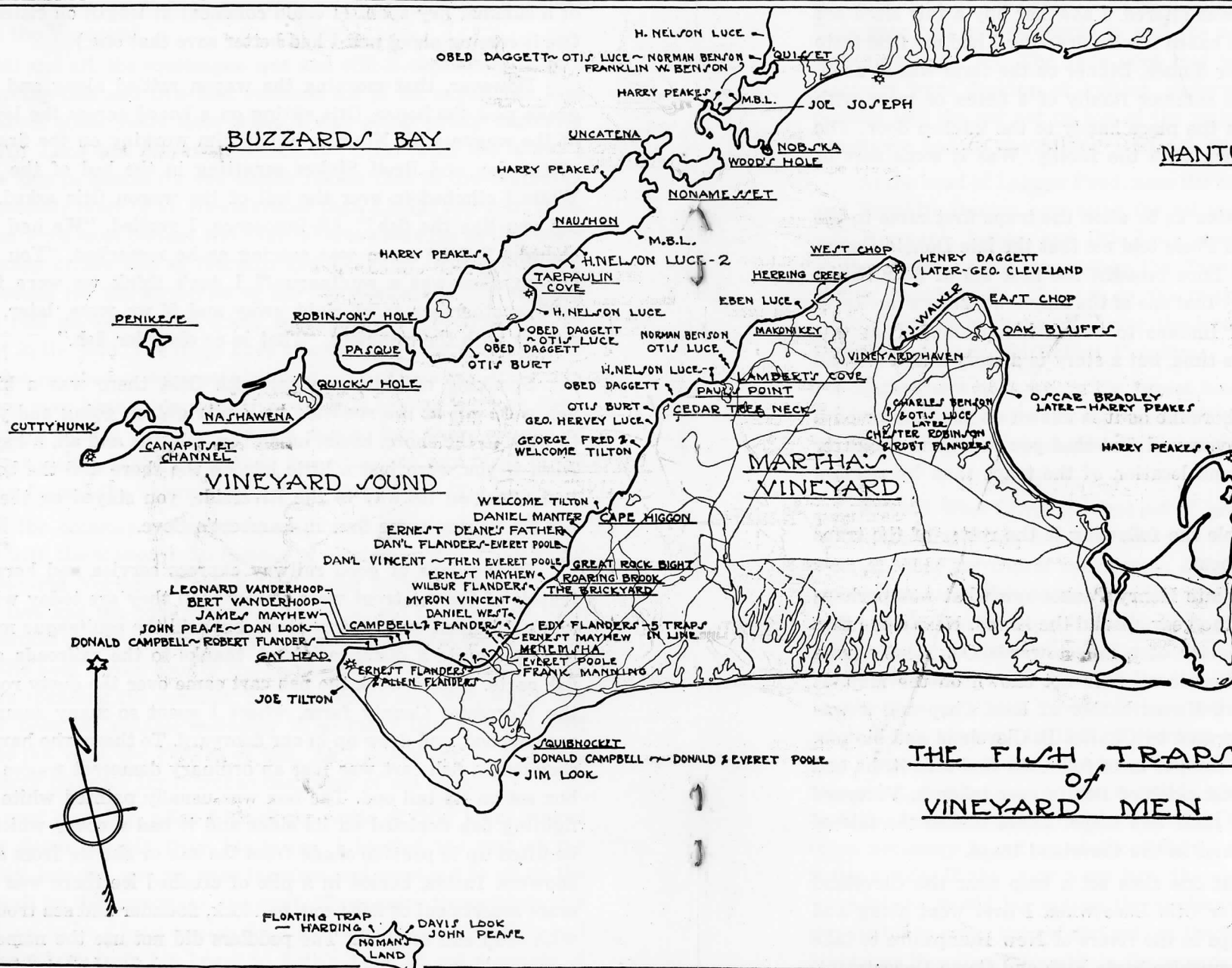
BUZZARDS BAY

NANTUCKET SOUND

VINEYARD SOUND

MARTHA'S VINEYARD

THE FISH TRAPS
of
VINEYARD MEN



J.B. Elvin - Feb. 28, 1959

I remember my Aunt Nan going out to the cart, with me tagging along to see what was offered. I saw her buy a fair sized sea trout and when later she baked it with dressing I had my first taste of this choicest of fish for dinner. Dinner on the farm was at noon. At dinner there was the summer family of a dozen or more with the hired man sitting in the place handy to the kitchen door. The hired girl never sat down with the family. Was it some sort of class distinction?

There is some question as to when the traps first came to the Vineyard shores. Donald Poole told me that the late Donald Campbell claimed that Jason Luce brought the first set of gear to the island but there is a story that one of the Mayhews, before the Revolution, hired a crew of Indians to "work his pound." That was long before Jason Luce's time, but a story is a story and it was all so long ago.

If you follow the shoreline as it is shown on the map or on a chart, if you have one, you will find that you can form a clearer picture of the number and location of the traps than by reading from a list.

As nearly as possible the following is the roster of the traps and the men who set them.

At Cape Pogue the late Henry Peakes ran what was perhaps the most easterly of all the gear around the island. Next came that of Oscar Bradley, a quarter of a mile towards Oak Bluffs from Anthiers Bridge. The next location is not shown on the map. It was just inside Vineyard Haven harbor at East Chop and it was the site of two traps operated by Charles B. Cleveland and his son, Rod, i.e. Charlie B. and Rod, to most folks. As Rod tells it, he and his father took the largest catch of Bonita ever taken in Vineyard waters, 2600 fish, from their two traps. There is also the tale of two dead men being found in the Cleveland traps.

Fred Norton also at one time set a trap near the Cleveland site. He was working for Otis Luce when I first went along and in later years he set traps in the rivers of New Hampshire to take salmon for the New Hampshire State Fish and Game Department.

At the head of Vineyard Haven harbor and near the present establishment of Carpenter and Painter was John Walker's trap. This gear had no downhauls to pull the net to the bottom of the stakes during a set. The yarn goes that when the old side wheel steamers were docking or getting underway the wash from the paddles laid the net out on top of the water. What effect this circumstance had on the fishing I do not know.

At the head of Lagoon Pond, near the causeway, where Norman and Franklin Benson now seine for eel bait, Charles Benson, who was Norman's father, and Otis Luce worked a trap for herring in the spring of the year when the "baiters" made that sort of fishing worth while. Changes in the methods of offshore fishing finally cut this business off. Later the location was taken over by Chester Robinson and Robert Flanders.

Somewhere near where the "great house" on the west side of the harbor stood, and which burned in 1958, there was a trap owned by Henry Daggett which was later bought from him by George Cleveland.

Around West Chop, the first set of gear was driven just west of the Herring Creek and was operated by Eben Luce. Then, just west of what the charts call Norton Point, and what the present generation calls Makonikey, was the first of the Lambert's Cove traps. Here, just offshore from the Look pasture, there was at one time a string of three traps belonging to Otis Luce which he later ran in partnership with Norman Benson. This was the last location in operation on all the Vineyard shore and had but one set of gear when it was given up in 1949 by Norman and Franklin Benson. It was a hard place to handle a trap. The tides run like a mill tail at this point, particularly on the east tide which made it imperative that the trap be hauled on slack water. This meant that it was often necessary to get up at about four o'clock in the morning to make a tide. If the crew were late, the net, when the downhauls were let go, would lay out on the surface and so make it almost impossible to purse the net and get out the fish. There was a process known as "hauling through" in the square traps whereby the two

small boats would be in position inside the trap on what could be called the upstream side, before the downhauls were let go. Then the net was picked up and underrun and the fish pursed against the down stream side of the pound and taken out there instead of at the back as was usual. It was a hard way to do the job. The back of the trap was preferred for the reason that the mesh of the net was smaller, which lessened the possibility of the loss of smaller fish such as tinker or spike mackerel.

Many were the summer mornings that I crawled out before the day was hardly born, to go along with the crew. Getting up always has its rewards for there is in the early morning something undefinable that makes it well worth the little loss of sleep involved.

There were always oddities to be met in the traps, sea turtles, butterfly rays (the other name is cramp fish), sting rays, sharks of one kind or another, and, occasionally, flying fish, now and then a king fish, and others.

In the middle of Lambert's Cove, in 1919, there were two strings of traps. The one more nearly in the center belonged to Otis Luce and in that string there were five traps running offshore in a line like a string of elephants in a circus. To the west of this string were two pounds in line belonging to H. Nelson Luce, Otis' brother. This large group of pounds gradually dwindled until there was only one left of the Otis Luce traps and this one was given up in the twenties.

Finally there was only the east trap at Makonikey and that was declared a menace to navigation and had to be lighted at night. What the menace was, other than poor seamanship on the part of summer sailors, I do not know. The charts show plainly the areas allotted to trap fishing and it was, up to that time, always the responsibility of the navigator to keep clear. Surely the trap could not up-stakes and leg it for shore like a skittish girl to avoid some errant vessel that came poking along too far inshore in the dark of the night.

Going along upsound again, the next pound was at Cedar Tree Neck right in Obed Daggett's front yard. Obed fished that location

as long as he was able. His trap boat was an oversized Swampscott dory with a make and break engine. That, with a towed sharpie, served to carry his fares of fish, together with two or three of his summer boarders, across the Sound to Woods Hole and Sam Cahoon's slip. If you, the reader, will study the map you will see that Obed had traps in other locations at the height of the fishing.

One summer day, after Obed had given up the fishing, he and one or two of his guests went along with Otis and Norman to make the rounds. The home trap was hauled and the run through Woods Hole into Buzzards Bay was made and the two traps at Quisset were hauled. This was a good morning's work and it was noon by the time the flotilla tied up in Sam's slip to take out the fish. While they were in the slip the weather changed and the wind picked up until, by the time they were ready to tie up to the dolphin in Lambert's Cove there was something near a hurricane blowing and a heavy swell running. Otis loaded Obed and the visitors along with two of the crew into the big sharpie and let them head for shore. The crew were Brett Stokes and Cel. Oliver and with them was Norman. Somehow they set one man ashore with instructions to get the horse and follow the boat along the beach to where the others could touch it on shore. The horse was kept on shore during the day in the old shed which used to stand near where the path to the beach comes out on the shore. A quick hitch was made by the man on shore to the bow of the sharpie, the horse surged ahead and yanked the whole business, people and all, up over the bank into the dunes. I still wonder how that particular horse got into so much action in so short a time.

Otis and I were on board the Riverside doing the last of the snugging down. Then Otis got the skiff alongside, told me to sit on the bottom, took the oars and worked the skiff to shore. There is a trick in beaching a small boat in a sea without having it go up on end. Good boatmen, like Otis, knew how and he slid her in on a wave quite smoothly and we were safe on shore. It was an experience that I shall never forget. Obed enjoyed it all.

Just beyond the ledge at Cedar Tree Neck there is a little cove

with a white sand bottom where we used to be able to watch the flounders slithering along the bottom chasing our bait. Here was the set of gear owned by Otis Burt. It seems a long way from this location to his home in North Tisbury but the relation between time and distance has changed with the passing years and it is difficult to come to any conclusion. It is probable that one of the old rights of way came to the shore there or through Obed Daggett's land but if so it has been lost to use through negligence of the town's voters in the passage of the years.

To the west of the Burt trap was the pound set by George Hervey Luce and Norman Benson which I have already mentioned. Beyond this, and not far from Tilton's Point, George Fred Tilton and his brother Welcome set their pound. Perhaps there was more than one set of gear and the same may be true of any of the fishermen of whom I am writing. To those of you who read this and have not heard of George Fred Tilton, I recommend that you look him up in the annals of the Arctic whaling. It will be well worth while.

Some thirty years ago, more or less, as the old land deeds say, George Fred came to the Vineyard in a manner he had never before essayed. There was a navy blimp stationed at Round Hills, Col. Green's place below Padanaram. George was invited to take passage to the Vineyard in the airship for a trip over his native shores. I have no particulars concerning the voyage other than a local consequence. William Look was alive then and he still had one cow that had the run of the whole forty acres of pasture between the Cove road and the shore wherein she did a masterful job of keeping the brush under control. She ranged at times clear to the beach where Will's ancient water fence kept her in bounds. On the day when George Fred sailed over (I swear the blimp had to do a low hurdle over my kitchen chimney) bossy was waiting by the gate in the road to the shore for milking time to come. The roar of the engines and the shadow of the great silver shape above the pasture did not please the cow and she took off for the gate at a run, made a jump to clear it and almost did so except for the top board of the gate

which was a casualty. I never heard that there was any damage to the cow.

It was after the setting of the trap near Tilton's Point that the Tilttons bought a trap from Harry Peakes that Harry had set on Dogfish Bar. This gear caught pollock in great shoals but owing to the fact that the fish had to be gutted before they were weighed in at Sam Cahoon's the trap was finally given up. The price was so low and the labor involved was so great that there was little money in the venture.

Coasting along to the westward towards Cape Higgon (Cap-piggon the natives called it, with the accent on the "pig"), there were traps of Welcome Tilton, Daniel Manter, Ernest Dean's father and Daniel Flanders. The latter trap was set by Everett Poole.

It must be remembered that many of the trap fishermen were also farmers on a reduced scale. They kept a cow or maybe two (one kept a white one so he could find her in the dark to milk her) and they had a vegetable garden in the summer time. This meant haying. In my own experience during those summers with Norman and Otis, the crew did not consider it a privilege to come ashore about four o'clock and then go into the hay field. It may have been darned hot, right mellow they called it, on shore all day but on the water it had probably been very comfortable. The contrast was violent, particularly if it became the lot of two of the crew to go into the mow and pack hay into the far corners as it was the lot of Jesse Oliver and I one hot afternoon. The old custom of making switchell was revived on one occasion. Switchell, you know, is that happy mixture of molasses, oatmeal, a lashing of good vinegar and spring water. It has the property of cooling the haymaker as nothing else seems to do.

Great Rock Bight and the Roaring Brook are the next locations we find. Daniel Vincent set his pound, or pounds at the Roarin' Brook for many years. He owned a fat and easy going mare and a democrat wagon for transport. The rig would get you there but you had to allow plenty of time. Later on Daniel sold out to Everett Poole. Daniel at one time freighted fish from Menemsha to New

Bedford in the Riverside for the fishermen of that part of the island. The Riverside was thirty-five feet long and broad in the beam and had a long fantail stern like a miniature tug boat. After the incident of the sinking of the freighter Port Hunter during the first world war the Riverside was refitted for salvage but she was never put to that use. The Port Hunter salvage operation was productive of a good many funny stories but they do not belong in this narrative.

After the boat had lain idle for some time she was taken over by Otis Luce to replace the Scout which was a small, cranky craft. The Riverside was a comfortable boat although she would pound under some conditions. This boat, along with Nelson Luce's "Lou" and the big net dory, used to be moored to dolphins well offshore in the middle of Lambert's Cove. It was not the best of anchorages. Otis used to bring his boat up to the cove mooring on the first of April every spring but this practice was discontinued after his death. I have a photograph of the boats taken during an "August Blow". Two-thirds of the length of the Riverside is shown clear of the water as she reared up out of the seas that were breaking all around her.

Daniel Vincent was a most interesting person. He really deserves a story of his own as do so many of the other men in this record. He found many fossils on the Gay Head cliffs and had a fine collection of Indian arrow heads which is now the property of his nephew, Norman Benson. Some of the fossils are in the Harvard Museum in Cambridge. Daniel was web-footed. Maybe this fact had nothing to do with it but he was a marvelous swimmer.

Continuing to the westward from the Roaring Brook, we find the trap of Ernest Mayhew and then that of Wilbur Flanders. Ernest Mayhew also had two herring traps, with chain leaders, set off the Roarin' Brook at one time. I suppose the advantage of the chain leader was its tendency to resist fouling which is the bane of the fisherman's existence.

Next came Myron Vincent's string of three traps in one line. Myron was Daniel's brother. His home is the lovely house at the

sharp bend in the South Road as the road turns towards the four corners, in Chilmark. I say "is" because Mrs. Vincent still lives there although Myron passed to his reward many years ago. After his retirement Myron had a hobby of training brook trout to come to the bridge over his trout brook at the sound of an old hand bell, at feeding time. They really did come.

Daniel West had the next location after which came Campbell and Flanders, followed by another set belonging to Ernest Mayhew. Directly off the Menemsha jetties there was a string of five traps owned by Edy Flanders. In the bight to the west of the jetties there were three traps, first Everett Poole, then Frank Manning and last, Ernest and Allen Flanders.

Farther along, at Lobsterville, there were five locations in the following order: Leonard Vanderhoop, Bert Vanderhoop, James Mayhew, John Pease who later sold to Daniel Look, and finally a trap fished by Donald Campbell who later sold to Robert Flanders. This was the last location on the sound side of Gay Head. The Vanderhoops and Frank Manning were Gay Head Indians.

Around the Head, Joe Tilton set a trap and farther on, off Squibnocket, there were two traps, one a floating trap. These were operated by James Look and Donald Campbell. The stake trap, which was owned by Donald Campbell, was later taken over by Donald Campbell and Everett Poole as partners. These men worked from the beach at Squibnocket, keeping their gear there and drying their nets on the sand until access to the beach was cut off by new owners. After that they had to run clear around the Head from Menemsha. This proved to be too much pork for a shilling and they gave up the trap. The loss of access to beaches and ponds which goes on all the time is a deplorable thing for the Vineyard. Why is it that when an off-islander buys a piece of land the first thing he does is to build a fence and put up a lot of signs? Are they afraid of having friends around them from the native population, do they enjoy being called opprobrious names and to be thoroughly disliked by those who have grown up on the island and have enjoyed its privileges which were accorded to everyone in "the good old days"?

Changes have to come but it does seem that the good things of life might be shared.

This, so far as I can find out, completes the roster of the traps along the Vineyard shores. There were two traps at Nomans Land; Harding's floating trap and a stake trap owned by Davis Look and John Pease.

Across the Sound there were a number of locations. Starting at Quick's Hole and working east these were owned by Obed Daggett, a second Daggett trap at Black Woods which was later fished as a bass trap by Otis Luce. Then, just west of Tarpaulin Cove, offshore of the French Watering Place, Nelson Luce had a set of gear. East of Tarpaulin Cove Nelson Luce had two traps and somewhere in the neighborhood of Lackey's Bay the Marine Biological Laboratory operated a set of gear. This trap was later fished by Nelson Luce for the laboratory.

On the Buzzards Bay side of Naushon, Harry Peakes had two traps, one at Kettle Cove and the other just to the west of Woods Hole near the Weepeckits. Northeast of Woods Hole, off Penzance Point, there was another Peakes trap. This latter is the one that figured in an incident involving a whale. The yarn has it that as the crew tied up the Vida T. alongside the heart, a whale was sighted swimming alongshore. It swung off to follow the leader at which the crew took to the rigging while the whale kept right on going into the heart, through the door and out through the back of the trap.

There is another whale story that might as well be told here. On the morning of the occurrence the Benson boat steamed up to the trap east of Quissett harbor. As Franklin Benson slowed down preparatory to tying up to the back of the trap as usual he noticed that something did not seem to be quite as it should be. There was a commotion in the trap and there seemed to be a large fish inside. Big fish in traps are not a rarity but this one was out of the ordinary and caution demanded that the boat be tied up elsewhere than on the back of the trap. They shifted the boat and lay to one of the heart stakes and took to the small boats as is usual in the process

of hauling the gear. The visitor proved to be a forty foot whale. Its presence and the slapping of its flukes caused turmoil among the lesser fish in the net. Consultations between the two Bensons brought about the decision to let down the back of the trap so that the visitor could slide out over the top line to freedom without damage to the net.

This was done but the leviathon showed no inclination to leave. Norman thereupon prodded him gently. Franklin dropped the net a little lower and finally the whale slid out into the water of the bay. He seemed to be a mite bewildered as though he did not know where to head.

Norman makes the rest of the story good listening with his account of his conversation with the whale and the knowing looks the beast turned on him. Finally it occurred to Norman that the whale wanted to know which way to go. He started out towards New Bedford and then turned as though uncertain. At this point Norman took an oar, pointed northward and said, "That's the way to the Canal." That seemed to satisfy the whale. He took a last look around, slapped his flukes gently on the water as if to warm up a bit and then struck out with speed and precision straight north towards the Canal.

That was one of the times when a camera would have served nobly to bring home a record of the whole business but there was none aboard the Judy Sue that day.

But, to get back to cutting bait, it was just a little way farther along past the Peakes trap and in the bend back of Penzance that Obed Daggett set a trap for a long time. He sold the location to Otis Luce and subsequently it came into the hands of Norman and Franklin Benson who kept it in operation as long as it was worth while. Close to this trap the Marine Biological Laboratory had another pound and this must have been the one where I received my initiation in handling nets with Nelson Luce.

There was another trap in the bight which was operated by Joe Joseph who now lives on the mainland although he was Vineyard born.

Beyond Quissett harbor there was another Daggett trap which went, like the other one near by, into the hands of Otis Luce and then into the care of Norman and Franklin Benson. This one is the last trap in operation by any Vineyarder and is the one that caught the whale.

At one time there was another trap beyond this, the last one and it was fished by Nelson Luce.

It may seem to the reader that these men operated large numbers of traps at one time and that they must have had to work out a complicated schedule to take care of everything. This of course is not true and if there were a record with the dates when the traps were in operation, and by whom, it would be apparent that there was continual change of ownership for one reason or another. Also not all the traps were owned by one man for there were cases when a group of men bought shares in the enterprise in the same manner in which shares were purchased in the whale ships and drew an income from shares without getting their hands wet.

There was another fisherman, James Frank Luce, who lived on the Indian Hill Road in the house later owned by the McQuarrie family which is now the property of Harold Dugan. Jim Frank later moved to the place now owned by Capt. Norman Benson on the Lambert's Cove Road. Jim at one time set traps in Buzzards Bay. He lived aboard his vessel and hired a crew to work the gear. His passing was not a happy one for he was drowned while trying to clear a lobster warp that had fouled the propeller of his dory.

Much has been said about the disappearance of the industry from the Vineyard waters. From my talks with Norman Benson and Donald Poole the answer seems to be the much involved pattern of cost and return. A man has to live by his earnings and when these earnings fall off below the point of survival he must find other means for making a living. The cost of net rose rapidly around 1915 to 1920; the cost of labor rose gradually from four dollars a day to fifteen dollars and the price of fish at the cap log dropped so low that there was no point in putting in the labor and expense

involved. In addition to these reasons, the men themselves grew older and there were fewer young men willing to take up the work. It is hard work, as is true of all commercial fishing, cold and wet at times, and without a fair return in money it seems to be not worthwhile.

At the present time, as I have already said, the last of the traps run by Vineyard men is the one at Quissett and it is kept in operation for two reasons. One of course is for the men who own it to make a living and the other is the need of the Marine Biological Laboratory and the Oceanographic Institute at Woods Hole for specimens of certain forms of marine life. These institutions take a lot of squid, a good many dogfish and other varieties for research. In return for this the fishermen are subsidized. The institutions send a boat along every time the trap is hauled, with a couple of men to help with the work and to bring back the specimens alive. They also take such oddities as there may be in the trap. These find their way into the aquarium at the Institute. This latter point of interest is unknown to a great many of the people who pass through Woods Hole in the summer season. If one has time it cannot be better spent than in making a visit to the aquarium.

The specimens taken are used for a variety of purposes. At the present time the work of the laboratories is devoted to research in the interest of the welfare of mankind. There are many medical men and other scientists working on the problem of cancer and other allied problems.

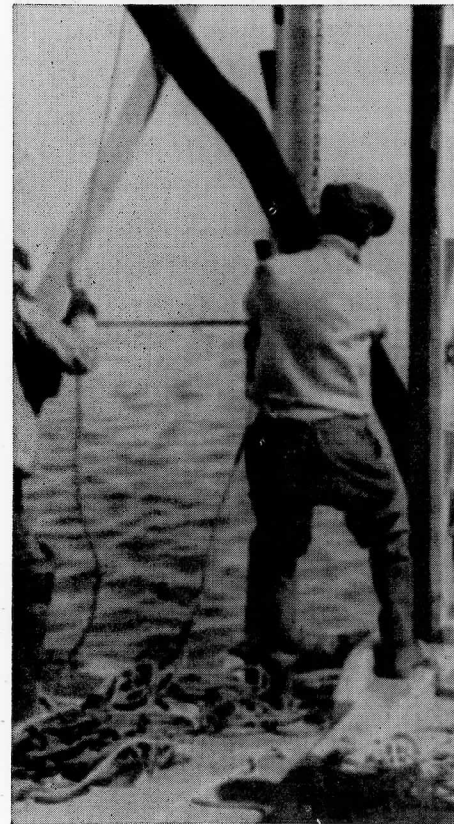
This is the story of the rise and fall of the Vineyard trap fishing industry. If I have omitted the names of any of the fishermen I shall have to be forgiven for it is very difficult to pick up all the loose ends and unravelled threads of something that is so rapidly fading into the shadows of the past. There are record books to be seen which cover the history of the industry but they do not take the place of the log books of the whaling masters. There are still pounds on the Massachusetts Bay side of the Cape and to the north but these are not related to our present field and so we must be content to let this be the end of the story.



Launching Stakes



A raft of stakes
Quissett harbor-



Setting a stake
in the gallows
for driving-

Otis B. Luce-





Mending net
 Franklin Benson
 Milton LeBaron Malcolm Luce
 Otis Luce Norman Benson
 1925



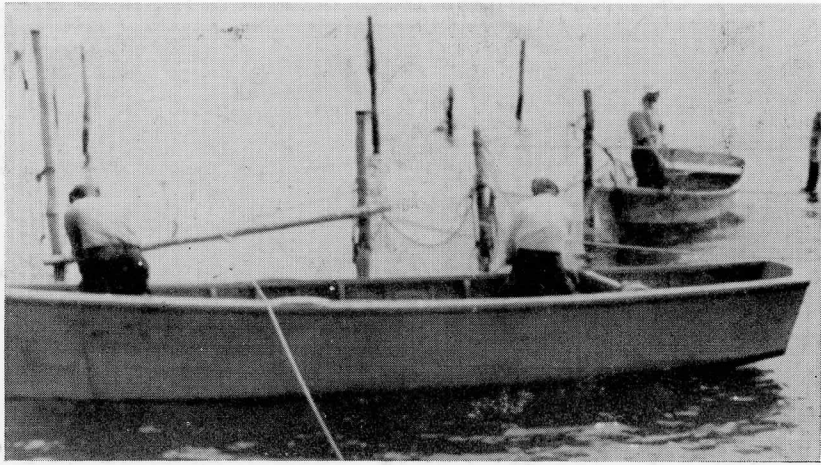
Loading net.



Norman picking out mackerel in May



The old tar kettle.
 Used for tarring nets.



Starting to haul
Two men at the door- one at the bend.



A light haul in summer
Franklin Benson-Lyman Luce-Norman Benson



Norman
Taking in leader
for drying and
changing.

Mending leader.



The following books are currently on sale at the Society's Museum Building.

The Guide Book—*Martha's Vineyard, A Short History by various hands together with a Guide to various points of interest.* 1963 edition. Paper cover. \$2.00

The Gosnold Book—*Bartholomew Gosnold Discoverer and Planter, New England 1602 — Virginia 1607*, by Warner F. Gookin and Philip L. Barbour. \$8.50

Records of the Town of Tisbury, Massachusetts, 1669–1864. 841 pages of Island history. \$5.00

The Wampanoag Indian Tribute Tribes of Martha's Vineyard by Milton A. Travers. 74 pages. Beautifully illustrated. \$2.00

A few back issues of the *Intelligencer* are available at fifty cents each at the Dukes County Historical Society in Edgartown.

Vol. 2, No. 1 — Dr. Sidney N. Riggs' illustrated article on "*Vineyard Meeting Houses.*"

Vol. 2, No. 2 — "*The Episcopal Churches of Martha's Vineyard,*" by Dr. Riggs; the "*Annual Report and Account of Accessions*" by Eleanor Ransom Mayhew, and second installment of Rebecca Smith's *Journal*.

Vol. 2, No. 3 — "*Years of Innocence on Martha's Vineyard,*" by Henry Beetle Hough. "*Some Gay Head People About Sixty Years Ago,*" by Eva Ryan. "*A Cache of Indian Artifacts,*" donated by George Magnuson.

Vol. 2, No. 4 — *The Singing Tiltons and Some of Their Songs* by E. G. Huntington, also a continuation of Rebecca Smith's *Diurnal Records For The Year 1813.*

Vol. 3, No. 1 — *Merrily They Rolled Along — On Skates — Five Miles At Sea*, by C. Nelson Bishop; *Sand Dunes and Sea Law* by Stanley King.

Vol. 3, No. 2 — *The Peddle Cart* by Flavel Gifford; *Rounding Cape Horn* by Elon O. Huntington; *Annual Report* by Eleanor Ransom Mayhew.

Vol. 3, No. 3 — *The Story of Pasque and the Pasque Island Club* by Alice Forbes Howland.

Vol. 3, No. 4 — *Adventure on St. Augustine Island* by Capt. Henry Pease, 2nd; *Some Vineyard Authors* by Dorris S. Hough.