

# THE DUKES COUNTY INTELLIGENCER

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GLIMPSES OF  
VINEYARD HAVEN AND VINEYARD HAVEN HARBOR  
By SYDNA ELDRIDGE  
TWO POEMS  
By SAMUEL KENISTON  
ANNUAL REPORTS

Let us consider some of the changes that have taken place in Vineyard Haven life in the last half century and more — since the late 1870's and early 1880's.

It must be within the memory of many who will hear this paper of how we were dependent on cistern water for all purposes. A few people had chain pumps, but the large majority had to draw up the water in a pail with a sinker attached. And woe be it to us if we didn't have the cistern cleaned in time for the spring rains to replenish.

There were no fish markets in Vineyard Haven, then, and no meat markets. Yes, a meat cart did come around twice a week, and it was a welcome caller. There was no laundry on the Island. There were no vegetables on sale in the grocery stores, and no citrus fruits. There was little canned fruit or preserved food of any kind. The housewife had to give her undivided attention to baking beans and brown bread and Indian pudding on Saturday for that night's meal and for Sunday.

When I came here, no one, to the best of my knowledge made yeast bread. I was told that old fashioned rye bread or baking powder biscuit was the bread. There was no light but kerosene lamps. The housekeepers thought that that was an improvement on whale oil. There was a small bank in Edgartown, but there wasn't one in Vineyard Haven.

Before the Cape Cod canal was built, Vineyard Haven harbor was one of the most important ports of call on the Atlantic coast. And Vineyard sound was second only to the English channel in the annual volume of its shipping.

Along the shores of the harbor there were at least three ship chandler's stores, but the one about half way between the head (as Vineyard haven village was then called) and West Chop was the busiest and best known. This store was established by the Holmes family and stood at the head of its own wharf for half a century and more. There is not much to mark the site of it now, but it was long the rendezvous of all coastwise vessels. Captains, officers, and crew members called there for mail, for water, and for ships' supplies of all sorts. An Associated Press correspondent there reported all arrivals and departures, and the old store rang with the three questions: Where are you from? Where are you bound? and How are you laden?

There was a sail loft above the store and a repair shop adjacent. Torn sails were mended in the former and damaged gear in the latter. Anchor drag-

Vineyard Haven after the great fire of 1883.



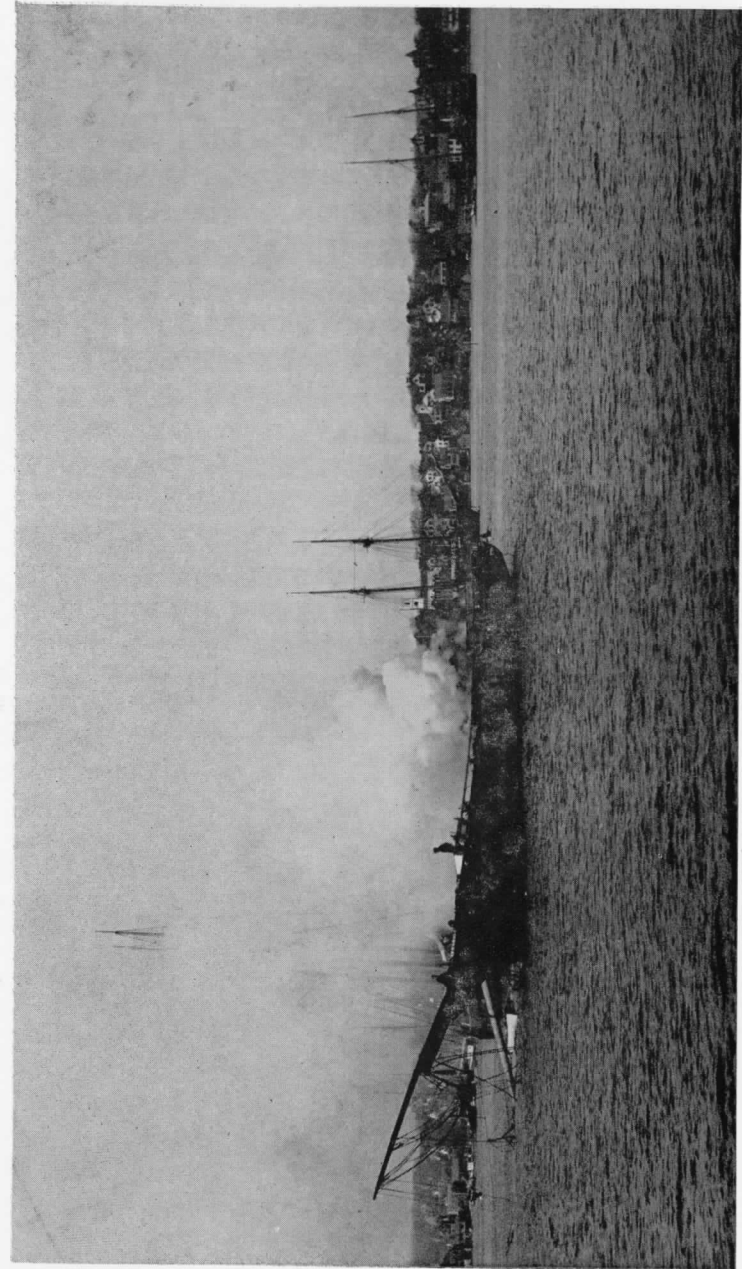
ging, piloting, and surveying of wrecks were great businesses in those days.<sup>1</sup> Vineyard Haven and "alongshore" abounded with pilots who drove a thriving business piloting vessels over the shoals and to the westward. It was a great sight to see their small boats put off in hot haste on the arrival of a fleet, each man racing to be the first to offer his services and get the job.

Another important business on the harbor shore were the salt works. There were at least four of them between the Head and West Chop and others all around the Island. The construction of the machinery to separate the salt from the ocean water was very simple. A long vat made of wood — I think about twenty-five or thirty feet long and five or six feet wide — was placed about three feet above the ground. The vat had a sliding cover that could be drawn over it in case of rain or snow. Then the sea water would be pumped into the vat to a depth of about two inches and allowed to evaporate leaving the pure white salt that was used by the inhabitants then. Then there was no need to buy Turks Island salt.

Every tide in those days would bring a fleet of vessels into the harbor, and the now vacant expanse of water was daily crowded with coastwise craft. As high as two hundred ships have sought anchorage here at one time, and it was common for twenty to fifty to go out on a tide. The sounds of the windlasses and chains weighing anchor; the rattle of wooden sail-hoops against the masts; the shouts of the crews of a whole fleet getting under weigh; the shadows and reflections of hulls and sails on the water; and the little wave shadows dancing between; who that remembers those daily sights and sounds can ever forget them, or cease to miss them as they look at Vineyard Haven Harbor now.

The harbor is good holding ground in all winds except those from the northeast. This is a fact that captains sometimes forgot or were forced to disregard. As a result, storms from that quarter, if severe, could be disastrous to the vessels riding there. There was a terrible storm in October of 1878. But the greatest disaster the harbor ever saw was the sinking of thirty-nine vessels in the November gale of 1898. Then there were masts sticking out of the harbor in every direction. The heroic rescue work done during that storm is one of the noblest events in the history of the port.

The sights and sounds of those by-gone days! Do we not remember the lime-laden schooners that caught fire at sea and were run into the harbor and were beached to lie there until they slowly burned up? Do we not remember



Lime schooner beached and burning in Vineyard Haven Harbor sometime after the great gale of November, 1898.

the schooners that so often limped in, topsails gone and topmasts dangling? Do we not remember the valiant little Helen May<sup>2</sup> that braved all sorts of nasty weather to bring crews ashore for services and socials at the Seaman's Bethel? Do we not remember the harbor — at least twice — as it looked with the fleets frozen in for weeks at a time.

And can you not remember schooners loaded so deep with lumber that rails and even taffrails were close to the water? Can we not remember the big long-boats that put ashore as soon as the anchor was down and the sails furled? Can we not remember how familiar a sight was the sailor with his leather belt and sheath knife on his hip? And can't you remember hiding your kittens when sailors were ashore lest they carry them off? And cannot some of us remember the tragic wreck of the City of Columbus when the piles of frozen bodies lay like so much sad statuary on the Holmes wharf down the Neck until they were identified and taken away?

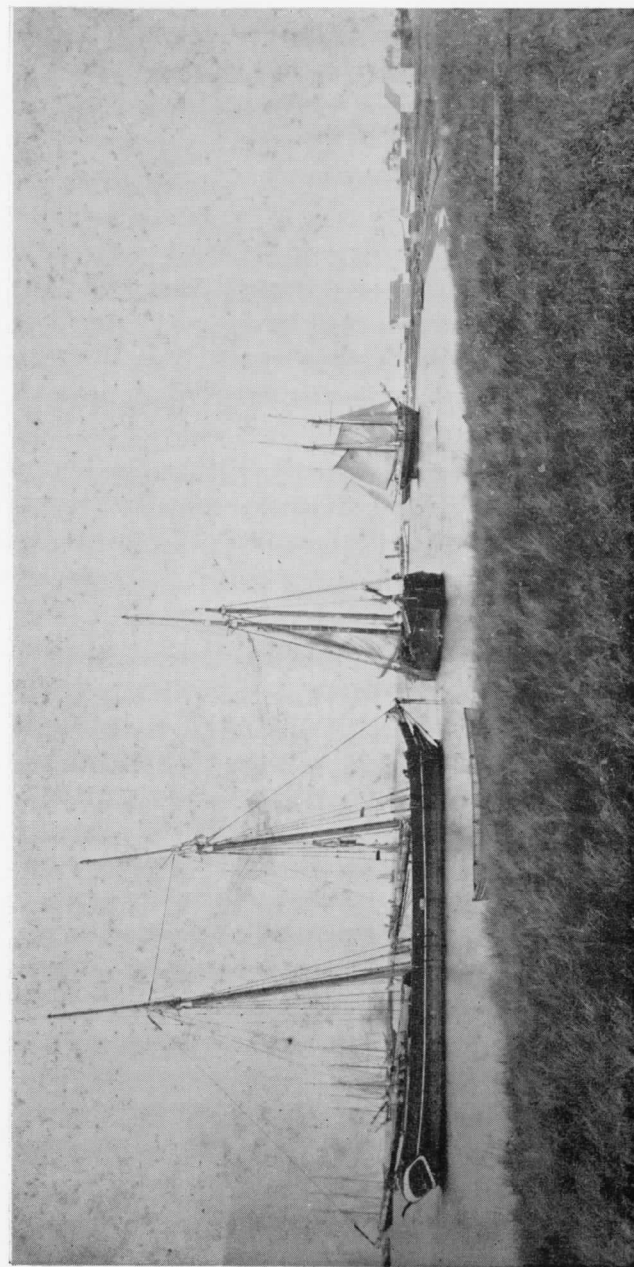
Well, after a while times changed and many schooners were dismantled, and the hulls made into coal barges. Then every night there would be several tugs lying at the wharf while their tows waited for them farther down the harbor. Once there were fourteen ocean-going tugs lying at the wharf at one time.

But the story was almost told. Charts and tide-books were perfected and the pilot's services became less important. At last the Cape Cod canal was finished and the shipping — even the tugs and barges — came no more. Harbor and sound are both deserted now and something has gone out of life.

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<sup>1</sup> Anchor dragging was searching for and salvaging anchors and anchor chains that vessels had lost, or that they had been forced to slip and leave unbuoyed. Surveying of wrecks was the business of estimating the value of a wrecked vessel and the probable cost of salvage.

<sup>2</sup> The "valiant little Helen May" was the Bethel boat for many years. She was replaced in the very last days of coasting by the Madison Edwards.



Schooners ashore in Vineyard Haven Harbor after the gale of October 12, 1878.

## TWO POEMS

by

SAMUEL KENISTON

*Editor's note.* Samuel Keniston was the Clerk of Courts for the County of Dukes County for more than forty years. He was elected to that office soon after he was graduated from Tufts University. Also, for ten years, between 1878 and 1888 he was owner and editor of the *Vineyard Gazette*. C. H. Marchant, later editor of the *Gazette* said of him, ". . . he is remembered as a most versatile writer . . . most brilliant with the editorial pen of any that the Island has produced."

In addition to many poems — Henry Franklin Norton our former curator called them "productions" — Samuel Keniston wrote a novel. He called it *The Islanders — A Romance of Martha's Vineyard*. The story, perhaps, is slight, but the writing is good and it gives a fine picture of life on the Island in the 1870's. Here are the two poems.

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### GAY HEAD

I sit on the roof of the Devil's Den  
On Martha's Western strand,  
Where the last of the aboriginal men —  
All that's left of this soil's children —  
Have made their final stand.

And the night wind blows from the Devil's Bridge  
(His majesty is paramount here)  
And shrieks and howls o'er the outer ledge  
And whistles and moans down the nearer ridge  
And it's awesome and grewsome and drear.

And I think of the sachem bold who bossed  
This headland of the sea —  
Socknout who o'er the cliff was tossed,  
Socknout the brave who loved and lost —  
And the blood-stained Howwosswee.

But it's not of the warriors dead in the vale  
That I'm sorrowing for tonight,  
And it's not the dismal and woeful wail  
That the wind sends in o'er the Devil's trail  
That sickens my soul like a blight.

It's neither of these that afflicts my mind  
And fills me with blank dismay;  
It's something far worse than both combined,  
Something to which I'm not resigned,  
Which will grieve me for many a day.

For down in the town on the eastern lea  
Where stands the government crib,  
A banquet is lain (with a plate for me)  
Salads and ices and drinkables free,  
And cakes and comfits ad lib.

Ices and salads and viands rare  
Dispensed to a chosen few,  
By silken-gowned women passing fair  
With shimmering sheen of gold-brown hair  
(Or auburn or ebony hue.)

But none of these dainties, alas! are for me,  
And none of this beauty and grace: —  
Old Socknout's great granddaughter poured out my tea  
And sullenly fed me with clams from the sea  
And some rude results of the chase.

And that's the cause of my spirit's blight,  
And that's what afflicts my mind,  
And sends me out on this frowning height  
To frame a message to send through the night  
On the wings of the western wind.

Fine clinking of glasses and flashes of wit,  
Accept my greetings then

While owls and night-hawks around me flit  
And ghosts of dead Indians glide by as I sit  
On the roof of the Devil's Den.

(Sent by S. Keniston and read by his daughter, Miss Mabel Keniston, at a social of the Information Club, held at Mrs. Faulkner's, evening of June 3, 1897.)

### THE OLD TOWN WHALER

Of all the venturous breeds of men  
On the Vineyard's famous roster,  
Lives one whose story attracts my pen,  
In homage these verses foster.  
So praise of the mariner here in rhyme  
Is the song of a deep-sea sailor  
Who clewed his canvas in every clime  
By the name of the Old Town Whaler.

From the frozen shores of Baffin's Bay  
To the far Antarctic stations,  
He has vexed the peace of his giant prey  
And lanced the toothed cetaceans.  
Nor Arctic berg nor southern flame  
Has offered the slightest trammels  
To the Old Town Whaler chasing his game  
In the haunts of these ocean mammals.

His good ship skippered by Captain Pease  
Was hailed as the staunch Susanna,  
And had ploughed the combers of western seas  
From the north to the Dutch Guiana,  
With a snub-nosed, dish-faced, apple bow,  
And the rake of her timbers perky  
She swirled like an Indian Ocean dhow  
And tacked like a strutting turkey.

He thought all lubbers who plowed the soil  
On the broad ancestral acres,  
And spent their days in that lazy toil  
Were — politely speaking — fakirs.  
For life on the shore was an irksome bore  
And the product was plainly sterile  
Without the gale and the ocean's roar  
And the thrash of the spouting peril.

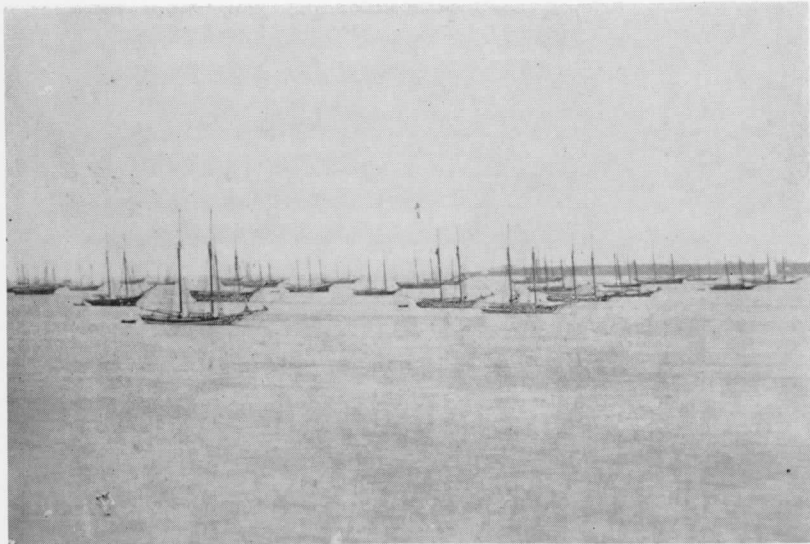
The mess was stored for months to come  
For their hunger's daily rally,  
With beef and biscuits, washed by rum  
In the smoke of the for'ard galley.  
They had barrels of beef and casks of bread  
To answer the call for luncheons,  
But — and it must be parenthetically said —  
(Their rum came aboard in puncheons.)

He had seen Joe Jenkins swallowed up  
Like Jonah in a monster's belly,  
With one titanic gulping sup  
And believed him crushed to jelly.  
But like the biblical tale of yore  
Of the stomach's inward suction  
His mate, like Jonah, was spewed ashore  
Unharm'd by this strange eruption.

His end he knew by the rule of three,  
As the cautious ever were crooning;  
'Twould either be signalled as "Lost at sea,"  
Or, "Killed by a whale," harpooning.  
But dying in bed was not for the brave,  
Why hearken to tinker or tailor?  
No matter what element furnished his grave,  
He would die like an Old Town Whaler.



Looking toward Vineyard Haven from the New York wharf, Eastville.



A small fleet of vessels at anchor in Vineyard Haven Harbor about 1875.

## DUKES COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

A selection from the reports given at the annual meeting held in Edgartown, August 10, 1965.

### REPORT OF THE PRESIDENT

At this the 200th anniversary of the raising of the roof beams of the lovely Cooke House which is such a fine part of our Museum group, and at the 42nd anniversary of the Society itself, I would like at the beginning of this report to pay tribute not only to the carpenters of 200 years ago who built so soundly and so well, but to the little group of devoted founders and early officers who knit the first pieces of our fabric. Many here knew those founders, I am sure, and I only wish today that I could match the intensity of interest found in the only one of that group that I knew personally, Mrs. Emma Mayhew Whiting. A wonderful woman.

Since the founding days of 1923, and the first major accomplishment in 1925, the printing of the history of the Island by Dr. Charles Edward Banks, much has happened. (And I shall have more to say about that history.) The construction of the library building; the assembly of the archives; the acquisition of the Fresnel lens, and the building of the tower to house it; the gradual bringing to its present perfection of the Cooke House; the publishing of the *Intelligencer* as a medium for an on-going perpetuation of Island history; all these, and many other things — each important in its own realm — have been accomplished.

As I go about the country and visit similar historical houses, I come back with pride to embrace the quadripartite of buildings which is yours and mine.

For the purposes of comparison I would like to go back to the first annual report which was presented on a cold February evening in 1924 when the simple statistics included 122 members (at \$1 each); a collection of objects (large and small) of about 500 in number; a library of about 150 items; an operating cost of \$411; and no real estate. You have heard the reports of our curator and treasurer and can see the picture as it is today with a nice nest egg of endowment; an excellent reference library; a museum group set in lovely grounds; and a service to the public which reaches 5,000 visitors annually. With all this "in hand" it makes me feel that your present board in devoting

its deliberations to matters of administration rather than extension, is having an easy time of it. But we must "keep the show on the road" and what we have been doing has been made known to you through the review of those activities by our devoted Miss Scoville.

Here I would like to commend to you the work of the curator and her staff, for she has done a tremendous job of making our collections tell a story, and in making the Cooke House seem a lived in home. Meanwhile, Mr. Huntington has been making our research collections more accessible. And he has had the satisfaction of seeing those collections used by an ever growing number of serious researchers. He has also been trying to bring to our members articles of worthwhile historical interest in our quarterly publication, the *Intelligencer*.

I would like also to say a word of praise to you, the members, for the support which you have given the Council by replying to our appeals for constructive suggestions. An amazing ten per cent of the membership took the trouble to write to us following the January letter, and showed us the real interest in the aims of our Society. It is indeed on the basis of those 70 or 80 letters that your Council is basing its thoughts for the future, and in the balance of this report I would like to tell you a little about what we are thinking of.

First, the money problem. A great number of you suggested that we could solve this by raising the dues to a realistic figure based on the value of the dollar today as well as on our need. It has been costing us, as we have said, more than the membership fee just to send you the *Intelligencer*. You will be asked to vote on this matter in a few minutes. A number of members suggested charging admission, but we have not done that — for a number of reasons — but principally because of the administrative problem involved in having four buildings. To charge admission would mean at least one extra staff member during the summer months. And within limits we do fairly well with free will contributions.

Another suggestion has been a plea for better labeling, and if you have visited the museum this year you will see that there are improvements and there are more to come. Miss Scoville would like to continue this work through the winter, but the Cooke House is too cold for that, and we feel that heat might damage both house and furnishings.

The Council is seriously thinking about republishing Dr. Banks' 3 volume *History of Martha's Vineyard* in its original content and format. If we felt that

we could sell enough copies to cover the remarkably low cost of an offset edition, we would undertake the project in the near future. There is a dealer who will buy 200 sets on publication. And now I would like to ask a hypothetical question. If you could buy a set of this three volume work (and that, of course, includes the genealogical section) of over 1700 pages, at a price now estimated at between fifteen and twenty dollars, how many here would do so? I would like to ask for a show of hands.

We are also thinking about the possible publication of a check list of Island plants. There is a very real need for such a publication, and hopefully we are thinking of similar monographs on such subjects as the geology of the Island, the sea-life of our surrounding waters, and the local Indian population. For the latter undertaking we have already the massive card-indexed work on the local Algonkian dialect of the late Warner F. Gookin.

And finally there is one long range project that so far I have not even mentioned to the Council. And now that I do mention it I may incur the wrath of my good wife, who happens to be Regent of the Seacoast Defense Chapter of the D.A.R. Frankly I would like to see the time come when we could truly say that we were the Dukes County historical society and take under our wing for the benefit of the public, the very excellent museum and collections of the D.A.R. chapter in Vineyard Haven. Miss Dorris Hough, a member of our Council, and Miss Frances McGaw, both of whom are here tonight, are the curators of those collections. They are doing a fine job of rehabilitation there, but the membership and funds of the chapter are so minuscule that they have no way of making the collections readily available for viewing, and Vineyard Haven is as flooded with summer visitors as is Edgartown. If we could make the arrangements to have this museum added to our group the public would be well served.

This, of course, is just a dream, but if we had the support of an even larger membership, and additional funds, doing things such as this might enable us to do more even than at present to make history come alive.

In summation then, let me say that while much has been done in the 42 years of our life, an ever increasing population of homeowners who are likely to be truly interested in the history of a unique island, makes it imperative that all of us set to work with muscle and money to strengthen our Society.

NELSON COON, *President*.

## REPORT OF THE GENEALOGIST

The genealogical history of Martha's Vineyard begins with the coming of the white settlers in 1641. Most of them were of English origin or descent. With more settlers and large families the population of the Island increased until it numbered about three thousand at the time of the Revolutionary War.

After the Revolution many Vineyarders removed to Maine for cheap or free land, to the midwestern territories for land, business, or industry, and later to California and other territories for all kinds of reasons. This exodus has continued to the present day. The result of this movement is that persons of Vineyard descent are found in every State in the Union. In many cases these people are conscious of their Vineyard origin and wish to know more about their forbears here. Inquiries have come to this Society from all over the country and have been referred to me for answering.

This year I have received letters of inquiry from Maine, California, Vermont, Indiana, Massachusetts, Tennessee, Nebraska, North Carolina, New Hampshire, and Florida. In some cases I could be of no help, but in others I have found the requested information, and have subsequently received letters of appreciation.

FLAVEL M. GIFFORD, *Genealogist*.

## REPORT OF THE CURATOR

Again my annual report is evidence of your continued interest and support. As your curator I am sincerely grateful for this. Many of you have made known your approval and this has been a deep satisfaction.

This year marks the 200th anniversary of the Thomas Cooke house and our observance has included an open house on June 21 when old time crafts were demonstrated by generous members, refreshments were served and hostesses wore old time costumes.

Because Memorial Day came on a weekend, we began our daily summer schedule May 29. To date, both registrations and donations average about the same as last year. With the remainder of the month and September to go, I am sure we will have close to 5,000 visitors.

As many of you know by experience, the upkeep of an old house is almost a constant process and during the past year there were a number of items which needed your curator's attention.

The summer kitchen was repainted and displays changed. The fence rails, gates, outside window of both Cooke House and library-museum were repainted. A supporting beam was placed under the floor of the so called customs room as a safety measure. The hall floor was varnished and the stairs painted. Some rotted boards were replaced in the tryworks and the tryworks repainted.

Lens tower windows were recaulked and a safety gate made for the Cooke House cellar door. An Eskimo kayak and gear which had been stored overhead in the carriage shed was brought down to be displayed on wall arms built by John Black who is of invaluable assistance in our maintenance projects. He also painted and repaired the row boat given to the Society last year by Mrs. Grace Norton Rosé.

Our schooner model displayed upstairs in the Cooke House, was rigged at the cost of \$200 and the Adams sisters' miniature organ was put in playing condition. Our 1842 piano also was reconditioned for playing. Rearranged displays were labeled for easier reading and improved identification.

Last month, Joshua Slocum's 1895 trip alone around the world in his 36 foot sloop, was marked by placing of a boulder and bronze plaque in front of his former West Tisbury home. The plaque and boulder were the gifts of Col.

Samuel Fleming Jr., Edgartown summer visitor. About 75 visitors attended the ceremony.

These activities were publicised by your curator who also wrote other publicity items and attended to much correspondence.

We now have color slides and color postcards of the Cooke House on sale in the museum library. As our librarian, Mr. Huntington has made considerable headway in cataloguing and he assists visitors in research.

In addition to Mr. Huntington, our courteous summer staff includes Miss Linda Timmins, Miss Debbie White and Jim Tripp, who will be leaving next month for their various schools.

Since last year's annual meeting, the Society has received a number of interesting as well as valuable accessions. Each donor now receives an accession record and a duplicate is filed by the society for accurate reference.

The Society received two handsome oil paintings of Capt. and Mrs. Richard G. Luce of Holmes Hole, with a Family Record, all from Mrs. Howard S. Hart, a descendant. Mrs. Grace Lambert Daggett Rader donated the fine spyglass given her father, Capt. Josiah Daggett by the German Emperor. The glass was in recognition of Capt. Daggett's aid to a distressed German vessel in November, 1881.

Mrs. Grace Norton Rosé contributed a Vineyard rocking bench, of about 1840 which is 46 inches long and has a rail for a baby.

Mr. Henry C. Ottiwell gave a collection of articles used from 1866 to 1905 by his uncle, Dr. Winthrop Butler who practiced medicine in Vineyard Haven during that time. Also some of Dr. Butler's account books.

Civil War period hats, swords and canteens were given by the now disbanded Henry Clay Wade Women's Relief Corps of Oak Bluffs. The Edgartown chapter, also disbanded, gave its charter.

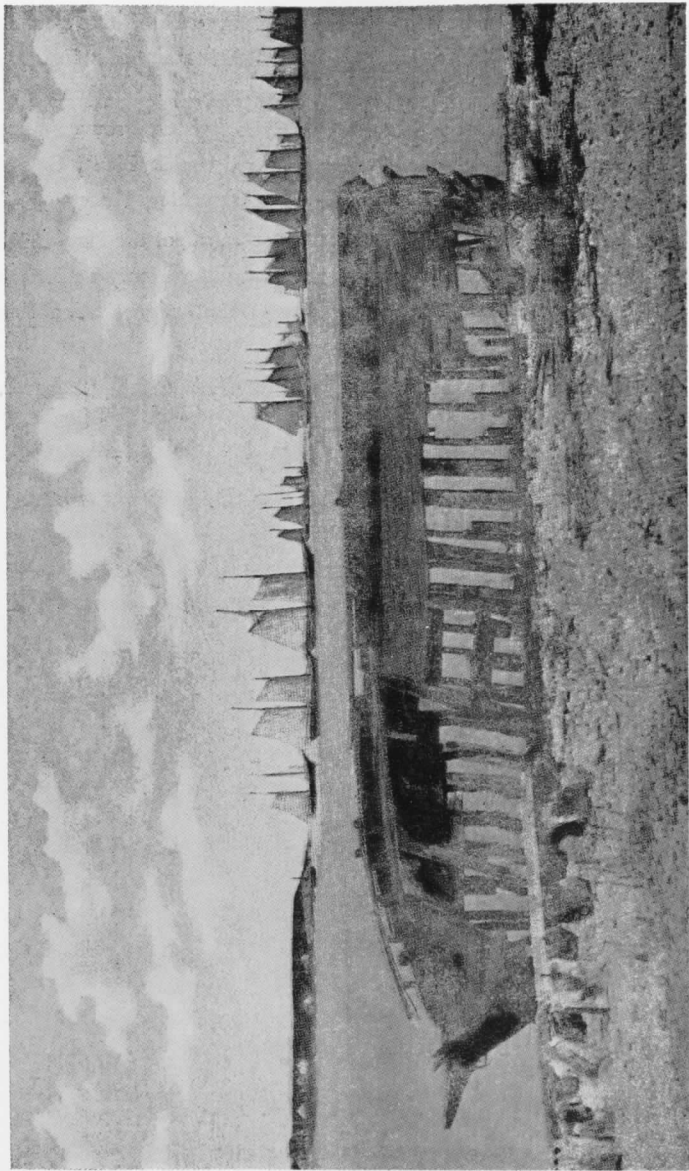
Two Society members gave their own books, Alice Forbes Howland, who wrote *Three Islands* and Walter M. Teller, author of *The Voyages of Joshua Slocum* and *Five Sea Captains*.

Other accessions: Photos (5) of early Oak Bluffs, Mrs. Helen Norton Anderson; beaded bag, c. 1860, Mrs. Henry Anderson; 20 camp ground prints from DCHS glass plates, American Heritage Publishing Co.; check from Chilmark Grange; two checks in memory of Miss Bertha DeLoura, Dedham

Teachers Assn., and Miss Rhona Swartz; 7 pieces of music from George Gifford Collection, Flavel M. Gifford; famed lithograph of Daniel Webb, one of six ministers to decide on site of tabernacle, Oak Bluffs in 1834, Mrs. Harriet E. Graves; collection of 14 post cards, mostly Prang, from Oak Bluffs store 1880's, Mrs. Albert Huntsman; Gay Head clay vase, c. 1898, Mr. and Mrs. Robert Huss; 1964 Dukes County Treasurer's report, Allan Keniston; Philippine bolo and two headhunters' swords, Mrs. John Mayhew; Cottage City souvenir cup and saucer, Mrs. Albert Melendy; large gilt, framed floral wreath, Henry C. Ottiwell; check in memory of Ben Mayhew Smith, from his daughter, Frances W. Smith.

Looking toward future interests, an off-set reprinting of the Hough-Whiting *Whaling Wives* is to be published this winter, and Mr. Henry B. Hough, our past president, now historian, generously has given the publication rights to the Dukes County Historical Society.

DOROTHY RADCLIFFE SCOVILLE, *Curator*.



Fleet of Schooners getting under weigh,

The following are some of the books and pamphlets currently on sale at the Museum building of the Society.

*Martha's Vineyard A Short History And Guide*, Eleanor Ransom Mayhew, editor, 160p., cloth \$4.00, paper \$2.00.

*Bartholomew Gosnold Discoverer And Planter New England — 1602 Virginia — 1607* by Warner F. Gookin and completed by Philip L. Barbour, 271p., \$8.50.

*Capawack Alias Martha's Vineyard* by Warner F. Gookin, 58p., cloth \$1.00. This little book deals with some of the early voyages of discovery, and with the naming of the Island.

*The Wampanoag Indian Tribute Tribes Of Martha's Vineyard* by Milton A. Travers, 78p. Illustrated, paper bound. \$2.00.

*Poems* by Harriet Frances Bailey (an Island girl), 57p., paper \$.50, cloth \$1.00.

*Our Enchanted Island* by Marshal Shepard, 16p. \$.50. This pamphlet is an attempt to show that Martha's Vineyard is the island of Shakespeare's *Tempest*.

*The Heath Hen's Journey To Extinction*, compiled by Henry B. Hough, 31p., and two illustrations. \$.50.

Also the following back issues of the *Intelligencer* are available.

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.