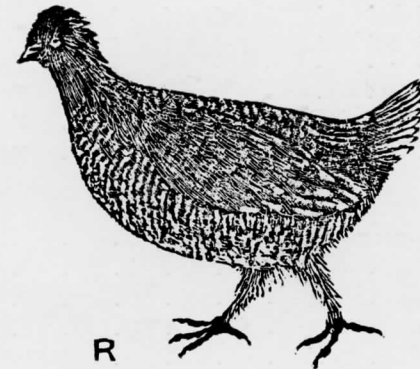


# THE DUKES COUNTY INTELLIGENCER

Published by  
DUKES COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY, Inc.  
EDGARTOWN, MASSACHUSETTS



THE LAST YEARS OF THE HEATH HEN

by  
ALLAN KENISTON

VINEYARD JOTTINGS

by  
HENRY BEETLE HOUGH

THE STEAMBOAT HELEN AUGUSTA

by  
GALE HUNTINGTON

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## THE LAST YEARS OF THE HEATH HEN

by

Allan Keniston

Those "last years" of the heath hen or pinnated grouse were on the Island of Martha's Vineyard.

One of the recorders of its earliest history was William Wood. In his *New England's Prospect* of 1635 he mentioned the heath hen as heathcock. The heath hen, then common from Maine to Virginia and westward until it merged with its near relative or counterpart, has had a most interesting history. The western bird, the prairie chicken, still exists.

In later years people came from far and near in early spring to see the bird and watch its weird mating antics — the struttings,



A "tooting" male heath hen. Photograph from Dr. Alfred O. Gross. *The Heath Hen*, Memoirs of the Boston Society of Natural History, Vol. VI, No. 4.

dances, mock battles, and tootings or calls. From close personal observance I saw flocks large and small, consisting of a very high

percentage of males, with what few females present, devoting their time to eating. This was commented upon by other observers. No answer.

The males strutted like turkey gobblers, tail spread high and forward and wings dragging the ground. Long slender pinnates attached to the upper part of the head normally hung downward toward the breast. But when in strutting posture these pinnates pointed to the sky like the ears of a rabbit. While the pinnates were up, sacks of skin, one on each side of the neck became inflated, and, during the process, a sound was made similar to that made by blowing small blasts of air across the mouth of a bottle.



A "tooting" male heath hen, rear view. From Dr. Alfred O. Gross. *The Heath Hen*, Memoirs of the Boston Society of Natural History, Vol. VI, No. 4.

To some the sound was like the call of a mourning dove. These toots could be heard in the quiet of early morning for great distances — a mile at least. No sound came from the sacks while they were being deflated. And at the end of the dance the bird would stand still and then stamp with both feet, one after the other in rapid succession.

This so-called mating performance lasted from very early dawn until sunrise when all the birds would leave the field.

In May 1916 during the nesting season a most disastrous brush and woodland fire occurred. It burned over most of the breeding

area of the heath hen. Starting near West Tisbury it burned very nearly to Vineyard Haven, Oak Bluffs and Edgartown. The female heath hens, incubating the eggs, sat on the nests protecting the eggs until they died. The males escaped. Some nesting areas must have escaped the fire as a few broods of the heath hen chicks were seen in June of that year. And so the heath hen had another chance to survive.



A heath hen feeding. Photograph by Allan Keniston, spring of 1929.

In 1918 I was appointed by the State Fish and Game Commission to fill the position vacated by the the Superintendent of the heath hen reservation. It was my job to see that all plans for the care and protection of the birds were carried out. That meant planting fields of corn, sunflowers, clover, and other crops to provide a food supply for the whole year. The purpose also was to concentrate them in the center of the five thousand acre preserve. I was also appointed game warden to aid in the protection of the birds wherever they might be found on the Island.

Mrs. Keniston and I occupied the house in the center of the reservation so that we could be on duty at all hours. We also had many callers and visitors who came in search of information about

the heath hen, and to study means to aid in its preservation. I had been interested in wild life since childhood and was very anxious to do all I could to save the birds.

The heath hen was never considered a good table bird except in the early fall. Later, and all winter, its food consisted of acorns of the scrub oak, which are very bitter, and bayberries which were then often used in candle-making. Consequently, after the early fall the birds were never hunted hard, hunters spending their time hunting water fowl which were very plentiful in those days.

Later on, when it became generally known that the heath hen was extinct everywhere else in the world but on Martha's Vineyard, they were hunted and killed to be sold to collectors and museums.

Shortly after I moved to the reservation, Mr. Norman McClintock took moving pictures of the heath hen — a series showing the mating antics. He first placed a clock-device which made a ticking sound, like the turning of the crank of the camera, on the dancing ground. The birds became used to the noise and soon paid no attention to it, and so he was able to take the pictures.

The heath hen had many enemies. I will list some of them in the order of their effectiveness.

From my point of view man comes first on the list as an enemy both directly and indirectly. Man hunted the heath hen for food, for money, and for sport. They were easy targets on the ground. And easy targets in the air too, as they did not dodge like a partridge. High in the air the heath hen's flight reminded me very much of the meadow lark's.

Then the summer people came, and they got kittens from the "natives" to catch mice and amuse the children. When the summers were past the summer people returned to the city and the kittens, now cats, were left behind, and took to the woods. This was no hardship to the cats as birds and mice were plentiful. And the cats grew large and into very much wild animals. Without doubt they ate many heath hens and quail. I hunted the cats and destroyed many.

Man again, and this time with his model T Ford. In those days our Island was criss-crossed in every direction by wagon roads. Horses were the power and the wagon wheels cut deep ruts. But those deep ruts were no problem to the model T. The wagon roads crossed heath hen country and the mother heath hen and her brood of chicks used the roads too. Along came a car and the mother bird fluttered on the ground and in the air. The driver watched the mother bird, and the chicks running along in the deep ruts were ground into the earth. And so a whole brood would be destroyed.

Then, last but not least, disease entered the picture. Many heath hens were brought to me sick or dead, even one from the Oak Bluffs golf links. Perhaps man was not to blame for this but one specimen brought in had blackhead, a disease fatal to barnyard fowl and turkeys.

About this time it was decided by the chairman of the State Fish and Game Commission to secure the services of an expert biologist and ornithologist who was also a photographer. Dr. Alfred O. Gross of Bowdoin College was chosen. He came to the reservation frequently the next several years and studied the birds. And he compiled a history of the heath hen which is the final word on the subject. He agreed with me on many of my findings, particularly the destruction of so many females by fire, thus creating a terrible imbalance in the heath hen population between the males and females.

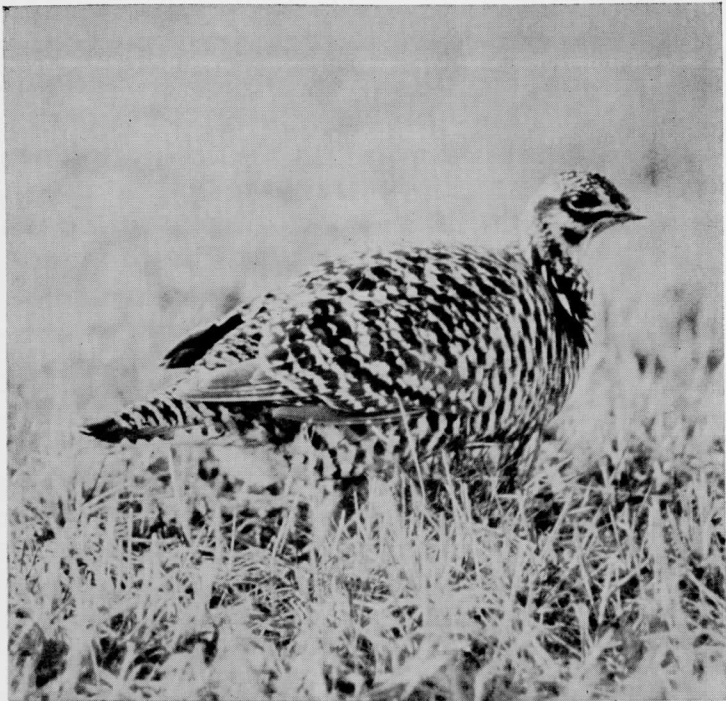
I mentioned one terrible fire. But almost every year there would be two or more fires. Many started by accident. But some were set to burn off the brush so that a bumper crop of blueberries would grow to be sold or "put up." The sad part of that was that spring was the time of burning. Also it was the breeding season.

During the last years of Dr. Gross's visits he brought another naturalist and ornithologist with him — Mr. Thornton W. Burgess. And during the years that I was in charge of the reservation many noted ornithologists besides Dr. Gross and Mr. Thornton W. Burgess came to the Island to see and study the heath hen. It was Mrs.



Keniston's and my pleasure to meet and entertain them.

Among those visitors were Dr. George W. Field, then Chairman of the Massachusetts Fish and Game Commission; Mr. Ludlow Griscom; Dr. John C. Phillips; Mr. A. C. Bent; Mr. Prescott Fay; Mr. Francis A. Foster; Dr. John B. May; Mr. Herbert K. Job; Mr. John Farley; Mr. Aaron B. Bagg. And there were others.



The last heath hen. Photograph taken March 31, 1930 by Dr. Alfred O. Gross.

The last surviving individual heath hen — a male of course — lived near the home of James Green on the outskirts of West Tisbury. This bird was captured by Dr. Gross and banded. It came back the next year, 1932, but after that failed to reappear. A hundred dollars was offered to anyone who might find another heath hen. But the money was never collected.

In 1929 I had retired from the service as there was no longer any reason to maintain a heath hen reservation. There were never going to be any more heath hens.

## VINEYARD JOTTINGS

by

Henry Beetle Hough

Perhaps there is a place for an historical paper about Martha's Vineyard which has no particular subject, but instead is simply made up of odds and ends. It is a little hard to imagine how such a paper will be received by the readers of the *Intelligencer*. But from the standpoint of the person charged with research and writing it has definite advantages. The chief one is this: when a Vineyard historian comes across an interesting anecdote, or a new-sounding passage of history, or some disconnected annal, his duty is to seize upon the clue and track it down. But if all these chance clues are to be kept waiting until they can be made into finished papers, with a beginning, a middle and an end, in due form, they will wait a long time.

Hence this paper is offered, presenting nothing but odds and ends, some of which might sometime fit into a complete paper on some phase of Island history, and some of which might be discarded.

It is not generally understood that Martha's Vineyard had a telegraph cable to the mainland as early as August, 1856. The cable worked, too. When it was put in commission there was a grand festival at Holmes Hole, and the principal speaker was W. L. Burroughs of New Bedford, who had long familiarity with Island communication systems of one sort or another. Some day these remarks of Mr. Burroughs may turn up in a narrative of the Island's telegraph and telephone history, but for the time being here are some extracts.

Mr. Burroughs alluded to the early methods of signalling used on and about the Vineyard and the Elizabeth Islands, and proceeded to say: "Twenty-one or two years ago (which would have been around 1834 or 5) various expedients were resorted to for reporting to the people of New Bedford the arrivals of whalemens at

Tarpaulin Cove. The principal operator was Capt. Richard Luce, and the code of signals very limited and imperfect. If my recollection serves me right, a Nantucket ship was represented by an empty flour barrel — hoisted on a signal pole — a New Bedford one by a triangle, composed of two oars and a boathook — and a sperm or right whaler was made known by the addition of a white and red flannel garment. A full ship could be known from some other preconcerted signal."

After this bit of retrospect, Mr. Burroughs suggested what a boon the electric telegraph would have been in times gone by, such as, for instance, the cholera times "when one of your worthy citizens ran the gauntlet to reach his home, and the whole population turned out to prevent his landing. Many of you remember the incident — what a picture he presented sitting on the stile in the rear of his house, refused admittance by his family *until he was smoked*. Then three vessels were dispatched from New Bedford to appraise you of the attempted invasion. Now carry a telegraphic dispatch to the office and in a moment it would be here. It annihilates time and space — *it even outstrips the Eagle's Wing*."

One of the anecdotes told by Dr. Burroughs has nothing to do with the telegraph, but it does deal with transportation, and something more should some day be found out about the principal actor in the story.

"You all know the long rock in Woods Hole Great Harbor. Captain Harding always insisted that it was impossible for a vessel to hit it — and I was with him one day on the Eclipse when he determined to show me that it could not be accomplished. So with a good leading breeze he steered her directly for the rock — "And now you see," said he, "anybody would think we was going to strike it" — but before the sentence was concluded, plump she went, stem on. "There," he said, triumphantly, "I'm the first man that ever hit it!"

"For my part," Mr. Burroughs added, "I never doubted the result, for the old commodore, in my estimation, was always sure to accomplish everything he set about. My good friend must have

broken the charm, however, if any existed, for Captain Barker had no difficulty in performing the trick afterwards, without taking any particular pains to do so."

Before leaving the occasion of this festival, it may be interesting to quote one further feature of the celebration program. As reported in the columns of the Gazette, this was as follows:

"One of the happiest events of the day was the appearance on the stand, after a patriotic toast, of Mr. Samuel Daggett, a gentleman of ninty-two years of age. Mr. Daggett was supported on the platform by several gentlemen while he sang the Ode on Science. At first he could scarcely be heard, his voice being weak and feeble, but as he proceeded his voice strengthened, and when he uttered the words:

"The British yoke, the Gallic chain  
Was urged upon our necks in vain;  
All haughty tyrants we disdain,  
And shout Long Live America!"

The old man's eyes brightened his nostrils dilated, his mouth was opened, and he poured the living burning words forth amid a perfect storm of applause."

Upon the occasion of this celebration, the steamer Eagle's Wing transported to and from the Vineyard a total of 2,000 passengers, the greatest work ever accomplished in a single day by any of the Island Steamers up to that time.

Skipping now to another fragment of Island history, is anyone here familiar with the experiences of the Rev. Thomas Conant, who labored on the Vineyard in the year 1810? It appears that Mr. Conant left Nantucket about the middle of August that year intending to proceed to Holmes Hole. For some reason that he did not know, unless "it was because I conversed with the men in the boat on the subject of religion," his escort put him ashore on the first land they came to, telling him this was all part of the place he wanted to go to. The land, of course, happened to be Cape Pogue.

Nothing daunted, Mr. Conant began holding meetings at the home of Benjamin Pease on Chappaquiddick. The first Sabbath he preached there all day and in the evening. Then he held prayer meetings at the rising of the sun each morning and preached each evening at some private house. Soon he was invited by Thomas M. Coffin to visit Edgartown, which he did. His narrative continues.

"The very first meeting I held in Edgartown I was seized while I was preaching and dragged out of the hall backwards, down stairs and out of doors. I continued talking, however, all the time; and while I was speaking at the door to the multitude around the building, and in the street, a young man was so powerfully wrought upon that he fell to the floor of the hall and cried for mercy. He said he wished me to pray for him. I mentioned the fact to those around the door, and wished they would excuse me from talking to them any longer, for there was a man at the head of the stairs in great distress of mind who desired me to pray for him. I did so, and no one offered the least molestation."

This incident gives an idea of what the Methodist clergy had to contend with on the Vineyard soon after the turn of the last century.

Now another change of subject. Everyone on the Vineyard knows of the part the Island took in the great gold rush of 1849, but it is not easy to say what became of many of the Islanders who left to look for gold in California. The story of one of the adventurers is told in a diary now in the possession of Mrs. Daniel Harris of Bakersfield, California. This is the diary of Timothy Coffin Osborn of Edgartown. Mrs. Harris describes it as beautifully written and showing the writer to have been a man of culture and education.

Timothy Coffin Osborn was born in Edgartown Nov. 23, 1827. He left the Vineyard on the ship *Splendid* on Sept. 20, 1849, going around Cape Horn to California. With him were two cousins, James and William Osborn. Timothy's diary begins on June 14, 1850, after he had been some time in San Francisco and was pre-

paring to start for the mines with James and William. The Vineyarders took a small schooner named *Annie* and sailed up the bay and river to the little town of Stockton. From there the three went to mines on the Merced River and worked with indifferent success for months. On Dec. 27, 1850, Timothy had apparently had enough, for he packed his blankets and left for Stockton to engage in a mercantile business with a man he had met.

In his diary he records that he had but \$45 in his purse which represented the profits of six months work in the mines, but he says: "However I'm content and I should be no more had I an hundred times the amount." A year later he mentioned in a letter that a fortune had been found in Bear Valley, a place he had often passed over. Success was not for him, apparently.

"I parted from William at the foot of the long hill on Rattlesnake Creek," Timothy wrote, at the time he left the mines. "It was with a good deal of regret that I bid him goodbye, for although a cousin he is one of those men with hearts in them, too big and too generous for his own good." There is one passing reference to William after this, and none at all of James after Timothy left the mines.

For some years Timothy kept a store in Stockton, and there he became friendly with Mrs. Harris's father. Perhaps the most interesting thing about the diary is the note written by this friend:

"The foregoing journal was written and kept by Timothy C. Osborn, a native of Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts, who presented it to me when on his death bed, during his last illness, which was short, sharp and decisive. He was a man of rare attainments, a French, Spanish and Latin scholar, yet so singularly constituted that he seemed unable to accomplish any success in life.

"He was beloved by all who knew him, and his company was sought, eagerly, anywhere and everywhere he was known. He was possessed of infinite wit and wondrous memory and was one of those happy mortals who, when they sacrifice to Bacchus, are smiled upon by Apollo and favored by Mercury, and whose pleasantries, wit and good humor increases with the number of their

cups, and to and upon whom wine acts as fire does upon incense, causing it to exhale only the rarest odors, and the most delightful essences.

"Green be the sod above thee,  
Friend of my early days;  
None knew thee but to love thee,  
None names thee but to praise."

And that is all there is to the story of Timothy Coffin Osborn; at least, unless Mrs. Harris finds a publisher for the diary as she has hoped to do. Undoubtedly the complete diary will make interesting reading. Meantime it is something to know the ending of one of the stories which began on the Vineyard in 1849 when the gold seekers sailed away, many of them never to return. On a window of the Abraham Osborn house at Edgartown, unless the glass has been broken quite recently, one may still see the name "Timothy C. Osborn," scratched with a diamond when Timothy was a Vineyard boy not yet lured away on the search for gold.

Again we change subjects. Here is a small item about the distinguished Thomas Cooke, whose house is now the museum building of the society. The story goes that Squire Cooke was importuned by John Slocumb, an Englishman and a great tory, who resided on one of the Elizabeth Islands previous to the war of 1812, to write an obituary for him. The squire thought a few moments and turned off the following:

"Under the sod lies Tory John —  
The Whigs are glad that he is gone.  
When he was alive he was mischievous,  
And now he's dead it is not grievous."

This fragment ought to appear some day in a brief biography of Thomas Cooke — brief, because it will not be possible now to find out much about the man and his life. But a biography should be written to preserve what we do know of him, just as we should have memoirs of all the fine old individualists of the Island.

Thomas Cooke had ten sons and four daughters. Thomas Cooke,

Jr. outlived all his brothers by more than thirty years, and when he died in 1852 only two younger sisters were living. Thomas Jr. was remarkable, too. He left his father's house at an early age, going on foot to Boston with a bundle over his shoulder, to look for a voyage to sea. He found a berth on a merchant ship and rose rapidly to be a captain. He commanded a ship in the War of 1812, and more than once exhibited great courage in action. Later he was appointed collector of customs at Edgartown, and served until Andrew Jackson was elected president. Thomas Cooke, Jr. gave more than \$600 toward the building of the Congregational church at Edgartown, a tremendous sum for that day.

Here is another item which is worth bringing forward. It is said to come from the notes of Parson Thaxter, who preserved the record as evidence of Vineyard longevity. Enoch Coffin died at the age of 83. He had ten children, and the ages which they attained are as follows: Love, 88; Hepzibah, 90; Elizabeth, 73; Abigail, 88; John, 82; Enoch, 90; Deborah, 80; Benjamin, 75; Daniel, 70; Beulah, 86. Anyone wishing to write a treatise on the healthfulness of Martha's Vineyard in years past should not neglect to cite Enoch Coffin and his ten children. But he should not do as Parson Thaxter did, and omit entirely any mention of Enoch Coffin's wife. The deficiency can be supplied from the third volume of Banks. She was the former Beulah Eddy.

A great deal has been written about typical Vineyard expressions and manners of speech. On this subject, has anyone heard the following phrase, attributed to one of the Island's most famous characters? Ichabod Norton, eccentric and noted saver of pennies, when asked to buy some small article, would often excuse himself by saying that he had no change and did not want "to let the wind into a dollar." This expression has a true Vineyard ring, and one wonders if it is not one of the Island's own inventions. It certainly sums up a frequent situation in which mankind finds itself, and is convenient to use many times. None of us likes "to let the wind into a dollar" for some trifling thing.



It was Ichabod Norton who also said, referring to his habit of saving money, "Some folks eat their short cakes in the morning, but I prefer to eat mine in the afternoon."

Much has been written about Ichabod Norton, and there is a memoir of his life which is not generally available. We ought to have all the material about this interesting figure brought together in one comprehensive paper.

Speaking of interesting figures, there is Parson Thaxter. From time to time we have references to the remuneration of clergymen in the old days. Here is a memorandum of the livelihood furnished to Parson Thaxter when he was called to Edgartown August 10, 1780, an interesting bit of data which should be included in this good man's biography when it is written. At present it exists only in detached references and chance papers.

Parson Thaxter accepted the call and was ordained Nov. 8, 1780. The town proposed to pay him one hundred pounds in silver money at the rate of six shillings and six pence per ounce. I have no idea what this amounted to in modern terms, but it was considerably less than princely. However, the parson made a counter proposition and the town agreed. Under this arrangement he received, annually, ten cords of good oak wood, three tons of good English hay, forty-five bushels of Indian corn, fifteen bushels of rye, eighty weight of good fleece wool, two hundred weight of large pork, two hundred weight of good beef, including the proportion of tallow, and two hundred Spanish milled dollars.

Upon this small salary Parson Thaxter not only lived and brought up a large family, but by good management and economy he was able from time to time to add a few acres of desirable land to his earthly possessions, and to give to the poor and needy many substantial tokens of his abounding charity.

Changing subjects again, it is a matter of speculation to some historically minded Vineyarders as to which street on the Island may be called the oldest. What is now Main Street in Edgartown seems to have priority. The town records for Feb. 6, 1654,

declare the highway "between Thomas Bayes and Thomas Paine to be two rods wide."

Thomas Bayes owned the land on the northeast side of the street, and Thomas Paine, owned the lot where the Edgartown National Bank now stands, extending from the harbor a little farther inland than the Bayes lot on the other side. This section of Main Street was not long, but it was a street, and apparently had been a street some years before 1654, since in that year it was necessary for the town to settle the matter of the width. It is safe to say that this highway is one of the oldest public ways in America.

This experiment in a patchwork and piecework paper on Vineyard history has probably gone on just about far enough. One may, by way of conclusion, merely indicate two or three subjects which are tempting, whetting the sort of curiosity which makes people turn to history.

For one, it is rather remarkable that the Vineyard should have carried or sent place names to other regions. Of course we know that the names of Tisbury and Chilmark were brought here from England. Then our own people founded the town of New Vineyard in Maine; we are also responsible for a Cottage City in Maryland, a Tashmoo Park near Detroit in Michigan, and a Vineyard Street in Honolulu. There are probably others. Anyone who comes across any instances should report them to this society.

For another thing, one desires to know more of Dr. Ivory H. Lucas, for a period a leading physician at Edgartown, who became a convert to Swedenborgianism or the Church of the New Jerusalem and left a fund for the propagation of this faith on the Island. The fund is still in existence, or was a few years ago, and meetings were held here to study the teachings of Swedenborg. These funds established in earlier years are themselves interesting. There is the Ichabod Norton fund for the worthy poor, and how many others?

Another item: it is worthy of remark that interest in education on the Vineyard was so keen in the old days that one of

the first teachers' institutes held here virtually broke up in a fight, and entailed the longest and most deeply felt controversy between Hebron Vincent and the late Rev. Smith B. Goodenow. History is not the worse for having a touch of fireworks, or even scandal, in it — so long as the wounds have all healed and the breach been closed many decades ago.

These concluding items are all trifles, perhaps, but trifles which encourage and beckon the searcher. All those who hold Vineyard history in affection and respect will not lack for many, many years to come lines of research down which to plod and to trip with paper conveniently placed and pencil in hand.

#### SOURCE REFERENCES

Telegraph history: for report of Burroughs speech and festival celebrating completion of first telegraph cable in 1856, see Vineyard Gazette of Aug. 1, 1856. Other references, with dates, and also correspondence with Western Union are in Vineyard Gazette morgue.

Story of Rev. Thomas Conant: see material on churches of the Island filed in Vineyard Gazette morgue.

Timothy Coffin Osborn: correspondence with Mrs. Daniel Harris is in Gazette office, filed under Gold Rush of 1849.

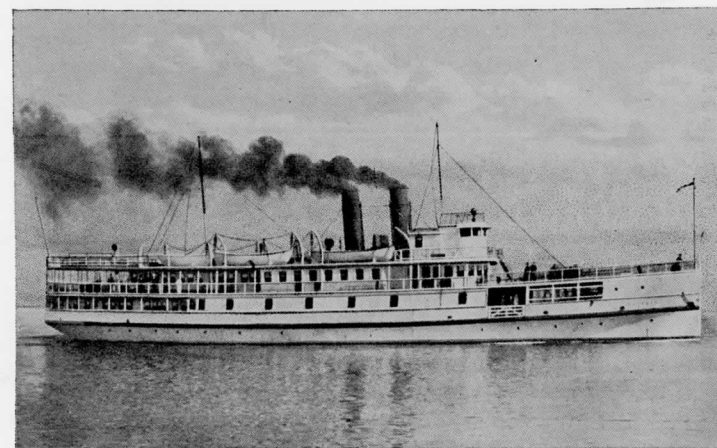
Items as to Thomas Cooke, Ichabod Norton and Parson Thaxter are also in form of clippings and references filed under these names and in envelope of material on Biography of Vineyard Persons at Gazette office.

As to Edgartown streets: citations from town records, with notes, are in Vineyard Gazette of Feb. 28, 1868.

## THE STEAMBOAT HELEN AUGUSTA

by  
Gale Huntington

Most Vineyarders think of the *Sankaty* as the first propellor steamer on the Island run. The *Sankaty* was a trim, slim — too slim, for she rolled badly — twin propellor vessel built in 1911 at the Fore River shipyard for the New Bedford, Martha's Vineyard & Nantucket Steamboat Company. She served on the island run until the night of June 30, 1924 when she burned in New Bedford Harbor.



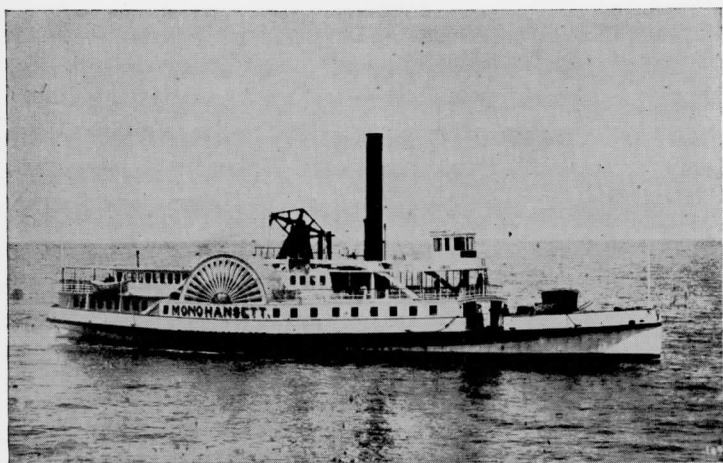
Steamer Sankaty about 1920.

But actually, and contrary to general opinion, the first propellor vessel to serve the Island was not the *Sankaty* but the *Helen Augusta*. The *Helen Augusta* was small but she was seaworthy and fast and a rather pretty little vessel. She was only 82.7 feet in length. Her beam was 21.2 feet and she drew 6½ feet of water. Her weight was 94.37 tons. But her speed was 16 knots, which isn't bad even for today.

The *Helen Augusta* was built at Clayton, N.Y. on the St. Lawrence river in 1861. She came on the Island run April 1, 1865,

and left it May 8, 1866. The fact that she served the Island for such a short time, only a little over a year, is the reason that she is so little known, and also the reason why there are so few good photographs of her.

This is how the *Helen Augusta* came to these waters. The side-wheeler *Monohansett* was built for the New Bedford, Vineyard and Nantucket Steamboat Company in 1862 to replace the *Eagle's Wing* which had burned the year before. Harry B. Turner in his *Story Of The Island Steamers*, says that when she was built the *Monohansett* was probably the best side-wheeler on the Atlantic coast.



Side-wheeler Monohansett.

She was good. So good, indeed, that she was requisitioned by the Federal Government to serve as a dispatch boat during the Civil War. First she was used to carry mail from Newport News to vessels of the United States fleet beyond the Virginia Capes. Later she was used to carry dispatches from Washington City to General Grant's army. Grant himself was on her a number of times. A mahogany table from her saloon is now in the kitchen of the Cooke House, and it bears a stain that looks very much as though it may have come from General Grant's whiskey bottle.

When the *Monohansett* went to war she left the Island as en-

tirely dependent on sail as it had been fifty years earlier, and it wasn't long before Vineyarders were complaining about the uncertainty and difficulty of getting to the continent. The packets which took over the burden of carrying passengers and freight to the Island were small sloops and schooners. They did the best they could, but that best wasn't quite good enough for the modern age of steam, and the complaints grew and mounted, as the following excerpts from news notices, editorials and advertisements in the *Vineyard Gazette* will show.

Nov. 20, 1863. Why is it that our Edgartown packets are so unfortunate or dilatory in making trips when the schooner *Independence*, Capt. Daggett, Holmes Hole has lost but one trip no matter what the weather since he has been on the route?

May 13, 1864. The schooner *Eliza Jane* of Harwich, 59 tons burden has been purchased by parties in town and will be put upon the route to New Bedford.

July 1, 1864. Daily packet service to New Bedford. Schooner *Eliza Jane*, Capt. George Huxford, and sloop *Range*, Capt. Davis, will leave for New Bedford and return on alternate days. The *Eliza Jane* is a newly purchased vessel fitted for special accommodations.

... we are completely isolated. Our packets are too much bound by the chance of wind and tide to answer our demands. Yes, by all means, obtain a steamboat.

Gentlemen of the Vineyard do you want a steamboat? You have the money and can purchase a half dozen if need be. A boat we need, a boat we can have, a boat we must have.

Our packet the schooner *Eliza Jane* leaves her dock regularly on steamboat days. Passengers from this place cannot find better convenience.

The schooner *Eliza Jane* when on her trip from New Bedford on Saturday last, came in contact with a small pleasure boat from Hadley Harbor knocking the mast out of her. Neither party can be particularly blamed. They were not watching their course.

Dec. 23, 1864. A steamboat, a quicker, surer mode of conveyance to the Main is the great want of our island. Our packets are safe, commodious, and often the pleasanter mode of travel, but not reliable being too much controlled by wind and tide.

A steamboat can easily be obtained. The government does not monopolize all of them. We learn that a good staunch propellor has been found by parties interested in having a boat . . . capable to run 16 knots per hour . . . and can be obtained for a reasonable price. Let us have a steamboat on the route.

Feb. 24, 1865. (in a letter to the Gazette from Henry L. Whiting of West Tisbury) A boat is our only medium of transportation.

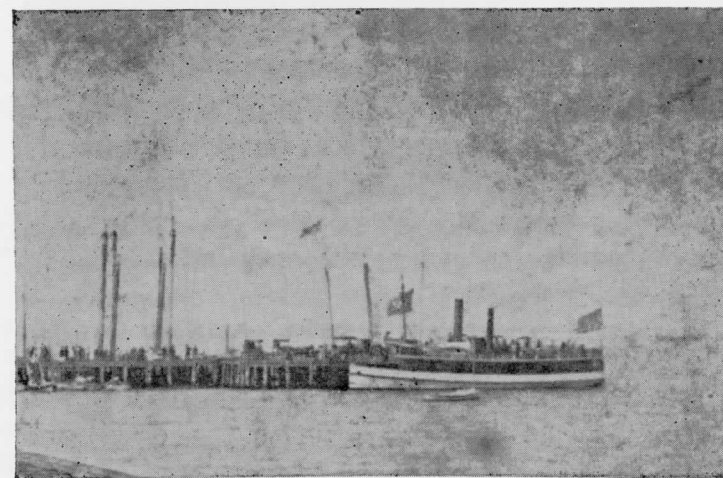


Bow on view of the Helen Augusta. Note the big sloop in the foreground loaded with cordwood.

It is supineness makes us so indifferent to our own interests. An opportunity now offers to try the experiment of a small cheap boat — one which has been favorably judged by those who have seen her. This boat is a small propellor, new, strong, well fastened, and built with special reference to economy in fuel, speed, and passenger accommodation. Already between 30 and 40 individuals have taken stock in the boat proposed.

March 9, 1865. We are glad to report that the action for the purchase of the proposed boat for our long neglected route is progressing favorably, and the board of directors chosen.

The *Helen Augusta*. The gentlemen who were authorized by the Martha's Vineyard Steamboat Company to proceed to New Bedford and examine said boat and purchase her if she should prove satisfactory have been heard from and are hearty in their approval. They have purchased her.



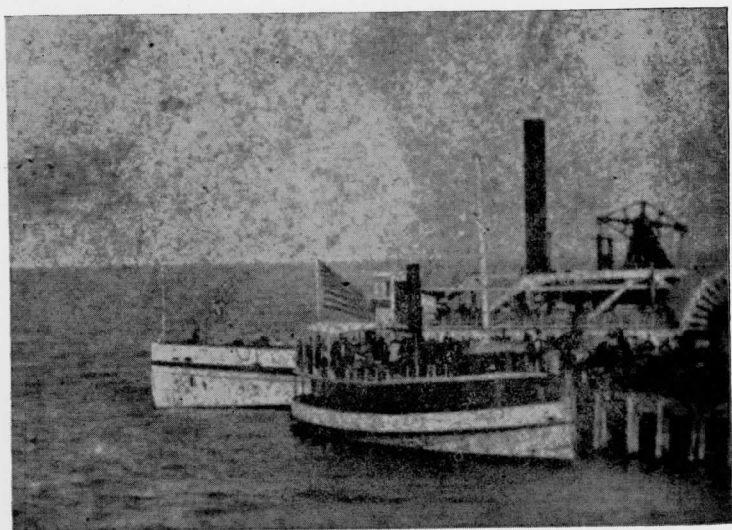
Helen Augusta at a Vineyard wharf, about 1870.

March 20, 1865. (From the New Bedford Mercury) The propellor *Helen Augusta* which reached Holmes Hole on Sunday arrived in New Bedford yesterday and will be put on the route between Edgartown and this port. The propellor is a well built and commodious boat and will meet the wants of the public.



April 7, 1865. (Vineyard Gazette) Our little boat has now been performing her duty upon the route for one week. Although a little boat she will be found to be a love of a boat.

The new and beautiful steam propellor *Helen Augusta*, John L. Gibbs, master, will run between Martha's Vineyard and New Bedford as follows. Leave Edgartown Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at 7½ A.M. Leave New Bedford Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday at 11 A.M. or on the arrival of the morning train from Boston, touching at Holmes Hole and Woods Hole each way. J. T. Pease, Cashier.



Helen Augusta on an excursion to the Vineyard about 1870 with Monohansett in the background.

In June, of that same year, 1865, the *Monohansett* returned from the war and resumed her Island run. For a little while the advertised schedules of the two boats appeared side by side in the Gazette. But the little *Helen Augusta* could not compete with the larger *Monohansett*, and in May of the next year she was sold to New Bedford.

For the next twelve years the *Helen Augusta* worked out of New Bedford, mostly engaged in freighting and towing in Buzzards Bay. But from time to time she did come back to the Island with

excursion parties to Cottage City. Then in 1878 she was "sold foreign," to a purchaser from the Dominican Republic, and steamed away to Santo Domingo.

#### Editor's Note.

Allan Keniston who wrote "The Last Years Of The Heath Hen," is very much an authority on the bird life of Martha's Vineyard. He assisted Edward H. Forbush, author of *The Birds Of Massachusetts*, in the study of the herring gull and a number of other species.

"Vineyard Jottings" by Henry Beetle, Hough our historian, was originally read at a meeting of the Dukes County Historical Society in the Cooke House on November 10, 1937.

In the "Steamboat *Helen Augusta*" article by the editor, information for place and date of building, and for the dimensions of the vessel is from the National Archives, in Washington, D.C.

Dionis Coffin Riggs can remember her mother tell about meeting the *Helen Augusta* in Holmes Hole. That was when she was a small child, and her father (Dionis' grandfather) Capt. James F. Cleveland was in temporary command of the vessel.

