

THE DUKES COUNTY INTELLIGENCER

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MARTHA'S VINEYARD AND THE THEATRE
by
HENRY BEETLE HOUGH

UP - ISLAND
SOME OLD PHOTOGRAPHS AND POSTCARDS

LOSS OF THE BARK HECLA
by
GEORGE F. SMITH

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MARTHA'S VINEYARD AND THE THEATRE

by

HENRY BEETLE HOUGH

This brief article deals with the associations which Martha's Vineyard has had, through the years, with the stage and the people of the stage. A hundred years ago, more or less, the lyceum movement reached to the Island and old records disclose a surprising range and variety in the cultural life of the day. Among other interests, and by no means the least of all, were the theatre and the drama. Plays were brought here in the form of readings, but the interest was genuine nevertheless.

In later years there were performances here of many plays, for instance one of East Lynne in the late seventies. Such performances were usually undertaken by Island clubs, and even the names of most of them have now been forgotten. Who remembers now that Edgartown had a Shakespeare Club founded in 1899, with regular meetings every two weeks, and "Fifth-night entertainments on Thursdays of every fifth week?"

Club entertainments, benefit performances for churches, occasional visiting companies in plays staged in the town halls or other public places — these were a real part of the life of every Island community. But one of the strongest ties with the stage was through the visits made to the Vineyard by actors who were prominent in their day.

One remembers at once the name of Sol Smith Russell. He was born in 1848 and he became a drummer boy in the Union Army during the Civil War. Although he had come from Maine, he found himself in the Middle West and one day, at Cairo, Illinois, he walked into a theatre and played the drums in the orchestra. It was only one further step for him to become an entertainer, and in a few years he was on the stage engaged in a long and notable career.

Russell's first appearance in New York was at the old Park

OUR ISLAND TROUPE!

CONCERT.

AT THE TOWN HALL,

FRIDAY EVENING, MARCH 5TH, 1858.

UNDER THE DIRECTION OF FRANK P. VINCENT

Misses Grace Ann Morse, Eunice G. and Annie Osborn, and Susan A. Smith,

PIANISTS.

PROGRAMME.

PART I.

1. The Free Country, a Glee, Full Company.
2. Overture to Lodoiska, Misses Grace A. Morse and Susan A. Smith. Messrs. S. L. Pease and F. P. Vincent.
3. Vocal Duet. Two Forest Nymphs, Misses Eunice G. Osborn and Emilie S. May.
4. Sunshine of Love. Polka, Miss Susan A. Smith.
5. Trio. Dunbarton's Bonnie Deil, Miss Ellen M. Vincent. Messrs. H. N. T. Pease and F. P. Vincent.
6. Railroad Chorus. [By request.] Full Company.
7. Piano Forte. Quadrilles, Misses E. G. Osborn and Grace A. Morse.
8. Vocal Duet. Shower of Pearls, Misses E. M. Vincent and Annie Osborn.
9. Piano Forte Duet, Misses E. G. and Annie Osborn.
10. Song. Speak Gently to the Erling, Miss Emilie S. May.

PART II.

1. Overture to Semiramide, Misses G. A. Morse and E. G. Osborn. Messrs. S. L. Pease and F. P. Vincent.
2. Song. Voices from the Spirit Land, Miss Ellen M. Vincent.
3. Vocal Duet. Matrimonial Sweet, Miss Annie Osborn and Mr. Horatio N. T. Pease.
4. Piano Forte Quadrilles, Misses Annie Osborn and Grace Ann Morse.
5. Vocal Duet. Meet me by Moonlight, Miss Eunice G. Osborn and Mr. F. P. Vincent.
6. Vocal Duet. Mr. and Mrs. Snibbs, Mr. Frank P. Vincent and Miss E. S. May.
7. Last Rose of Summer, with Variations, Miss Grace A. Morse.
8. Song. Star of Love, Miss Eunice G. Osborn.
9. Duet. Gypsy Polka, Misses Susan A. Smith and Annie Osborn.
10. Vocal Duet. Gently Sighs the Breeze, Misses E. S. May and E. M. Vincent.

TABLEAU.

THE PRAYING CHILD.

ADMISSION FEE. Gallery 25 cents; all others, 15 cents. TICKETS to be had at the Store of J. N. VINSON, and at the Post Office. DOORS open at 7. CONCERT to commence at 7 1/2 o'clock.

Playbill for a concert in Edgartown, March 5, 1858.

Theatre — then at the corner of Broadway and 22nd Street — in the year 1881. He appeared under the management of Augustin Daly in a play called Edgewood Folk. Although he acted many parts, Sol Smith Russell never became popular in New York. He was, however, loved in the country at large. He became identified with a particular type of role, and a particular sort of acting — his stage qualities were simplicity, gentleness, and an apparently natural quaintness.

All over the United States people who never thought of going to the theatre at any other time invariably went to see Sol Smith Russell. They saw him in A Poor Relation, in Peaceful Valley, in A Bachelor's Romance. Mr. Russell played more than 1,500 times in the first of his plays, Edgewood.

The Vineyard would naturally not have seen Sol Smith Russell behind the footlights, but he came here as a visitor and, in 1899, built on Tower Hill, at Edgartown, an imposing summer home with a circular tower, a balcony, more than a hundred feet of veranda, and an ample supply of bay windows and balconies. This house was later burned. It stood on what is now the Vose lot, next to the Shepard house.

While Mr. Russell was still active, and an enthusiastic Vineyarder, he appeared at least once in the Edgartown town hall. This was before his own summer home was completed. On August 19, 1897, — to quote a contemporary account — "the sedate and rather clerical figure of Mr. Sol Smith Russell appeared upon the stage. Just as the people were about to prepare to be disappointed in him, they found themselves convulsed with laughter over his facial expressions and from that moment this king of humorists had them completely at his mercy. He has a style peculiarly his own, and his humor — always clean and unobjectionable — is simply irresistible. With admirable good humor he complied with the demands of his audience for more until the utmost limit of his time was reached."

This entertainment was for the benefit of the Edgartown Congregational Church, and on the bill with Mr. Russell was another

PROGRAMME

Vineyard Haven Brass Band

ENTERTAINMENT

TUESDAY EVENING, JAN. 9, '83.

Part I.

1. SELECTION BY BAND, - - - Wait till the Clouds.
2. SONG, - - - "Watchman."
Mr. C. L. Marks.
3. QUARTETTE, - - - Good night, Beloved.
Misses Clough and Robinson, Messrs Ottiwell and Cleveland.
4. SOLO—PIANO,
Miss Octavia N. Crocker.
5. READING,
Miss Annie F. Daggett.
6. SOLO—FLUTE,
Mr. J. W. Ingles.
7. DUET, - - - How dear to me the Hour,
Miss Clough and Mr. C. F. Chadwick.

Part II.

8. SELECTION BY BAND, (Schottische) Life of the Band-room.
9. TRIO, - - - Queen of the Night.
Misses Clough, Robinson and Cleveland.
10. PIANO—DUET, - - - Poet and Peasant.
Misses Crocker and Howes.
11. SONG,
Mr. H. J. Cleveland.
12. SOLO—CORNET, - - - Magnolia Serenade.
Mr. C. F. Chadwick.
13. QUARTETTE, - - - O, Hush the my Baby.
Misses Clough and Robinson, Messrs Ottiwell and Cleveland.
14. READING, - - - Ride of Jennie M'Neil.
Miss Florence B. Daggett.
15. SELECTION BY BAND, - - - Swanee River.

[F I N A L E .]

E. H. Manter, Printer, Vineyard Haven, Mass.

Playbill for concert and entertainment in Vineyard Haven, January 9, 1883.

AT UNION CHAPEL, COTTAGE CITY.

FRIDAY EVENING, Aug. 17th,

AT EIGHT O'CLOCK.

Grand Musical and Dramatic

ENTERTAINMENT

In Aid of the Vineyard Haven Relief Fund,

BY THE VISITORS TO VINEYARD HAVEN.

PROGRAMME.

1. TRIO,—Piano, Violin and Flute, *Hayden*
Miss BARNES, MESSRS. STEINHART AND BARNES.
2. ARIA,—Diplacer, *Rossini*
Mrs. OTIS ROCKWOOD.
3. GREAT ENGLISH FARCE,—In one Act:

"Ici on Parle Francais."

CAST:

MAJOR REGULUS RATTAN, G. F. MACDONALD
VICTOR DUBOIS, R. C. LACROIX
MR. SPRIGGINS, G. ROCKWOOD
MRS. SPRIGGINS, MRS. KIMBALL
ANGELINA, (their daughter), MISS M. MACDONALD
JULIA, (wife of Major Rattan), MISS LEACH
ANNA MARIA, (maid of all work), MISS ROCKWOOD

4. WALTZ SONG.
Miss PRATT.
5. DUET,—Barbier De Seville.
Mrs. ROCKWOOD AND Mr. LACROIX.
6. THE LAUGHABLE FARCE,—In one Act:

MR. X.

CAST:

MR. ANTHONY HENN, R. A. OTTIWELL
MR. XERXES XAVIER, (Insurance Agent), G. F. MACDONALD
MR. JOSHUA FISK, (Telegraph Operator), R. C. LACROIX
MISS MATILDA HENN, (Anthony's sister), MRS. M. G. WASHBURN
MISS JESSIE HENN, (Anthony's daughter), MISS A. ROCKWOOD
MOLLY, (the maid with a treacherous memory), MISS A. RICHARDSON

TICKETS, - - 50 CENTS.

Star Press, Cottage City.

Playbill for benefit entertainment given just five days
after the great fire of August 13, 1883.

stage star famous in her day. This was Marie Burroughs, who had a summer home next to his on Tower Hill. Miss Burroughs appeared in the potion scene from Romeo and Juliet. A reporter wrote that "Miss Burroughs is said to have no superior in her impersonation of Juliet, and we can well believe it. Her superb stage presence excited the warmest admiration."

Nevertheless, Juliet was not one of Marie Burroughs' famous roles. Up to that time her most successful roles had been in plays little remembered today. She was born, incidentally, as Lillie Arrington in San Francisco in 1866. Marie Burroughs was simply her stage name. She appeared in *The Rajah*, as Mary Bleakern in *The Middleman*, Vashti in *Judah*, in *The Profligate*, in *The Meddler*, and in *The Battle of the Strong*.

During the same week that these notable stage people were acting in the Edgartown town hall, Tom Karl was taking some of his talent from Innisfail and giving a show at Association Hall in Vineyard Haven. Innisfail — there was a bit of the stage specially incarnated on the Vineyard! At this hotel on the Lagoon the always improbable combination of an actor and hotel keeper was realized. Tom Karl was both. So long as the hotel remained even remotely solvent, it was a glorious place for comradeship and for rustivating actors and singers.

There Annie Russell came, and she said at Innisfail in 1897, "I really believe that of all my vacations spent in America, this will prove to be the most enjoyable season."

There, too, Katharine Cornell came as a little girl. And Joseph Holland, well known actor of his time; Emma Cecelia Thursby, as famous in her generation as Adelina Patti; Dellon Dewey, like Tom Karl himself a member of the original cast of *Robin Hood*. Innisfail was a pleasant and Bohemian place, but finally the inexorable rule of economics caught up with Tom Karl and he had to surrender the management. Later on the hotel was burned.

Then, turning again to Edgartown, there was Frank Keenan. His memory is still green with many still living on the Vineyard. Exhibited here today is a holograph letter of Keenan's in which

he says, "I have not forgotten . . . dear old Edgartown. Remember me to my friends." Keenan died in 1929. He began his stage career years ago in the Boston Museum, but he had already felt the spell of the theatre through the showboats of the Mississippi which attracted him as a boy.

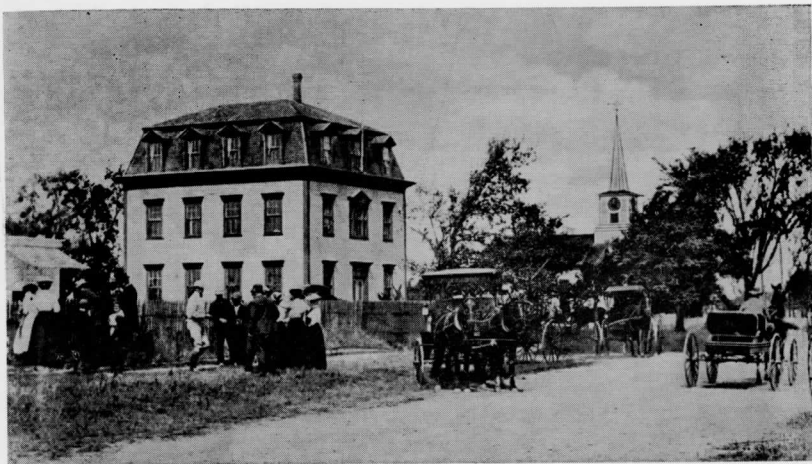
From the broad melodrama of *The Girl of the Golden West* to subtler characterizations in later plays and on the screen, Frank Keenan lived from one theatre generation into another. He was the only one of this old group of summer visiting actors who went into the movies. For many years he was a familiar figure in Edgartown. Everyone knew and liked him, and he is well remembered taking part on pleasant social evenings at the Home Club.

Frank Keenan, like the others, took part in many benefit performances, and there was an intimacy about his appearances here which could not have been present in the legitimate theatre.

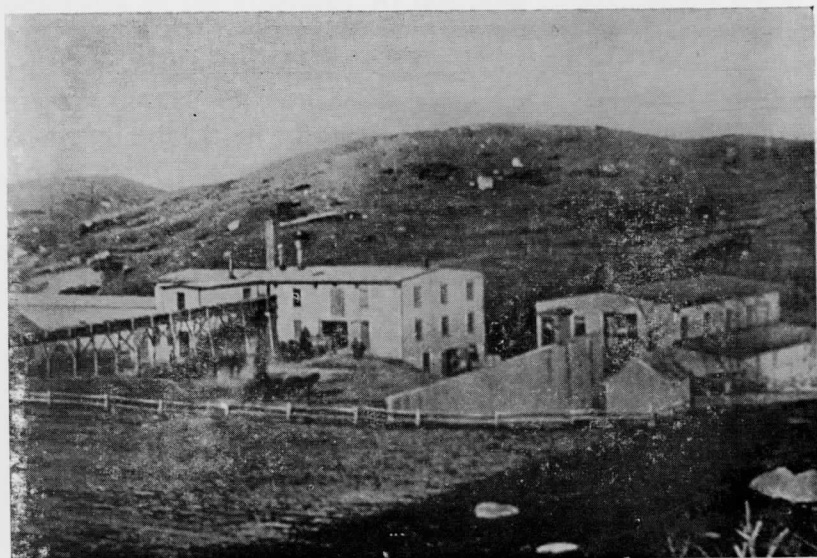
More recent still was Percy Plunkett, well known as a comedian, who staged many productions on the Vineyard and appeared here in a variety of roles.

These names do not make a complete roster of the stage people associated with the Island, but they are the best remembered names of their time. They gave color to the summer life when they were here, and they gave the Vineyard a contact with the theatre which most small communities do not have.

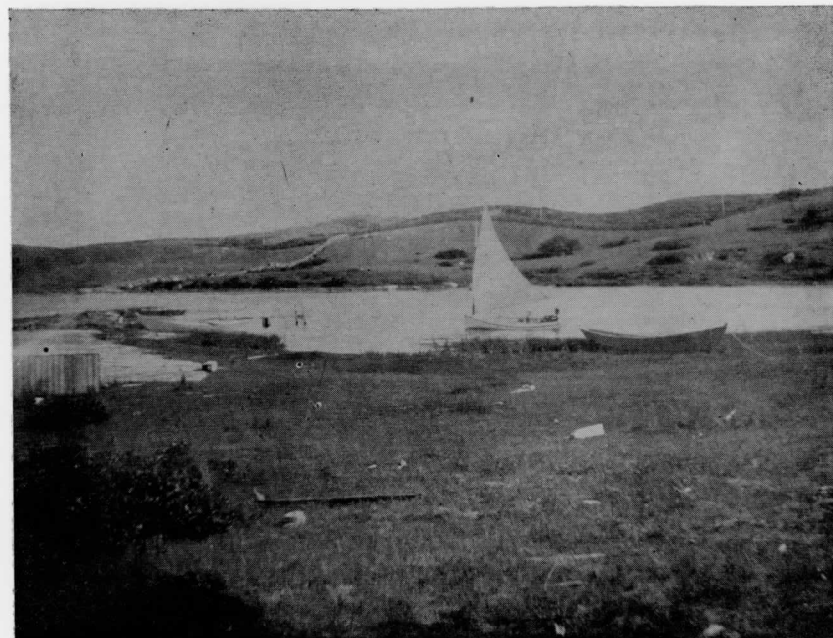
UP - ISLAND
SOME OLD PHOTOGRAPHS AND POSTCARDS



The cattle show and fair at West Tisbury about 1900.



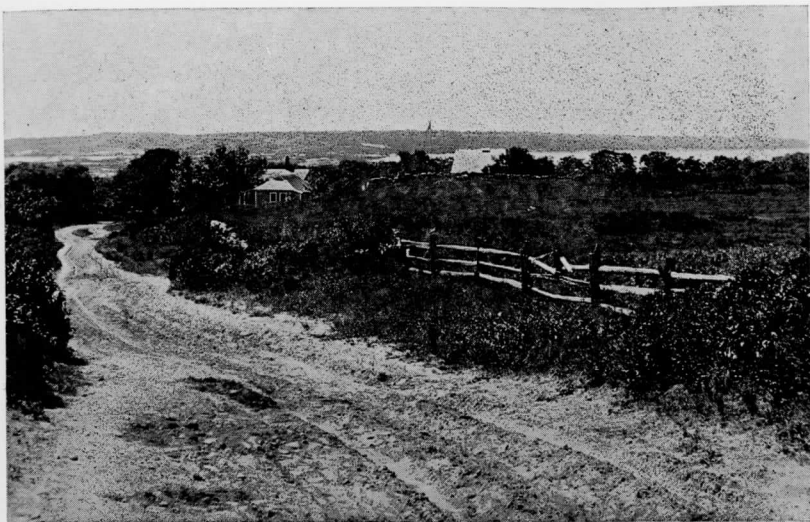
The Paint Mill on the North Shore about 1875. Schooners landed at a wharf here, and the paint was freighted up and down the coast.



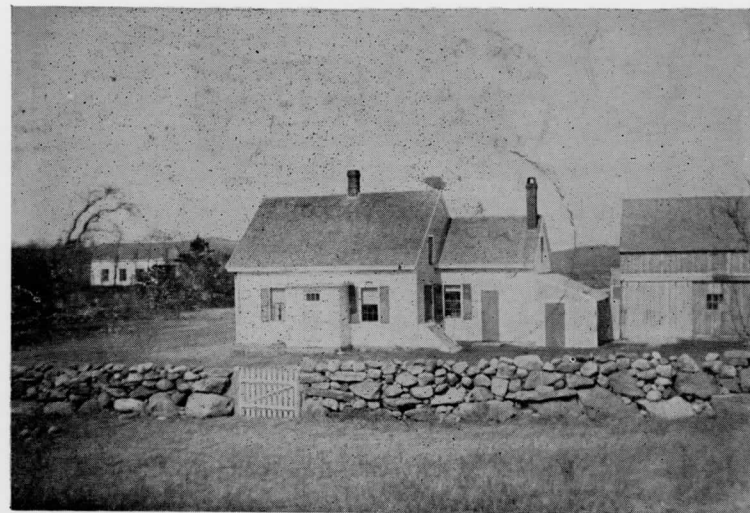
Clam Point and Clam Point Cove, Quitsa, about 1900. The little smack boat may be Benjamin Mayhew's which he used in the ponds for eeling.



The Chilmark Post Office and E. Elliott Mayhew's store about 1905.



The road to Menemsha before paving, with the Flanders "Homestead" in the background.



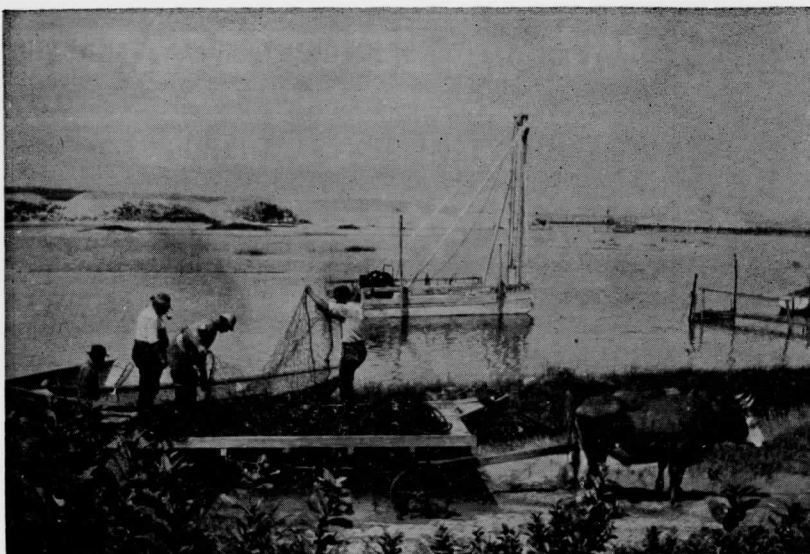
The Chilmark Methodist parsonage when it was on the Middle Road near the Meeting House Road. The church is in the background.



The Creek side. Menemsha about 1905, with Dan Vincent's trap boat on the ways.



Menemsha Basin before Dutcher Dock. The salt house in the background was used to cure herring and whiting.



Spreading net to dry at Menemsha about 1910.



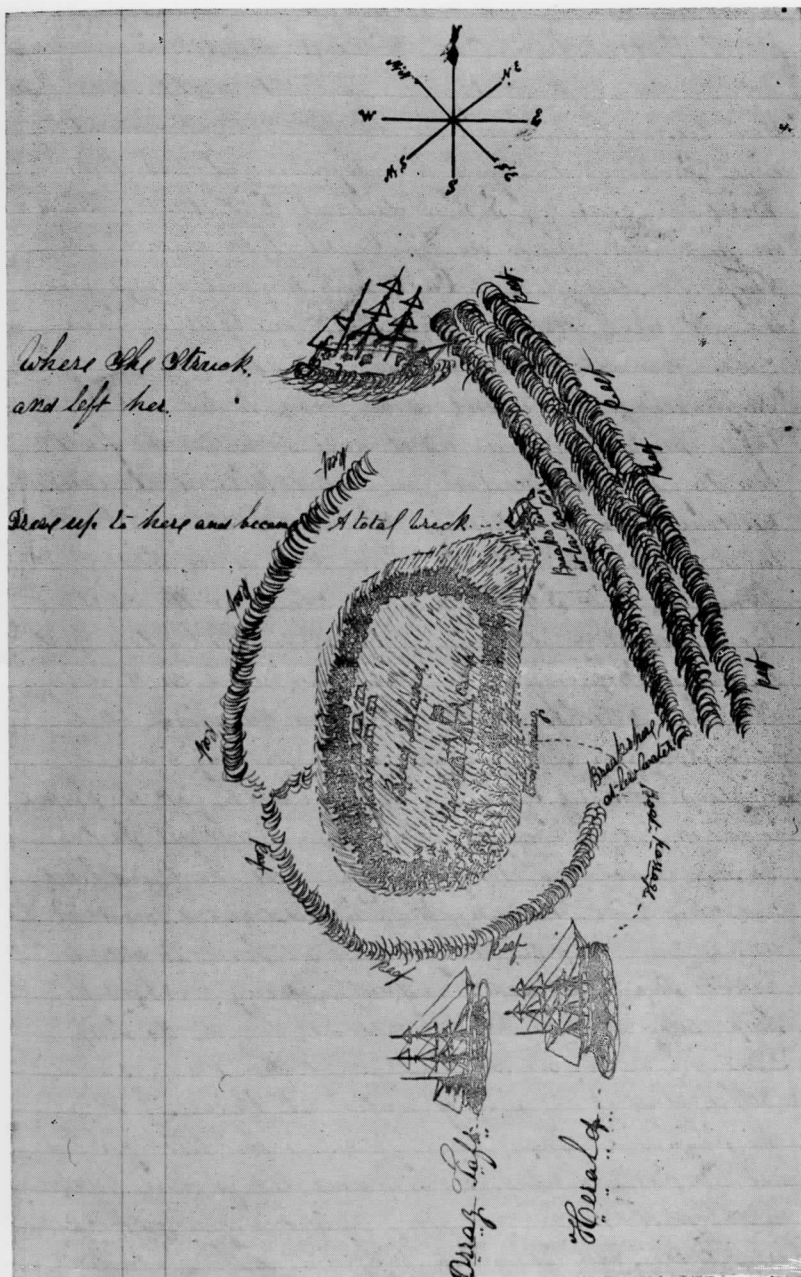
The North Tisbury Post Office, in the days when North Tisbury had a post office and a general store. Lily Adams was the postmistress.



The Menemsha school, and E. Elliott Mayhew's store before the days of indoor plumbing, and before the road to Gay Head was paved.



Trapfishing in Menemsha Bight about 1910.



First officer Smith's drawing of the wreck of the Hecla on Bird Island.

LOSS OF THE BARK HECLA

by

GEORGE F. SMITH

Remarks in regard to the loss of the Hecla.

Remarks Thursday December 29th. First part good breeze from N. West, at two P.M. Sighted Bird Isl. and Steered for the Isl. With nearly all Sail Set, until Five P.M. then luffed by the wind to the Westward, at Sunset took in light Sails, and reefed the Topsails, at that time the Bird Isl. bearing S. West, distant Six Miles. Stood on the Western tack until Eight P.M. then wore ship heading N. N. East with a good breeze from the N. West under reefed topsails, courses, two jibs, Fore Topmast Staysail, Spanker & Gaft Topsail. Supposing the Current to be going to the N East three miles per hour as it had been for the past two days, but the Current had turned its course Suddenly to the South. Stood on the N. N. Eastern tack until Ten thirty P. M. then wore ship heading W by S $\frac{1}{2}$ South and stood on the last tack mentioned until two A.M. the Orders were to ware ship again at that time and in so doing the Ship Struck on the Reef on the North end of Bird Isl. All hands were immediately called on deck. Third Officer had the Watch. Got the Ship to the wind heading N E by North. Made all sail on Ship in hopes to drag her off, but the third time she Struck it unhung the Rudder and made it useless. had to work the for and aft sails in order to keep the Ship to the wind, and in so doing worked the Ship along Four times her length, the Ship striking heavy all the time. Tryed the Pumps and could not free the Ship of Water. at three A.M. the ship was hard and fast on the reef. furled all the Sails, bent Port cable and let go Port Anchor to stop the Ship from going into heavy breakers. at Four A.M. the Ship Bilged, and the Water was above the Cabin floor, and the only remaining thing for us to do was to Save our lives and what clothing we could for the Ship was going to pieces.

We put our things into the Boats with what Sails we could Save off the yards and landed them on Bird Isl. and then went back to the Ship and stopped on bord until all three Masts went by the bord then we were obliged to leave the Wreck for the Sea was breaking clear over her.

So ends this day.

Friday 30th. Pitched our Tents on the Isl. and went to the North part of the Isl. to look at the Wreck, and found She was going to pieces very fast. Saved three casks of Oil with our boats as it was drifting by the Isl. during the day the Barks Orray Taft & Herald anchored on the South Side of the Isl. to render assistance. In the afternoon the Capt. & First Officer got on bord of the Ship through the breakers by a rope made fast to the Ship and cut the Port Cable in hopes the Wreck would drive higher up. We tried to save a cask of bread to eat while on the Isl. but could not stop on bord it being so rugged, so left the Wreck and went back to camp. At Eleven Oclock Friday night Capt. First & Second officers went to the Wreck, found she had altered her position considerable and was still going to pieces and continuing to drive higher up. Wind blowing fresh with heavy rain Squalls, Thunder & Lightning from N. West to North.

Saturday 31st. Still blowing fresh from the N. West and rainy. At Eight Oclock had hard Bread & Coffee and raw eggs for breakfast. At Eight thirty A.M. all hands went to the Wreck. Cut a large hole in the deck in hopes to get out some oil. See only one cask and could not get it out, a heavy sea breaking over the wreck all the time. At Eleven Oclock had to leave the Wreck, it was blowing a heavy Gale from the N. West. Herald & Orray Taft put to Sea remainder of the day, blowing a Gale. Ship still working to pieces and driving higher up. Suppose the Oil to be about all Stove to pieces for we picked up a great many bung staves. So give up this day and went into Camp to enjoy Camp life. Hard old enjoyment.

Remarks Sunday January 1st. 1871.

A new Year commenced and I hope it will prove a more successful one to me than the last. All hands got breakfast and went to the wreck. Got all the yards and Davits on shore, two casks of Flour, five coils of Tow line one cask of bread and other things. Worked until two Oclock then it got so rugged had to leave for Camp. Got dinner and loafed the rest of the day it remaining pleasant overhead. Herald and Orray Taft in sight off the north end of Isl. distant Eleven miles. So ends.

Remarks Monday Jan. 2nd. All hands went to the Wreck and saved some provisions, towline & three casks of Oil.

Remarks Tuesday Jan. 3rd. Commencing pleasant, all hands took their traps and repaired on bord the good Ships Herald & Orray Taft. Bound to Wake Isl. where we received a great deal of

kindness from Cpts. Officers & Crew.

So ends the Hecla's Voyage.

Editor's notes.

The bark Hecla sailed from New Bedford on a sperm whaling voyage to the Pacific Ocean August 31, 1869. She was a small vessel of only a little over 160 tons. Frederick H. Smith was her master and George F. Smith her first officer.

It was George F. Smith who kept the official log of the voyage. The logbook containing it is in the library of the Dukes County Historical Society, and is the gift of H. W. Downs, Jr.

The last entry in the log was made December 29, 1870 and reads as follows; "Remarks Thursday Dec. 29th. First part good breeze from the N. West at 2 P.M. saw Bird Isl. Sailed for it, at sunset shortened sail the Isl. bearing S. West 6 miles. Ship on Western tack." And there the log ends.

Just below that final entry there is this in different handwriting and ink; "Old Hecla is gone and I feel glad."

The continuation of the log of the Hecla, and the story of the wreck and the map showing Bird Island and the position of the wreck, are found in the back pages of a journal for a voyage of the bark Rose Pool of Edgartown. The Rose Pool journal was kept by George F. Smith, and so is the story of the wreck. There is no mistaking Mr. Smith's handwriting. Why the story of the wreck is continued in the Rose Pool journal rather than in the Hecla logbook is probably one of those questions that will never be answered. The Rose Pool journal is also in the Society's library.

Bird Island is a speck of land in latitude 22°20' north latitude, and longitude 160° west. It is usually considered to be the north-westernmost of the Hawaiian Islands, and according to the ninth edition of the Encyclopedia Britannica "a mere haunt of sea-fowl." Mr. Smith was from Holmes Hole.

The photographs of Chilmark and Menemsha are from the collections of Mrs. Everett A. Poole, Arthur Bailey, Miss Ethel Wood, and others.

The article by our historian, Mr. Hough, was read at a meeting of the Dukes County Historical Society on Aug. 30, 1938.

Some Publications of the Dukes County Historical Society on
Sale at Island Book Stores and in the Society's Library

Whaling Wives by Emma Mayhew Whiting and Henry Beetle
Hough. A new edition. 294 p., illustrated. Cloth \$4.50.

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

Capawack Alias Martha's Vineyard by Warner F. Gookin. 58
p. Cloth \$1.00.

Martha's Vineyard A Short History and Guide. Eleanor Ran-
som Mayhew, Editor. New 1966 edition with added index.
Maps and illustrations. Paper \$2.50.

The Wampanoag Indian Tribute Tribes of Martha's Vineyard
by Milton A. Travers. 78 p., illustrated. Paper \$2.00.

The Heath Hen's Journey to Extinction by Henry Beetle
Hough. 31 p., illustrations. Paper \$.50.

The Fishes of Martha's Vineyard by Joseph B. Elvin. 36
illustrations of fishes. Paper \$1.00.

The History of Martha's Vineyard by Charles Edward Banks.
A new edition (publication date September). Indices, illustra-
tions, three volumes. Cloth \$22.50.