The New Bedford, Martha’s Vineyard
And Nantucket Steamboat Company
by
Edward Law Thomas

Some Old Steamboat Excursion Fliers
The Hazards Of Seafaring - Martha’s Vineyard
1780 - 1827
from
Joseph Thaxter’s Records

Historical Society News

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The New Bedford, Martha's Vineyard And Nantucket Steamboat Company

by

EDWARD LAW THOMAS

Editorial Note:

Mr. Thomas teaches at the Martha's Vineyard Regional High School. This paper is actually Chapter Six of an almost book length "Study Of The Nantucket-Vineyard Ferry Lines - 1890-1948," a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of master of arts in history for the University of Rhode Island in 1966.

Mr. Thomas is a sailing enthusiast. In addition to taking advantage of the Vineyard's ideal opportunities for boating, he has taught sailing from his home on Hine's Point in Vineyard Haven.

From 1818 when the steamboat Eagle began a regular scheduled run between New Bedford and Nantucket, there had been a succession of steamboat companies as well as a number of privately owned steamboats serving the Islands. The New Bedford, Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket Steamboat Company was the result of a series of consolidations that had extended over a long period of years. In every case consolidation had been for the purpose of eliminating competition.

The Island Home at the Oak Bluffs wharf at Cottage City. The Island Home had been built in 1855 and thus was the oldest of the steamboat line's fleet of vessels. She was a fine sea boat and crossed Nantucket Sound many times in weather that would keep the present steamer Nantucket tied at the wharf.
The two most successful lines financially were the Nantucket and Cape Cod Steamboat Company, which ran boats directly to Hyannis, and the New Bedford, Vineyard and Nantucket Steamboat Company, which ran from New Bedford and Woods Hole. In 1886 as a result of a final consolidation the New Bedford, Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket Steamboat company was formed and Nantucket no longer had steamboat service to Hyannis. The new company served the Islands from 1886 to 1922.

The Monohansett was built in 1862, but before she had really begun her duty on the Island run she was chartered by the Federal Government as a dispatch boat. After returning from the war she served the Island faithfully for thirty-five years.

From 1886 to 1911 the Company was independently operated, but in 1911 it was absorbed by the New Haven Railroad. During its period of independence the Old Colony Railroad held shares in the steamboat company and these were taken over by the New Haven Railroad when it leased the Old Colony in 1893.

In 1886, however, there was no indication that the steamboat line would not continue to exist as a strong and independent business organization. The directors of the newly consolidated boat line, strengthened by combined capital and equipment and by elimination of competition, prepared to handle the ever increasing passenger and freight business to and from the Islands. The excursion business was also profitable and the board soon decided on a ship replacement program. In 1886 it was voted to construct another steamer to replace the thirty-one year old Island Home on the run to Nantucket. The Monohansett was on a regular schedule making a daily round trip from New Bedford to Edgartown with stops at Woods Hole, Vineyard Haven and Cottage City. For Nantucket, the Island Home, later replaced by the Nantucket, sailed from Wood's Hole to the island one day and returned the next. Advertising referred to the two routes as the Old Colony Line of the New Bedford, Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket Steamboat Company.

In 1890 the directors of the steamboat company ordered construction of a new steamer to replace the Monohansett which had been built in 1862. The Gay Head was launched and went into service in July, 1891. With the completion of the Gay Head, patrons of the Fall River Line were advised that two boats a day made round trips to the Vineyard and one a day to Nantucket.

Six vessels - River Queen, Martha's Vineyard, Island Home, Monohansett, Nantucket and Gay Head - were owned at one time by the New Bedford, Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket Steamboat Company. Although detailed records are unavailable, the Company initiated summer excursion trips to
supplement income from the ferry business. Gay Head at the northwestern tip of the Vineyard with its high varicolored cliffs, the Indian town, and the splendid views of Vineyard and Block Island Sounds, was a popular spot to visit in the nineties. A wharf was constructed on the Vineyard Sound side, and after climbing the cliff, excursionists were carried in ox carts to the Life Saving Station and to the lighthouse with its famous Fresnel lens. No trace of the Gay Head wharf remains today.

![Image of the River Queen](image1)

*The River Queen again. This time at the wharf at Cottage City.*

While records for the Company have been unavailable, the Old Colony Railroad Company ledgers show that its organization did $8,050.07 worth of passenger business with the Vineyard line during 1893. The steamboat company was the regular mail carrier for the Islands, and $7,850 for the Nantucket route, and $3,000 for the Vineyard mail were paid by the Post Office Department to the boat company. These two figures represent income in addition to ferry and excursion fares and were probably typical from 1886 to 1893. The financial ability and the need to build the two new steamers *Nantucket* and *Gay Head* indicate that the boat line was enjoying a period of prosperity. It was not because of financial setbacks that the Company was to lose its independence and individuality.

With the consolidation of the steamboat lines, the shares of the Nantucket and Cape Cod Steamboat Company, and of the New Bedford, Vineyard and Nantucket Steamboat Company were exchanged for an equal number of shares in the new New Bedford, Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket Steamboat Company. The Old Colony Railroad Company became the largest shareholder in the new company with three hundred and ninety-seven shares of stock worth $15,340.83 in 1886. While the railroad had previously arranged a working agreement with the old NBVN Company, it now had a more direct stake in the steamboat operations. However, the Old Colony directors were perfectly content to allow the steamboat directors a great deal of independence. The Old Colony officials were more concerned with the expansion and operation of the railroad system.

![Image of the Martha's Vineyard](image2)

*The Martha's Vineyard bound out of Vineyard Haven Harbor. Built in 1871 the Martha's Vineyard served the Islands for more than forty years.*

While the Old Colony Railroad was building its tight little railroad and steamboat empire in southeastern Massachusetts, it was well aware of the strongest threat to its position. That threat was the New York, New Haven and Hartford Railroad. The New Haven was gradually working its way toward Boston by lease, purchase, and the merger of smaller roads, just as the Old...
Colonial had done in its own area. And as will be seen, it was the growth and financial ambition of the New Haven which finally brought the independence of the Island steamboat line to an end.

To forestall the New Haven's attempt to acquire tracks into Boston from the south, the Old Colony Railroad leased the Boston and Providence Railroad in 1888. Then the Old Colony controlled all the railroad approaches to Boston from the south, completely preventing the New Haven from entrance into the city. That was the trump card in the battle between the two railroads. And the New Haven knew that it must get into Boston. It was the larger and richer of the two railroads, and it soon made the Old Colony an offer that proved irresistible. It guaranteed the Old Colony a 7½% return on Old Colony stock, and an exchange of stock at the rate of nine New Haven shares for ten shares of Old Colony. On March 13, 1893 the Fall River Line Journal announced the consolidation of the two railroads. The Massachusetts railroad was designated as the Old Colony Division of the New York, New Haven and Hartford Railroad. The Old Colony ceased active railroading but continued its existence as an investment and holding company. The New Haven had indeed found its way into Boston.

Since the Old Colony Railroad had been authorized to acquire capital stock of the Old Colony Steamboat Company and had done so, the New Haven gained control of various Old Colony steamboat lines at the same time it acquired control of the railroad. Although the New Bedford, Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket Steamboat Company was not owned by the Old Colony Railroad, the Old Colony's shares were taken over by the New Haven railroad. The New Haven bought three additional shares of stock in 1894 to hold an even four hundred shares, or 28% of the Island steamboat line. But because the Island line had never actually been a part of the Old Colony Steamboat Company, it did manage to retain quite a large measure of independence even after the consolidation took place.

The Gay Head coming in to a landing. Built in 1891 she was the largest of the Islands' paddle wheel steamers.

The River Queen had been sold in 1891, and in 1895 and 1900 the steamboat company sold the Island Home and the Monohansett. In 1902 the line's last paddle wheel steamer and first steel-hulled vessel, the Uncatena was launched, and so the line still had four steamboats in active service.

In 1903 the beginning of increased regulation by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts took place when the Board of Railroad commissioners was given authority to regulate freight and passenger fares of the steamboat companies. The counties had had this authority, but since they had not rigidly exercised it, the steamboat lines had actually enjoyed a great deal of freedom in setting rates. But this freedom seems never to have been abused by the Island lines. However, two years later a formal hearing was held in Boston in regard to rates and fares. The hearing revealed some of the problems of the steamboat company. The counsel for the company stated that one way tickets for the two preceding years had accounted for twenty per cent of
passenger receipts or seventeen thousand dollars. This indicates total passenger receipts for two years of $85,000.

When the subject of excessive freight rates was under discussion the Company stated that over a six year period it had lost $41,000 on freight to the Vineyard, and $66,000 on the Nantucket run. That was no trifle, but it must be remembered that the old steamboats were primarily passenger vessels. Almost all heavy freight such as now comes to the Islands on the ferry then came by schooner and barge. To partially make up for the loss on freight the steamboat company received $10,692 for transporting the mail to the two Islands.

The *Uncatena* was the last of the paddle wheel steamers built for the Island line, and also the first steel hulled vessel. She was a very able and popular boat, most passengers preferring her to the *Sankaty*, the line's first propeller vessel, which was built in 1911.

Increasing costs, and losses incurred on carrying freight may have led the directors to consider the advantages of being allied with a larger corporation. Also, the cost of the propeller steamer *Sankaty*, built in 1911 to replace the *Nantucket* may have strained the resources of the Company to the limit. In any event, in the fall of 1911 the New Bedford, Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket Steamboat Company was sold to the New York, New Haven and Hartford Railroad.

Although the name of the steamboat line was retained the character of the company changed. It lost its individuality and native flavor and became merely another part of the New Haven Railroad empire. Nothing reflects this more than the membership of the board of directors. In early 1911 the board consisted of five New Bedford men, two from Boston, one from Nantucket and one from Vineyard Haven. By 1922 when the company was absorbed into the New England Steamship Company, a subsidiary of the New Haven, all but two of the directors were from Connecticut or Boston. 1911, then, marked the beginning of the end of the Island steamboat company as a locally controlled and operated enterprise.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Some Old Steamboat Excursion Fliers

These fliers, or handbills, are from a collection of more than a hundred pasted in an old steamboat company freight ledger. Excursions to Gay Head seem to have been by far the most popular, but there were also excursions to Nantucket, to Newport and up the Sound past the beautiful "Elizabeth's Isles – Cuttyhunk and Penikese, Nashawena, Pasquenese, Great Naushon and Nonamessett, Onkatonka and Weepecket."

There were moonlight excursions, basket picnic excursions, excursions to the yacht races off Brenton's Reef. There were excursions with brass band and excursions with orchestra. And because there is nothing new under the sun there were excursions from Hyannis to witness Illumination Night at Cottage City. There were even excursions to "quaint old Edgartown." And there were excursions to the Vineyard from Nantucket – "See the beautiful sister island" – and from New Bedford, from Mattapoisett, from Hyannis, from Onset and from Falmouth Heights and from "Woods Holl."

There is no indication of who made this collection, but it is valuable, not only for the fliers but because it also contains more than a hundred boat schedules – summer schedules, winter schedules and in between schedules.

FAMOUS
GAY HEAD!

SATURDAY, August 28th, 1886, (WEATHER PERMITTING)
Steamer ISLAND HOME,
Capt. N. H. Master,
Leaves Cottage City 9 A. M.
Highlands 9:10 A. M.
Vineyard Haven 9:30 A. M.

The sail is one of the loveliest along the American Coast, on the one side skirting the shores of the Vineyard, with its beautiful scenery; on the other the noted Islands Naushon and Pasque, where the New York Club Houses are located; Vineyard Sound, the great Metropolis for thousands of vessels, often time one hundred or more are seen on these trips.

Fare for the Excursion 50 Cents.

E. T. Pierce, Agent.

STANDARD PRINT.
FIRST EXCURSION
OF THE
New Steamer
NANTUCKET
Capt. CHAS. C. SMITH,
TO
GAY HEAD,
Friday, July 30.
Leave Wharf 1.30 P. M.
Fare 50 Cents.

CLAM BAKE
AT
WESTPORT.
Thursday, Aug. 4,
(WEATHER PERMITTING.)
Steamer
ISLAND HOME,
Capt. N. H. MANTER,
LEAVE WHARF
At 9 A. M.
The Sail to this Charming little Village embraces a look at Nonquitt, with its Clustered Cottages, a good view of Dumpling Rocks and Round Hills, Misham and Barney's Joy, passing in sight of the Hen and Chickens Light Ship and the now noted and fast growing resort, Horse Neck. Giving ample time to get a good old-fashioned Clam Dinner.
Fare for the Trip, 50c.
E. T. PIERCE, Agt.

STANDARD PRINT.
Old Colony Railroad.

EXCURSION FROM HYANNIS TO COTTAGE CITY TO THE GRAND ILLUMINATION SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 4, 1886.

There will be an extra passenger train leave Hyannis for Woods Hall on above date at 4:30 p.m. connecting with the boat at Woods Hall for Cottage City. Returning leave Cottage City at about 9:45 p.m. or after the fireworks.


**PASSENGERS** can go to Cottage City on any regular train during the day and return by the special train at night.

**EXCURSION TICKETS** at reduced rates will be on sale Saturday, Sept. 4: Hyannis and Yarmouth to Cottage City and return $1.00, Barnstable and West Barnstable do. 1.06, Sandwich and Sagamore do., 1.15, Bourne and Bourne do. 1.05, Buzzards Bay, Monument Beach, Pocasset, Cataumet, North Falmouth and West Falmouth do. 1.00, good to return on the late train Saturday night or the regular Sunday train.

J. R. KENDRICK, Gen. Manager.
C. H. NYE, Division Supt.

HYANNIS, September 1, 1886.

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GRAND OLD NEWPORT

View the City where wealth congregates during the warm season; where all the odd and new style of Equipages can be viewed; where summer cottages are built to cost hundreds of thousands of dollars; where a beautiful drive can be had around ten miles of cliffs, lashed by the heaving and sporting surf. The finest harbor on the coast, frequented by hundreds of elegant Yachts.

**Wednesday, Aug. 3d,**

(WEATHER PERMITTING)

Steamer ISLAND HOME,
Capt. N. H. MANTER,

LEAVE
Falmouth Heights, - - 7:20 A.M.
Vineyard Highlands, - - 7:50 A.M.
Oak Bluffs, - - 8:00 A.M.

Fare for the Trip, **$1.00**

E. T. PIERCE, Agent.
Joseph Thaxter came to the Vineyard in 1780 as the pastor of the Edgartown Congregational Church. He was then thirty-six years old and he was a physician as well as a clergyman. In a brief autobiographical sketch he tells us that he had done all in his power to further the cause of American independence. And when separation from the mother country did come he played an active part. He fought at the battle of Concord Bridge. He was the chaplain at the battle of Bunker Hill. And he served as both chaplain and surgeon with the Continental Army until he was wounded during the retreat across New Jersey.

For all the almost forty-seven years of his pastorate of the Edgartown Church, Thaxter kept a careful record of the deaths that occurred in the town, a total of 773. For most of those deaths he has brief comments which throw an interesting light on the life on the Island during those years.

This paper, as the title indicates, will deal only with the deaths of Edgartown seamen, although Thaxter's comments regarding many who did not go to sea are quite as valuable historically. For those statistically minded, the figures are also interesting. Of the total of 773 deaths 124 are of infants less than a year old, a terrifically high infant mortality rate. The death rate among children two and three years old was also very high, with a great many attributed to scalds and burns, the result, no doubt, of playing with the kettle swinging on the crane, or of crawling or falling into the fire.

The deaths of young women in "child bed" were also cruelly high. But the most astounding, the almost unbelievable, figures are those for the young men of Edgartown who died at sea, or as the result of seafaring, of diseases contracted in the tropics and in steamy Southern ports, mainly yellow fever, and what Thaxter calls Georgia fever, which was probably malaria. We said young men, for it was almost exclusively the young men who went to sea, boys in their early teens, and men in their twenties and thirties. A few men did continue seafaring into middle age, but only a few. Most retired while still at an early age to the family farm, or to shops and crafts ashore, and their younger brothers and their sons took their places on the water.

Seafaring included fishing, coasting, merchant voyages to all the far ports of the world, and increasingly in the later years of Joseph Thaxter's life, whaling. Almost all of the vessels were small - sloops, schooners, topsail schooners and brigs. It was only with whaling that ships in any number began to call Edgartown their home port. Over and over in these records we find Thaxter saying, "Struck overboard and drowned." That means struck overboard by the boom, for in those small vessels with a following sea there was always the possibility of an unintentional jibe. Also, many of those vessels were flush deck which made going overboard very easy.
Between those years, 1780 and 1827, 128 of the young men of Edgartown lost their lives as the result of seafaring, a mortality figure even higher than that of infants in their first year. If the life, then, was so very dangerous, and it was, why did the young men go to sea? The answer is that that was how the Vineyard lived. Almost all of the wealth of the Island in those days came from the sea and there really wasn’t much else for a young man to do.

The obverse of this terrible picture of early death is that if a man or woman reached the age of forty or so, past childbearing and past the dangers of the sea, the chances of reaching a ripe old age were good indeed. 140 of the deaths that Thaxter recorded were at an age of seventy or older. And of 140 seventeen reached the age of ninety or over. But the early years were something else again.

Parson Thaxter’s records are in chronological order. But sometimes it took months and even years for the notice of the death at sea to reach home and then the chronological order is broken. The format of the records is more or less as follows: the number of the death, the date, usually the age of the individual, the name, and finally the cause of the death, or a comment, or both. The editor has changed that order a little so that the record will not read quite so much like a catalog.

Thaxter notes that for the years 1781-1783 fifteen Edgartown men lost their lives at sea or died in British prison ships. Thaxter only lists Edgartown deaths. Edgartown then included all of what is now Oak Bluffs, the communities of Farm Neck and Eastville. But the deaths at sea must have been proportionally quite as great for the other Island towns, Tisbury and Chilmark, for seafaring was the way of life of the whole Island and not just of Edgartown.

The opening tragedy in this long record is the loss of a ship on Gay Head in which seven Edgartown men lost their lives. One of them was Bayes Norton. And because what happened to a man’s family when he was lost at sea in those days so long before Social Security was one of the hazards of seafaring, the notice of the death of Dorcas Norton, Bayes Norton’s widow, long after, has been included here.

There is a song commemorating the loss of that ship on the rocks of Gay Head. It was published in its entirety in the February 1964 issue of the Dukes County Intelligencer, all twenty-one stanzas of it. Here is the opening stanza again.

On the fourteenth day of January last
Be sure it was a dismal night
The famous ship away was cast
It was sometime before 'twas light.

The acting editor has not been able to find the name of the “famous ship.” And there is a discrepancy between the date of the wreck as given in the song, January 14th, and January 17th, the date in the record. The reason for that is that until February 16, 1808 Thaxter’s dates are all for the day of the burial. After that they are for the day of death.

So here are some of the entries from Joseph Thaxter’s record, of the deaths at sea or as the result of seafaring, during those years between 1780 and 1827.

January 17, 1782. Matthew Butler, Samuel Wiswell, Bayes Norton, Samuel Fish, Jethro Norton, Isaac Bunker. They all perished in a ship cast away at Gay Head. Bayes Norton and Isaac Bunker were not found; the rest were brought to the meeting house and buried in the New Burying Place, which were the first laid there. They left four widows and twenty four fatherless children & Mrs. Butler near the time of her lying in. 9 of our people were saved and three that belonged to the ship. The rest, 8, perished. Bayes Norton and Isaac Bunker were found afterwards and buried in Chilmark.

May 29, 1784. Bema Cousins Norton killed on board a ship; in letting go the anchor he was caught in the cable. (aged 24)

Dec. 15, 1786. Nathan Smith and Cornelius Smith. Two sons of Ebenezer Smith Esq. perished being cast away at Marshfield near the North River. (aged 17 and 24)

Dec. 23, 1790. Thomas Butler son of Silas. In Surinam. (aged 24)

June 5, 1791. Lemuel Weeks in the West Indies. (aged 23)

February 1793. Abraham Smith. Killed in the West Indies by a fall from the mast. (aged 23)

October 15, 1793. John Coffin, son of Daniel Coffin, by a fall from the ship’s yard. (aged 20)

February 1794. Abraham Whaley, Robert Fish, John Survash died in the West Indies (aged 22, 20, and 15) August 1794. William Rawson, James Banning and Bartlett Butler, died at sea, Georgia fever. These three were with Capt. Thomas Coffin. (aged 18, 18 and 14). Huxford Marchant, Silas Butler Jr., Daniel Norton in the West Indies. (aged 20, 21, and 15) September 1794. Richard Hall in Carolina. (aged 24) Seth Pease in the West Indies (aged 25)


May 17, 1799. Eddy Coffin Jr. At sea on his passage from Havana. (aged 23)

April 1800. Henry Osborn son of Henry Osborn (and) Jared Worth son of Jethro Worth. Both died at Havana about July 1799. (both aged 18)

July 13, 1800. Jonathan Daggett with yellow fever in Georgia. (aged 24)

April 1800. Gamaliel Fish & William Dunham. They both left wives in a state of pregnancy. Dunham’s wife delivered of twins July 15 both boys.

October 1801. Christopher Beetle, son of William, died in Virginia Sept 11 of yellow fever. (aged 14)

Sept. 2, 1801. George Corliss Pease the deaf and dumb son of Wm Pease fell overboard and drowned in the English Channel. (aged 32)

Feb. 1802. Tristram Cleveland. he fell overboard and was eaten up by an alligator in the harbor of Batavia. (aged 31)

April 15, 1803. Ralph Ripley son of Joseph Ripley. He with Barrlett
Fisher and Coatney were fishing; they were driven by wind and tide under Squibnocket where they lay in an open boat in a violent gale of wind and storm all night; the next morning they drifted to Noman’s Land where Ripley drowned but the others saved. (aged 16)

June 1, 1804. Henry Coffin son of James Coffin was struck overboard and drowned on his passage to Europe. (aged 20)

Dec. 6. John Sprague was struck overboard about a mile from Nantucket Bar and drowned. Found the last of May on Nantucket Point and buried there. (aged 55)

July 1, 1804. Henry Coffin son of James Coffin was struck overboard and drowned on his passage to Europe. (aged 20)


April 1806. Benjamin Worth at sea.

May 1806. Fraser Banning son of James Banning perished at sea on their passage to England. (aged 20)

October 1806. John Wheldon died in March while on a whaling voyage in the India seas. (aged 43)

Feb. 23, 1808. Nicholas Norton. In piloting a vessel he was struck overboard the back of Cape Cod and drowned.

March 1811. Jonathan S. Smith son of Benjamin Esq. was lost at sea.

July 15, 1813. John Marchant died at Sierra Leone; he went out on a privateering cruise and was taken and carried in. 1/3 of the crew died. 28 out of 86.

1812. Gamaliel Marchant and George Marchant both lost at sea. (Both aged 15)

July 3, 1815. Joseph Thaxter Jr. was drowned on the south side of Nantucket. By the care of the Rev. Mr. Swift he was kept till the 19th and then brought home and buried the 20th. Blessed God, I bow; thy will is done.

August 1818. Charles Norton, son of Wm Norton drowned April 3rd. A whale stove the boat and before relief could get to him he sunk. (aged 25) May 1818. John Crossman, son of Peleg on a whaling voyage, he fell from the maintopmast yard into the sea and was drowned. (aged 23)

March 20, 1820. Received news that Leonard Jernegan was lost in the Gulf Stream. The Schooner upset & he with forty five passengers and crew perished on the 5th of March. His mate and one seaman were taken from the wreck on the 8th.

March 30, 1822. Received news of the death of Tristram Cleveland, drowned in the Pacific Ocean. He was the son of Joseph and Matta. (aged 19)

Sept. 9, 1822. Received news of the death of Henry Cooke son of Littleton Cooke who died at Batavia.

July 2, 1823. Martin Arey died at Valparaiso, S. America. He was master of the ship Apollo. (aged 32)

March 22, 1824. Received news of the death of William Fellows son of Daniel Fellows. He was in the Almira, Capt. Daggett, Pacific Ocean. (aged 21)

May 3, 1824. Dorcas Norton widow of Bayes Norton who was drowned at Gay Head, Jan. 16, 1782. She was left with six children, the youngest at her breast. A house and small garden was all she had; she brought up her family honorably without begging. She was a shining example of Christian virtue and died in good hope of eternal life.

Oct. 20, 1824. We heard of the death of Capt. Thomas Worth and William Beetle his mate in the ship Globe of Nantucket. They were murdered by the crew. One Comstock, a native of Nantucket was at the head of the mutineers; they fell out among themselves and killed Comstock. Gilbert Smith a son of John Smith Jr., when the mutineers were on shore cut the cable, put to sea with six men and got safe to Valparaiso. The mutineers when they killed Worth and Beetle threw a son of Abishai Lambert of Chilmark overboard and drowned him. Also a son of Amaziah Fisher.

April 11, 1825. Bartlett Fisher was struck overboard by the steering oar coming in to Washqua and drowned. He had only an Indian boy in the boat. He was a remarkable steady virtuous young man. His father Gamaliel Fisher perished at sea many years ago. (aged 27)

April 1825. Fordam Pease and Charles Coffin. They sailed in the ship Lady Adams. She has long been despaired of. It is thought they were lost about midsummer 1823. They were very promising young men. (aged 22 and 19)
Historical Society News

It was a busy summer at the Dukes County Historical Society -- no mistaking that! And our visitors came from such far away places as the Solomon Islands, Alaska, China, New Zealand, Thailand, Pakistan, Israel.

The August total in our guest book at the Thomas Cooke house was 2,348 and many others did not take the time to sign. Our summer total reached 5,273, which was a big increase over last summer’s total. There were 12 new members added and a new Life member -- Mr. Emil Kratovil of Greenwich, Conn.

In July it was decided to keep the Thomas Cooke house and library open during the noon hours to accommodate visitors on a limited time schedule. This was continued until after Labor Day when Debbie Belisle, Mrs. Hilda Giluley, Gale Huntington and our volunteer docent, Sandra Thornhill, wound up their summer stint, leaving Mrs. Bettencourt, librarian, and your curator to keep things in hand. Winter schedule hours are 1 to 4 Tuesday and Wednesday and 10 to 12, 1 to 4 on Saturday.

Two very helpful visitors to the Society showed their interest by contributing working hours during their summer vacations. They were Carl Austrian, of New York City, whose hobby is whaling, and Winfield B. Heinz, a Los Angeles engineer.

Mr. Austrian, whose scrimshaw work bears a close resemblance to that done by the whalermen, did much preservation work on the Society’s whaling implements, while Mr. Heinz cleaned, oiled and greased the Fresnel lens mechanism in the tower on the grounds. Mrs. Heinz is the former Susan Fuller, daughter of a former lighthouse keeper at Gay Head. The lens was operated each Sunday night during July and August by Domingoes Bettencourt, on the Society’s grounds in Edgartown.

Following the August annual meeting with Walter Teller speaking on Capt. Joshua Slocum, all officers, headed by Alfred Hall, president, were reelected. Mrs. Adeline Rappaport was added as a new Council member.

Accessions are a major item in our activities report. The Society prize is a handsome illustrated journal of the ship IRIS, on a whaling voyage from 1843 to 1847, kept by Richard Norton, grandfather of Mrs. Grace Norton Rosé, who generously presented the gift. The journal has the traditional whales stamped on the pages to indicate the catch and three of these valuable stamps recently were found in the Society’s collection of unclassified items. They are beautifully hand carved of wood and bear the name Russel Hancock, grandfather of Miss Esther Hancock, who came in one day and identified them.

Mr. Hancock, born on Quenames, made two whaling voyages, one on the Sea Ranger in the 1870’s, when he sailed as mate. He died in 1931, in his 90th year, according to Miss Hancock.

Other accessions: for our costume room, a roman striped brown silk taffeta dress with basque waist, full sleeves and skirt, c. 1880; a cream silk shirtwaist with high neck edged with lace and yellow velvet, of the same period, both from the wardrobe of Ellen Mary Cyr, (Mrs. Ruel P. Smith) author of children’s Readers published internationally by Ginn & Co. The Cyr summer home was on East Chop and the clothing, which also included two baby dresses, were the gift of her son, Ruel Smith.

Mrs. Janet Eastman Whitfield, granddaughter of Frank Newcomb, one time assistant postmaster of Brooklyn, N.Y., and a long time summer resident, gave a rare postcard of historic Eastville Inn, which Mr. Newcomb owned and operated from 1895 to 1922. She also gave an old postcard of Gay Head light, plus three photographs of the steamer Gay Head and Sankaty and the schooner Island City, wrecked off Highland wharf in 1898.

Miss Olive Hillman contributed a lovely Canton china plate from the Capt. Aaron Littlefield home and on the back of the plate, in faded ink, is the interesting inscription: "This plate came from the house in New London where Com. Decatur boarded when he went to N.Y. to fight Com. Barron." Com. Stephen Decatur, Naval hero of 1812, was killed in a duel with Com. Barron at Bladensburg, N.J. Mar. 22, 1820.

Roland C. Bettencourt brought in an elaborately beaded and fringed deer skin jacket, Eskimo made and brought home in 1907 by John Swartz on the Whaleship William Bailey.

A collection of Artist Amelia Watson material has been added to the Society archives by Miss Grace Meloney. Mrs. Chester Copp gave two stereo cards of the Oak Bluffs camp grounds where her grandfather was believed to have built the first cottage -- one room. Miss Gilberta Goodwin brought us three of her handsome and valuable water colors -- all of historic interest, since the places no longer are as pictured. They are of the coal wharf and fish houses in Edgartown and the soldiers monument in Oak Bluffs.

An elaborately engraved powder horn of 1756, used by Capt. Nathan Smith of Tisbury in the Crown Point expedition against the British, was given to Miss Hough by Mrs. Charles H. Brown and ownership had descended in a direct line from Capt. Smith to Mrs. Brown’s husband.

Poems of the late Ledyard Brown, printed privately after his death in February, are a contribution from his widow. He formerly was an editor of the Washington Star and for many years an Edgartown summer resident.

A bequest from the late Francis Foster, has added a collection of medals to the Society’s archives. Mrs. Charlotte L. Dyer has given a side saddle of the 1900’s used on the Vineyard by her mother, Mrs. Charles Leavitt, long time resident of Seven Gates. Mrs. Dyer also added a Vineyard harpoon and four Fiji weapons.

So -- until next issue next year,

Dorothy R. Scowille
Curator
Some Publications

OF THE DUKES COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY ON SALE AT ISLAND BOOK STORES AND IN THE SOCIETY'S LIBRARY.


Our Enchanted Island by Marshall Shepard. An attempt to prove that Martha’s Vineyard is the Island of Shakespeare’s Tempest. Paper, 50¢.


Tales and Trails of Martha’s Vineyard by Joseph C. Allen. 234 p. Illustrated. Paper $3.95. When ordering by mail please add 25¢ to cover postage and handling.