

THE DUKES COUNTY INTELLIGENCER

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The Dukes County Historical Society

1923 - 1973

by

Dorothy Cottle Poole

Memories Of Marshall Shepard

by

Henry Beetle Hough

DCHS News - Accessions

August 1973

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DUKES COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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 Dukes County Historical Society, Inc.
 Edgartown, Massachusetts

Fifty years ago this summer The Dukes County Historical Society was incorporated by a small group of people, almost all of whom were of Vineyard ancestry or of long Vineyard association, who had a deep and abiding love of the Island and its history.

In a small way this issue of the *Intelligencer* is a memorial to that group whose names follow, reproduced from the *First Annual Report of the Dukes County Historical Society*.

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The Dukes County Historical Society

1923 - 1973

by Dorothy Cottle Poole

The seed for the Dukes County Historical Society was planted in April 1921, when a small group of people, under the leadership of Marshall Shepard, of Edgartown, formed the Vineyard Bibliography Committee. The purpose of this group was "to preverse, to create greater interest in, and to make available for all, our Vineyard literature, published and unpublished."

This group asked the Vineyard librarians to band together for "greater cooperation and broader accomplishments," resulting in the Dukes County Library Association. At that time, one hundred eighteen titles of Vineyard literature were listed in a "moveable collection," which became the nucleus of the Dukes County Historical Society's library.

On October 23, 1922, the "Dukes County Historical Society, a corporation constituted for the purpose of collecting, preserving and occasionally publishing historical and analagous matter relating to the County of Dukes County," was duly organized at the public library at Oak Bluffs. Marshall Shepard presided. Francis Foster was elected temporary clerk and was sworn in by E. G. Eldridge, Justice of the Peace. A sketch of the proposed seal of the society was approved and the by-laws were submitted, discussed, modified and adopted. The officers, elected by ballot, were:-

President	Marshall Shepard
1st Vice President	William J. Rotch
2nd Vice President	Ulysses E. Mayhew
Secretary and Treasurer	Francis A. Foster

The Dukes County Historical Society was incorporated on July 12, 1923, with 27 charter members. That year there were eleven Life Members and 120 Annual Members. Fifty years later, there is a membership of 800, with 100 Life Members.

The society originally met from two to four times a year at the homes of members, or at one of the town libraries. A speaker, a special exhibit, or both, followed the business session. Reports on whaling were numerous, covering many aspects of that industry and often describing distant ports, as familiar to Vineyard whalers as Nantucket and New Bedford. Exploration, early settlement, the Norsemen, the Indians and, of course, the "first families" were some of the topics covered. Often exhibits were arranged to complement the lecture. To preserve the history and tradition embodied in these programs, the society frequently printed an address, verbatim, in pamphlets made available, not only to members, but to the general public.

In August 1959, this service was expanded by publishing *The Dukes County Intelligencer* "with the hope that it might be Vol. I, No. 1 of a quarterly publication," presenting brief articles of "general and scholarly interest" about Martha's Vineyard and the Elizabeth Islands. The current issue (Aug. '73) is Vol. XV, No. 1.

Besides these quarterly publications of its own, the society has published, or sponsored, two Guidebooks to the Island, three printings of a three-volume history of Martha's Vineyard, and numerous books and reprints. In the early days of the society, Miss Laura Pease suggested that records be compiled of "distinguished persons known to be of Vineyard ancestry." Whether or not Miss Pease made a list of "distinguished" persons, many Vineyarders have gained distinction and their records, when they appear in print, may be found in the society's library. A Hall of Fame was established in 1971 for Tisbury's Tercentenary and Dionis Coffin Riggs has incorporated and expanded those records into a book entitled, *People to Remember*, about to be published by the Dukes County Historical Society. Another current project, is an oral history, co-sponsored by the Council on Arts and Humanities, for the purpose of recording facts about the island which might otherwise be lost to posterity.

All preservation has not been of printed matter nor antiques for, very consistently, the society has "deplored vandalism" and has pledged itself to preserve old buildings and landmarks, "using its influence in favor of reconstruction rather than destruction."

The Thomas Cooke House, now 208 years old, is one example of this preservation. A one-third interest in the property was given

to the society by Ethelinda Mayhew and the remainder was purchased from the other heirs by dint of much determination and perseverance. When at last the mortgage was paid in full, one jovial member of the society suggested a song of praise to the tune, "Roll Out the Barrel," but the others agreed with Mrs. Emma Whiting that the *Doxology* would be more appropriate. The work continued; the house was repaired and island treasures were garnered to become part of the furnishings of the Thomas Cooke House, now a Vineyard museum.

The lighthouse tower on the grounds of the Cooke House is another instance of salvage. The tower is a replica of the top fifteen feet of the second tower, constructed at Gay Head in 1858-59. It was built to house the powerful Fresnel lens of 1003 prisms of polished crystal, whose light could be seen twenty miles at sea. In 1951, when the United States Government decided to replace this famous lens with an automatic beam powered by electricity, the society intervened to save it. As a result, the government gave the lens to the Dukes County Historical Society, the tower was erected and was dedicated on December 1, 1952, and the lens was first lighted in its new position 96 years from its activation. In 1956, a centennial lighting was observed with some of the Edgartown school children participating.

Not reconstruction, but certainly in the interests of preservation, was the erection of the fire-resistant library next to the tower, and the copy of the old church carriage shed built to shelter boats, fire-engine, and other large equipment. A dedication ceremony for the library was held in May 1954, when the Cape and Islands Historical Society visited Dukes County.

Soon afterwards, the replica of the tryworks of a whaleship was built behind the Cooke House, and this year a gatehouse has been added to the grounds to expedite the flow of visitors. An herb garden, box specimens and other plantings in the yard have all been in keeping with the old house, as are the plantings around the gatehouse, a memorial to Allen Gelinas, who for many years kept the grounds attractive.

Early in its history, the society purchased the Sampson Hill Meeting House property on Chappaquiddick. The building itself was not considered worth repairing as it had been wrecked by vandals and ensuing storms and was of no significant historic

value. But, besides being used as a gathering place for the "praying Indians," and later for Methodist "classes" and a non-sectarian summer chapel, Sampson's Hill was the site of a signal tower which, with similar ones on Nantucket, Muskeget, East Chop and Falmouth, announced the arrival of whaleships returning from years at sea. A native field stone, with a bronze plaque commemorating this fact, marks the site and the Chappaquiddick Association has volunteered to maintain the plot.

Such cooperation is the essence of conservation and many years ago the historical society pledged its cooperation to the Martha's Vineyard Garden Club in preserving island beauty spots. When the historic old building, which housed the Martha's Vineyard Chapter, D. A. R., was sold to the Dukes County Savings Bank, its treasures were entrusted to the historical society, where they are displayed in their appropriate settings. The society also helped the Seacoast Defense Chapter, D. A. R., to repair the Mayhew Chapel at Indian Hill and to keep open, during the summer months, the Nathan Mayhew Schoolhouse Museum in Vineyard Haven.

The accomplishments of fifty years must be condensed, but a few examples will suffice to show that the society has continued its original purpose.

For the Tercentenary of the Edgartown Congregational Society, the portrait of Thomas Mayhew, Jr., in the Congregational Library in Boston, was restored and delivered to Edgartown, on loan, at the expense of the Historical Society. When the *U. S. S. Constitution* was restored in 1930-31, the society furnished a plaque to be placed on the ship in memory of its builder, Colonel George Claghorn of Chilmark. Copies of the painting "Old Ironsides" by Gordon Grant, suitably inscribed, were purchased and presented to each schoolhouse in the county. Several times the Cooke House has been a part of the Open House Tour to benefit the Martha's Vineyard Hospital.

Articles for exhibition have been loaned to "responsible persons, any two officers of the society concurring," ever since the society's inception. Also, special exhibits have been arranged with study sheets for loan to schools and organizations. The *Intelligencer* is sent regularly to the High School and to all town libraries. For some time, the *Vineyard Gazette* worked closely with the Historical Society, printing each week a feature story

about some article or grouping to be seen at the museum. This educational trend extended to the Agricultural Fair where, for a number of years, the Historical Society had a booth featuring such things as "Farm and Home Implements of a Century Ago" or "Gothic Revival in Cottage City." Meanwhile, records are constantly up-dated, photographs are labeled and filed, printed matter is carefully catalogued, interviews are taped, and valuable documents are microfilmed as the society endeavors to augment its records and increase their availability, in accordance with its original purpose.

So, after a half century, we glance back briefly; but history does not stand still and neither must we. Today's events - colossal or trivial - will constitute tomorrow's history and it is important that the record be clear so that future generations may evaluate facts and build a better tomorrow upon the bedrock of today and yesterday. The Dukes County Historical Society asks your assistance and support in "collecting and preserving" these records.

Memories Of Marshall Shepard

by

Henry Beetle Hough

Marshall Shepard in the 1920's when the Dukes County Historical Society was aborning combined a gift for historical scholarship with sufficient leisure to pursue this interest consistently, and also with a quiet but twinkling sense of humor and a much longer and deeper Island background than most of his contemporaries realized. I remember him not only as a Vineyard historian of the first rank, which he was, but also as a good companion.

It was a congenial group who, as members of the Council of the Society, launched into historical discussions at every meeting, as if Vineyard history could be accounted a personal matter for each. Emma Mayhew Whiting, Laura Mayberry Pease, Ulysses E. Mayhew, Francis A. Foster, Marshall Shepard -- these and others with whom I was glad to be associated, formed a dedicated group, sharing the excitement of discoveries and making the Society's annual income of about \$300 seem entirely adequate.

Marshall Shepard was a grandson of Deacon Calvin Shepard who had been a paper manufacturer and a state senator from the town of Ashland. He was among those who selected the name "Ashland" which they took from that of the home town of Henry Clay whose protectionism in tariff policy they admired. Calvin Shepard moved to Taunton in later life and married as his second wife Harriet Fisher of Edgartown. He had already spent some time in Edgartown, and in the early 1880's he and his wife, Harriet, were living year-round in the Capt. Thomas Milton House, close by the famous pagoda tree.

It followed naturally that Marshall Shepard Sr., son of Calvin, should come to the Vineyard with his family for filial visits. One of these visits took place in 1886 when Marshall Shepard Jr. was 8 years old. In later years he remembered how he went out before supper while his younger sister was being put to bed, and how he ventured as far as the causeway to the Harbor Light which then

made a right angle before it took off from shore in a straight line. He would have liked to go all the way to the lighthouse, but he knew there wasn't time enough before supper, so he hurried back to rejoin the family. This was his own discovery of Edgartown.

His father, Marshall Sr., had attended the old North School in Edgartown for a time, and he had grown fond of the town. But he felt misgivings about any future as a summer resort since there were, as he saw it, no tourist attractions. Nevertheless, he decided to rent the Charity Norton house at the corner of North Water and Cottage Streets for a year-round rental of \$200, though his occupancy was limited to the summer season.

After seven summers, Mr. Shepard was won over to settling on a permanent establishment of his own, and he bought from Henry Ripley ten acres of land at Tower Hill. He contracted with Ellsworth Vincent, a noted Island builder, for a house to be built on plans drawn by Percy Griffin, a New York architect. His death occurred before the house was completed, and it was occupied by his widow and the children, Marshall and Eleanor.

Young Marshall made the most of the inviting opportunities of summers in Edgartown. He came to know the surviving whaling captains, their wives, the merchants, and the old time characters who bore an imprint of the Island's past. He was also given to adventure, and it was he who introduced the first naphtha launch -- as motorboats were then called -- to Edgartown harbor.

He always remembered how he stood at the end of North Water Street in the summer of 1896, looking across the open fields where the Harbor View and the Starbuck's Neck houses now stand, and saw the famous waterspouts in the Sound off Cape Pogue. He ran as fast as he could to the boathouse at the foot of Morse Street where a number of retired sea captains sat smoking and talking. They looked at him as he burst into the boathouse out of breath and told them about the waterspouts. They just sat and went on smoking.

Marshall became a great friend of Theodore Wimpenney, and together they invented a new type of boat mooring which could be screwed into the harbor bottom. They had the mooring patented, but it does not appear to have sold well. Anyway, Marshall acquired from Mr. Wimpenney a rich store of tradition and anecdote which would fit into a historian's retrospect of

Vineyard life.

For some years of separation from the Island, Marshall studied art in Europe, attended the Art Students' League in New York, and married a fellow student. He and his wife lived in Katonah, in New York City, and in Babylon, Long Island, before they decided to buy property at Long Hill in Edgartown and build the Long Hill Cottage, now, after enlargement through the years, the summer home of the Morton Feareys. Long Hill had been advertised for sale in 1881 with this description:

"House and 25 acres of Land overlooking the village of Edgartown, the Vineyard Sound, and surrounding country. Desirable location for cottages. This property, part of the estate of the late David Coffin, comprises a house in good repair and 25 acres of land, is located in the suburbs of Edgartown village, but three minutes walk from the railroad depot. . ."

Marshall had little use of the railroad, for it stopped running in 1896.

Finally settled year-round in Edgartown, he became chairman of the library trustees, serving for years, and on various town committees. He was the initiating spirit in the founding of the Dukes County Historical Society in 1923, and turned over to it much unique historical material. The handicap of the society in having no settled quarters was obvious, and when Miss Ethelinda Mayhew died in 1930 she left her share of ownership in the Squire Cooke House to fill this great need.

It turned out that two-thirds of the Squire Cooke property had to be bought from other heirs, and Marshall joined with others in a successful campaign for funds. He interested the late Elmer J. Bliss and Wilson G. Crosby in financing the purchase of Edgartown customs records which had been sold by the government as waste paper and stored in a basement subject to water damage. Mr. Bliss and Mr. Crosby helped in other purchases as well.

The first enterprise in which Marshall and I engaged was a visit to Aunt Rebecca Manter of Roaring Brook to check on a report that she had a complete file of Vineyard Gazettes. She was cordial but evasive, and she obviously didn't want us to visit the old Roaring Brook mill. After we left her we circled around through the trees and bushes and discovered her reason. The mill was a complete ruin, the roof fallen in, and any Gazettes stored there

must have been reduced to pulp and tatters long ago. We never knew whether Aunt Rebecca was really aware of the condition of the mill, or whether she didn't want to know, and didn't want anyone to tell her.

Marshall and I visited Moshop's Bed and Pillows, the Goat Rocks, and other monuments of the glacial era, and a number of times we turned out to investigate reports of newly discovered inscriptions or other phenomena. Once he asked me to go with him to see the late Mattie Modley who said she owned an important old document she was willing to sell to the Society. This proved to be a penciled copy of the Mayhew Family Tree, nicely done, and interesting to have at some small price, but with no importance whatever.

Miss Modley showed us the "document" and took us for a tour of her house, pointing out a piano and numerous other heirlooms, but she balked at naming a price for what she wanted to sell. Finally, after we seemed to have been at her house interminably, she said she would throw in the piano – and this, and this, and this, naming a number of other items – and sell the whole lot for something on the order of \$700. We said we would think it over.

Marshall theorized that Martin Pring, the explorer who came to the New England coast a year after Gosnold's naming of the Vineyard, had reached Provincetown and not Plymouth, as other historians believed. Provincetown had a harbor "winding like a shell" whereas Plymouth didn't. Some writers had tried to establish that Edgartown's harbor was the one, for it did wind, in a way; but Tower Hill made a poor Mount Aldworth, as Pring described it. Charles H. Brown had claimed Pring for Vineyard Haven, and Mount Aldworth there perpetuates his theory, though evidence lies overwhelmingly against Mr. Brown's notion.

Many and many a discussion Marshall and I had about Martin Pring, but we never convinced any of the mainland historians. Marshall also made a careful reconstruction of Gosnold's expedition, only to have it countered by a different interpretation by Warner F. Gookin who contended that Gosnold had deliberately misled those who might wish to follow him. Both Marshall and Mr. Gookin accepted the supposition that Cuttyhunk might have been taken for an island "sixteen English miles in compass," following the accepted version of the historian,

Belknap, who had fixed on Cuttyhunk because it had a large pond with an island. A more recent view is that the real island of Gosnold's fort was Naushon which has a great pond and a peninsula that could have been described as an islet.

But it was not the final proof that counted in any research, but the stimulus of discussion, the discovery of fresh sources, the pushing on from one historic fact or person to another in the Vineyard context.

Marshall concerned himself practically as well as in theory. He undertook to solicit subscriptions for the third volume of the Banks History which had long been in manuscript, and at times he went from door to door to make publication of the third volume possible.

His artistic ability often came to the fore as it did in his supervision of the design and casting of the tablet now on a mast of the frigate Constitution in memory of her master builder, Col. George Claghorn of Chilmark. He insisted that I go to Attleboro to check on the progress of the tablet, but there was nothing I could suggest. Everything was fine.

Marshall was still interested in Island history as he came to the slowing-up period of his life and his death in 1954 at the age of 76.

DCHS News

Summer activity is now at its height around the historical society, and a large number of visitors are enjoying their tours of the Thomas Cooke House, the Carriage Shed, the Fresnel Lens, and the Museum-Library. The most noticeable change this year is the gatehouse which controls entrance to the society's grounds and which is used as a convenient location to collect an admission fee of \$1.00 for adults and 50 cents for children. Island school groups, however, are still admitted without charge. Manuel Bettencourt, the gatehouse keeper, is keeping busy with the welcoming of guests (over 800 in June) and with the sales of our publications.

Other new staff members at the society this summer are Kathy Greeley, Kathryn Karmen, and Doug Ewing. Francis Phelan, Hilda Gilluly, and Allison Shaw have returned for another season, and Mrs. D. Osborn Bettencourt continues in her work as our reference librarian. In addition to the regular staff, we are very fortunate to have several efficient volunteers. Marian R. Halperin, our Registrar of Accessions, works a full day each week on her regular duties as well as on taking an inventory of the exhibits in the Thomas Cooke House. Peter Cannon, a recent graduate of Stanford University, is working regularly as our archivist, and Rachael Williams comes in for two mornings each week to devote her time to fund-raising. In June, Betsy McFadden skillfully replanted our herb garden, and the beauty of her work has resulted in many compliments.

In addition to the restoration of the herb garden, the month of June saw the accomplishment of several other important projects. The gatehouse and the landscaping around it was completed, and at the June meeting of the society's Council, Nelson Coon was officially commended for promoting the idea of the gatehouse and for supervising its construction.

After two months of work, the painting of the Thomas Cooke House was completed by Gerrit Conover and his able assistants, Bob Schwier and John Pine. All the windows were glazed; the trim was taken down to the bare wood, given a coat of primer and two coats of oil-based paint. All the doors were painted; several panes

of glass were replaced; and a number of other small repairs were made. Everyone is very pleased with the results. Earlier in the spring, the trim and the shutters of the library were painted by David Murphy and the curator. The inside appearance of the library has been improved by the addition of a supporting cabinet for the Howland scrimshaw collection. The cabinet, which was beautifully constructed by George Magnuson, also serves as a bookcase and now contains almost all the letter boxes that were downstairs. Thus, we have much more room in the basement and much easier access to our manuscripts. Funds for this project came from the donation given by Mr. and Mrs. Kenneth Stoddard for the refurbishing of the library.

The additional room in the basement came in handy, because the walls are now lined with 1,000 new sets of Charles E. Banks' *History of Martha's Vineyard*. This new printing is exactly the same as the 1966 edition except for three pages of addenda. The dark green covers and gold lettering are also unchanged from the earlier edition, and the three volume set can be purchased at the society for \$30.00 or it can be ordered by mail.

As the result of the article on George Welden in May's *Intelligencer*, we have received an interesting letter from Orin Lambert Romigh, who is the great grandson of Captain John A. Luce, the master of the Bark *America*. According to the legend as described in the last issue of the *Intelligencer* Captain Luce discovered after more than three months at sea that Welden was a female, disguised as a man and serving as one of his crew. Until now, little evidence existed to prove this story, but Mr. Romigh has written that he is the owner of the *America's* log and that there is indeed an entry indicating that George Welden was a woman. We hope that Mr. Romigh will be able to take a picture of the entry so that we can publish it. At least on this occasion, it will be possible to prove the authenticity of a folklore story.

Also in the last issue of the *Intelligencer*, we noted the need for more money to preserve the historic treasures that are in the care of the Dukes County Historical Society. The Council has therefore established the Thomas Cooke House Preservation Fund, which will be in effect on a permanent basis and will be used solely for the house and the exhibits within it. The simple fact of the matter is that we need money. Our income from various sources is

adequate to cover operating expenses, but there is not enough left over to properly take care of the Thomas Cooke House and many of the exhibits, such as the portraits, which need periodic attention. If our island heritage is to be preserved, we will need many contributors to this fund. A donation of \$25 will be acknowledged with a free copy of *Cap'n George Fred, Himself*, and contributors of \$100 or more will receive the new edition of Banks' *History of Martha's Vineyard*. Please send in whatever amount you can afford.

Thomas Norton, Curator.

ACCESSIONS, April -- June 1973

ARTIFACTS:

Two sections of *rail*, possibly from Martha's Vineyard Railroad, gift of Walter Blackwell.

Six tiny *walrus ivory animals* and a *fitted kayak model* brought from Labrador in 1879, gift of Miss Rachael Williams.

Pair of *shoes* belonging to Lucy Adams, donor's great-aunt, gift of Anna Wyn Novick.

BOOKS:

No Island Is An Island by Anne W. Simon, gift of Carla Godson.

PAPER AND MANUSCRIPTS:

Plan of the Highlands, gift of Clarence E. Blodgett.

PHOTOGRAPHS AND PRINTS:

Five *sepia photographs of Lucy and Sara Adams*, gift of Mrs. Philip Perham.

Marian R. Halperin, Registrar

Some Publications

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

The Mammals of Martha's Vineyard by Allan R. Keith. Illustrated, paper. 50¢.

Whaling Wives by Emma Mayhew Whiting and Henry Beetle Hough. A new edition. Illustrated. Cloth \$4.50.

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

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

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

The Heath Hen's Journey to Extinction by Henry Beetle Hough. Illustrations. Paper 50¢.

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