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The Old Highboy

BY DEIDAMIA OSBORN BETTENCOURT

Excerpts From Jeremiah Pease's Diary
from the Archives

Chilmark In The Year 1850
from the 1850 census

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 Edgartown, Massachusetts

The Old Highboy

by Deidamia Osborn Bettencourt

A folded paper, yellow with age, found tucked away in a small drawer, the writing not easily readable, is the basis for the fascinating story which follows. It has all the aspects of an Alfred Hitchcock movie; intrigue, spying, kidnapping etc., and it originates in the far off city of Dublin, Ireland.

There, more than 200 years ago, in 1702, a little girl named Hannah Sprowell was born. She was an only child, her parents were people of wealth and social standing, her father occupying the important position of High Sheriff of Dublin.

When very young she lost her mother. Her father's brother, realizing that he was next of kin should anything happen to Hannah, and upon the death of her father, he would inherit all the family property and wealth, decided to get rid of the child. So he plotted, and spied and bided his time.

Possibly her father conducted his official business in an office at the City Hall, for Hannah frequently accompanied him and played there. One day he announced that he had to go away on business and would be gone for several days.

This was just the opportunity the Uncle had been waiting for. He watched the City Hall every day, noting the comings and goings of all who entered. The day came when Hannah received permission from the housekeeper who had charge of her, to go as usual to her favorite playground, her father's office. The Uncle spied her, with her dolls clasped tightly in her arm, just about to go up the Hall steps. He stopped her, and told her, her father would never be back, that he had died, and it was his wish that she go to America and live. This news was more than a small seven year old could grasp, and she went willingly with her Uncle to the small sailing ship waiting at the wharf.

To the Captain however, it had been quite a different story. The Uncle had told him the child was an orphan who had been living with his family, that her name was Hannah Sprowell, and he wanted the Captain to find a good home for her in America, and he offered to pay him quite generously for her passage.

Thus a very bewildered little girl, snatched from the love and security she had known, and after crossing a great and turbulent ocean, finally arrived at the island of Nantucket, Massachusetts.

The Captain went immediately to a friend of his who kept a boarding house. He asked her if she would like to have a little girl to wash dishes and run errands, saying that he had one on board his ship who would, he thought, be just what she wanted. The woman consented to take the child, and so a new life began for Hannah. The woman soon realized that Hannah did not belong to the servant class, and questioned her as to her background, but, she never received any satisfactory answers. She decided to rear and educate her like one of her own children.

Meanwhile, back in the city of Dublin, a fruitless search was going on for the missing child. For days the church bells rang, and the people were called together to give their help in trying to find some trace of her, the perfidious Uncle also joined in the search. Of course she was never found, nor, as far as it is known, did they ever obtain any clue as to the mystery. It no doubt, hastened her father's death, for he lived only a few years after her disappearance, hoping to the very end she would be found.

When Hannah had grown to womanhood, there appeared one day in the town of Nantucket, a young sea Captain by the name of John Harper. It was not long before he and Hannah became acquainted, and it was found that he had come from the city of Dublin. Hannah then told him the story of her coming to America, just as the Captain of that sailing ship years ago, had told the story before his death, to the woman who had reared her. Then John Harper told Hannah of the circumstances connected with her early years in Dublin. About her Uncle who had finally inherited her father's wealth, how he had squandered it, and of the day he was thrown from his horse and killed. Hannah wept when she heard of the years her father had searched for her, and of his untimely death.

In due time Captain Harper and Hannah were married, the date was October 4, 1728, and moving to Martha's Vineyard set up their lares and penates in the little village of Edgartown.¹ A large family of nine daughters was born to them, the records of whose births may be found in the vital statistics of the town. Of those, however, we have only to do with one, a daughter named for her

mother, Hannah Sprowell Harper, and it was when she was 12 years old that the story of the old highboy really begins.

Now in those days, no self respecting young person would be guilty of taking a salt dip in the day time. Taffeta bathing suits and criss-cross stockings were unknown and undreamed of. Not so much as a little bare toe might run the risk of being seen even by old Sol himself. So when Hannah Harper and her friends wished to enjoy the pleasures of a sea bath, they quietly stole down to the beach in the early morning.

One bright moonlight night, with shoes and stockings off, Hannah and two of her friends were wading along the shore. Suddenly they spied a strange object drifting toward them, which upon investigation proved to be a beautiful piece of wood. They dragged it ashore, and all the other pieces floating in. They soon had a very large pile which they divided into three parts, one for each of them. Each of these piles was found to contain enough wood to make a highboy and a dining table, and it is Hannah's highboy which furnishes the subject of our story.

The village cabinet-maker told them the wood was mahogany, which had come from a ship wrecked off South Beach. The precious pieces of wood were committed to his care. Who this genius was, who carried his talent in his finger tips, we do not know, for while many of the artisans of those times employed some method of making their names known to posterity, it does not seem to have been so in this case, for no whisper of his name was ever made known. Think of it! Someone lived right here in this little hamlet of Edgartown - for it was only that in the 1750's. Who could fashion by hand, from one of the most beautiful of known woods, a piece of furniture, that after more than 200 years of service, still shows in perfection all its beautiful lines and curves, its brass handles, hammered and shaped also by hand, smooth, perfect in outline and unmarred by time?

The highboy stands over six feet in height. The drawers do not, as in many cases, continue to the floor. There are only five large ones, graduated in depth, with three smaller ones occupying the space of a sixth below, the front of these last being handsomely rounded and shaped on the lower edge.

The drawers rest upon a table or stand about three feet high, the supports being so gracefully curved and as beautifully finished

as a piece of Chippendale. On some of the edges there is a light molding, and at the top the entire piece is crowned with an ornamental finish.

Time has thrown a shadow over the lustre of its polish, and here and there on surface, corner or edge, may be found the irregularities that are the hallmark of its years. Safe within the home of little Hannah's great-granddaughter it stood for years, with its air of unruffled dignity, perhaps dreaming of the centuries past, and facing calmly, it may be, the centuries to come.

¹ The year that John Harper and family came to Edgartown, he purchased a house and lot on the harbor front.

The Kelley House of today is on the site of a hostelry that is over a century old. It is on the northerly half of the original Bayes home lot, which descended to the Newcombs, and was bought by John Harper from their heirs in 1743.

He began keeping a tavern there in 1748-1771. He was succeeded by his son-in-law Lemuel Kelley, 1772-1787. Bathsheba Kelley (widow of Lemuel, and daughter of John Harper), ran the inn from 1788-1800, and was succeeded by their son William Kelley, 1801-1807.

Hannah Sprowell Harper died in May 1789 at the age of 87. Her husband John Harper, died two years later at the age of 91.

From Charles Edward Banks, M. D. Vol. II of *The History of Martha's Vineyard*.

Excerpts From Jeremiah Pease's Diary from the Archives

Editorial Note:

These excerpts are from a diary kept by Jeremiah Pease between November 16th, 1819 and December 19, 1822. It is almost certainly only a portion of a longer diary which has been lost. The reason that only excerpts from the diary are included here is because very many of the diary's entries consist of the barest weather information and nothing else.

The diary is important historically for a number of reasons, chief among which, perhaps, is the fact that it was kept exactly at the time when the Vineyard was just entering upon the period of its greatest whaling prosperity.

Jeremiah Pease was born in Edgartown April 8, 1792. He lived in Edgartown all his life. For most of his years he was an officer in the United States Customs House service. But that did not stop him from having many other interests. He was an active surveyor. He had a shop, which was probably a carpenter shop, and as will be seen, he had apprentices. He planted and tended a big garden. He was a bone setter having learned that occupation from his benefactor, Joseph Thaxter. Parson Joseph Thaxter was not only the outstanding Island minister of his time but also the Island's leading physician.

We are fortunate that in addition to the diary a number of other of Jeremiah's manuscripts have survived. One is a brief "History of Methodism On Martha's Vineyard." Another is a record of all the vessels calling at Martha's Vineyard between the years 1827 and 1834. This record includes vessels' and masters' names, home port, ports of departure and call, etc. He has also left us a record of his survey of the Indian lands on Chappaquiddick.

Jeremiah Pease was an early convert to Methodism abandoning the established Congregational Church of his patron and benefactor Joseph Thaxter. That he could do such a thing when Parson Thaxter needed him so badly indicates the tremendous power of the religious upheaval that was taking place on the Vineyard. And so Jeremiah became an exhorter in the Methodist Church. He also, a little later, was instrumental in establishing the Wesleyan Grove Camp Meeting near Squash Meadow Pond in what is now the town of Oak Bluffs. At the Camp Meetings he was a tentmaster and also a chorister.

Jeremiah married Eliza Worth, an Edgartown girl as her name would indicate, on September 30, 1813. We could wish that Jeremiah had told us a little more about his home life, and at least given us some picture of Eliza. But he didn't. He and Eliza had ten children. The first born was a boy and there probably was no argument about what his name should be. It was Joseph Thaxter Pease.

Jeremiah died very suddenly on June 5, 1857. There is no obituary in the *Gazette* of the following week but only the bare notice of his death, which brevity seems to have been more or less customary at the time.

A good many spelling changes were made in this transcription of the diary, and almost all of Jeremiah's abbreviations have been spelled out in full. Also the names of the vessels have been italicized which Jeremiah did not do. These changes have been so that the entries would read more easily and it is hoped that purists will excuse them. Information for this brief editorial note and for the footnotes is from the following: The archives of the Dukes County Historical Society; Dr. Banks' *History Of Martha's Vineyard*; Henry Beetle Hough's *Martha's Vineyard Summer Resort*; Samuel Adams Devens' *Sketches From Martha's Vineyard*; *The Vineyard Gazette*, various issues; *The Dukes County Intelligencer*, various issues; and Alexander Starbuck's *History Of The American Whale Fishery*.

November 1819

- 16th. Wind east southeast. Cloudy. Boarded a schooner⁽¹⁾
21st. Wind northeast. Boarded a ship and a sloop for New York,
25th. Wind southwest. Assisted in bringing salt from the salt store.
Ship *Boston* arrives from the Brazils

December 1819

- 2nd. Wind northwest to north. This day set apart for Thanksgiving.
6th. Wind southwest. Pleasant. Killed my hog and visited J. A. Pease.
9th. Wind southwest. Pleasant. Ship *Criterion* arrives.⁽²⁾
15th. Wind north northwest to west southwest. With Mr. Thaxter I assisted in setting an ankle for William Swain of Nantucket. The ship *Criterion* sailed for Nantucket.
17th. Wind north northeast. Fresh breeze. Boarded a brig.
21st. Wind at west northwest. Fresh breeze. Boarded a sloop for Boston.
30th. Wind east northeast to northeast. A severe snowstorm. Boarded a sloop.
31st. Wind south southwest. A very heavy gail. The revenue boat parts her mooring and comes against the wharf and was damaged very much. Part of the roof of the Presbyterian meeting house comes off,⁽³⁾ and vessels were damaged at the wharfs. A sloop sinks. Col. B. Norton's wife dies at about 5 A.M. In the P.M. wind north northwest. A fresh breeze. Saltworks blows off.

January 1820

- 1st. Wind variable with snow squalls. I assisted Thomas Cooke, Jr. in securing the saltworks.
10th. Wind north northeast. Boarded ship *Thomas* from Cape Horn. Heavy snow at night.
13th. Wind north northwest. Boarded one schooner and two brigs from the West Indies. Mrs. Jedidah Cleveland dies.

- (1) When Jeremiah Pease says that he boarded a schooner, or a sloop, or whatever vessel, it was in his capacity as an employee of the Custom House to see if the vessel's papers were in order and to check the cargo against the manifest.
(2) The ship *Criterion* was a Nantucket ship, but like most Nantucket vessels of the period she unloaded her oil at Edgartown.
(3) In Jeremiah Pease's day the Congregational church was often, perhaps usually, called the Presbyterian church.

- 16th. Wind west northwest. Boarded brig *Climax*, Jared Fisher master from Dublin. Boarded schooner from Charleston.
20th. Wind north northwest. Boarded a brig from the West Indies.
21st. Wind southwest. The fleet goes out for Boston.
22nd. Wind south southeast. The fleet comes back⁽¹⁾ It rains.
26th. Wind north northwest to west northwest. Very cauld. It snows at night.
27th. Wind west to west southwest. A brig arrives for Nantucket.
28th. Wind southwest to southwest by south. The fleet goes out for Boston again.

February 1820.

- 1st. Wind north to northwest. A very cauld day.
2nd. Wind north to north northwest. Remarkably cauld. Harbor frozen all over. Wind changes at night.
4th. Wind west to northwest. Cauld. I went eeling. Caught nothing.
5th. Wind north northwest. Cauld in the morning. I went eeling. Caught thirty-five dozen.
10th. Wind east southeast. Light. Went to brig *Caroline* of and from Boston for N. Allens⁽²⁾ wrecked near Norton's shoal. Returned from her and went to a schooner on shore but could not get to her for ice. P. M. wind east to east northeast. Very heavy snow storm. The most snow I ever saw fall at one time,
13th. Wind south southwest. Foggy, rains a little. Snow melts very fast being the most on the ground at one time for a great number of years.
18th. Wind west to southwest. Clear. Fresh breeze. Ship *William*⁽³⁾ of Nantucket arrives, also schooner *Quaker*.

- (1) The fleet means the sloops, schooners, brigs and ships, mostly coasters, that were at anchor in Edgartown harbor waiting for a fair wind to continue their voyages. A southwest wind was fair for Boston. When the wind turned southeast the fleet came back.

In Jeremiah Pease's day sometimes a hundred or more vessels would be at anchor in the harbor waiting for a fair wind. Later in the century when coasting vessels became larger Holmes Hole harbor gradually replaced Edgartown harbor as the anchorage. But because it was open to winds from the northeast Holmes Hole was never as safe as Edgartown.

- (2) N. Allens must mean New Orleans.

- (3) As with many both Nantucket and New Bedford whalers, the *William* was commanded by a Vineyard man, Capt. Obed Luce.

19th. Wind east northeast. Clear. Boarded two sloops and ship *William*.

20th. Wind east southeast. Gail with rain. P. M. wind west to northwest. A ship *William* of New York arrives and two sloops.

22nd. Wind west northwest in A. M. P.M. west southwest. The vessels go out.

24th. Wind southwest to north northwest. Rains in the morning. Cleared ship *Ruby* for the Brazils.

26th. Wind south southeast to south. Gail. Rains. Took down the customs house boat's masts.

March 1820

1st. Wind northwest. Fresh breeze. Clear weather. Boarded schooner *Zephyr* for Martineque. She arrived the evening before.

2nd. Wind north to northeast. Fresh breeze. Boarded a schooner for Savannah.

3rd. Wind west to northwest. Fresh. Boarded two brigs for New York. Wind southwest at night. Snows.

4th. Wind south southwest. Snows A. M. Boarded a brig for the Canary Islands.

5th. Wind south southwest. Rains. The fleet goes out for Boston.

6th. Wind south to south southeast. Rains. Went to a vessel supposed to be ashore on Tom's Shoal. She proved to be a sloop from Nantucket for Philadelphia.

9th. Wind east southeast. Captain Leonard Jernegan's wife dies in childbed very suddenly.

10th. Wind east southeast. Rainy. Meeting held in the court house for the purpose of repairing or rebuilding the Presbyterian meeting house. Committee chosen &c.

12th. Wind northwest to southwest. Fresh breeze A.M. P.M. moderate. very cauld. Captain Leonard Jernegan's wife buried. In the afternoon a meeting was held at his house by Rev. J. Thaxter. A very good sermon preached. Boarded a schooner for Philadelphia.

17th. Wind south southeast. Cloudy. Boarded a schooner from the West Indies. P.M. wind east. Went to Cape Poge to get saltworks boards &c. Boarded a schooner from New York.

18th. Wind east northeast. Cloudy and cool. This day a son is born

to Mr. Heman and Mrs. Sally Arey. Great joy no doubt.

19th. Wind south southwest. Pleasant day. The first this month.

20th. Wind southwest. Pleasant. This day the news of the loss of Capt. Leonard Jernegan arrives which causes great lamentation with the inhabitants of this town he being a very valuable citizen. The particulars of his loss were as follows. He commanded the schooner *Quaker* of Boston built at Edgartown in 1801 by Capt. Timothy Daggett. A very fine vessel. He had made several voyages in her and was bound to
being off the Capes of was upset the

6th of March. There were on board forty-eight passengers and the crew which were all lost except the mate and one man who were taken off two days after.⁽¹⁾ This is truly a day of sorrow, his wife which was likewise a very valuable member of society dies three days after him in a very shocking manner leaving four young children to lament the loss of their father and mother who were in the bloom of life. Meeting held in the court house for the purpose of repairing or rebuilding the meeting house.

24th. Wind east northeast. Very pleasant. Went to Mr. Joseph Ripley's to cut joists for Thos. Cooke Jr. Esq's saltworks.

25th. Wind southwest. Pleasant. Bought a quantity of leather.⁽²⁾

26th. Wind southwest. Pleasant. Boarded a brig from Boston. William Brown's wife dies with consumption.

27th. Wind southwest. Fresh breeze. Attended Mr. Thomas Jernegan for the most part of the day he being sick and much deranged. Mr. Anthony Chadwick dies last night. Boarded a schooner for Bermuda.

30th. Wind north northeast. Fresh breeze. Boarded two schooners - coasters.

(1) The blanks in the account are Jeremiah's. He evidently intended to fill them in when he got the information but never did. Undoubtedly the Boston papers must have had a more complete account of the tragedy. The following is Rev. Joseph Thaxter's account. (see the Dukes County *Intelligencer* for Nov., 1968.) Received news that Leonard Jernegan was lost in the Gulf Stream. The schooner upset and 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.

(2) This may indicate that in addition to all his other interests Jeremiah Pease was a shoemaker. We do know that he had a shop where he conducted some sort of business endeavor. Or perhaps the leather was all for home use.

April 1820.

3rd. Wind north. Clear. Moderate with considerable snow on the ground. Annual meeting held at the court house.

4th. Wind variable. Caud. Schooner *Fox* sails for Providence.

7th. Wind south southwest to south southeast. Some snow. The snow which fell March 22nd. still on the ground. Got some joists from J. Ripley's. Evening wind southeast. Blows fresh with rain.

8th. Wind southwest My birthday - "And now my soul another year of my short life is past."

9th. Wind east northeast. Boarded three vessels. One a schooner for Bermuda. Amariah Fisher, Jr. dies of a fever being an enterprising young man and married about four months.

10th. Wind north northwest. Fresh breeze. Went to Holmes Hole for Thomas Cook Jr. and brought his horse cart.

12th. Wind northeast. Boarded five vessels - coasters.

13th. Wind west to southwest. Assisted Thomas Cooke Jr. Esk. at the saltworks all day.

14th. Wind northwest. Put down the stone to moor the revenue boat. Assisted T. Cooke at the salt mill. Boarded two schooners for Richmond.

17th. Wind southwest. Fresh breeze. Engaged in bending the revenue boat's sails and endeavouring to set the salt mill agoing.

23rd. Wind calm. A.M. Breezes southwest P. M. northeast. Boarded a brig for New York and a sloop. Rains at night smart showers.

26th. Wind northeast to east. Cool. Boarded two sloops and a brig. Assisted in setting Thomas Arey's leg.

May 1820.

1st. Wind northwest. Planted beans, squash, peas, &c. Attended probate court at J. Worth's.

7th. Wind north northeast to northeast. Light breeze. Ship *President* of Nantucket arrives from Cape Horn.

8th. Wind east northeast to southwest. Flattening. Began to shingle the front roof of my house.⁽¹⁾

15th. Wind southwest. Pleasant. Went to Holmes Hole to carry Mr.

(1) Note that it is "my house," not "our house." Jeremiah barely mentions his wife in two or three places in the whole diary. It was indeed a man's world.

and Mrs. Cooke. Circuit court sits. Judge J.M. Williams presides being the first time since his appointment. His charge to the grand jury was thought to be the best ever delivered in this court.

18th. Wind south to southwest. Attended the wedding of our sister Velina Worth who was married to Mr. Frederick Baylies, Jr.

19th. Wind east northeast. Rainstorm. I attended the second part of the wedding at Frederick Baylies.⁽¹⁾

20th. Wind south to southwest. Very growing weather. Finished planting my potatoes.

21st. Wind east northeast. Rainy. Boarded schooner *Liberty* for Lubeck.

22nd. Wind east northeast. P. M. southwest. The ground is now very wet and very growing weather. Mr. Levi Fisher very sick. Mr. Thomas Jernegan recovered to the great joy of all good citizens.

23rd. Wind southwest. This day our sister Velina goes to Nantucket. The parting was truly affecting. She was a very fine girl, pleasant disposition and much respected by all her acquaintances. The loss of her agreeable company is very great although married to a fine young man.

25th. Wind northeast. Light. Went to Chappaquiddick after shingles for T. Coke, Jr. Esq.⁽²⁾

26th. Wind northeast. Gail with much rain.

June 1820

3rd. Wind south to east southeast. Light and flattening. Sold our sail boat to Mr. Bartimus Luce. Received a letter from Freeman Allen relative to the estate of Janathan Pease.

16th. Wind northeast. Light. Boarded three sloops. Engaged in landing lumber from sloop *Five Sisters*.

17th. Wind northeast. Went to Newtown on business relative to the estate of Jonathan Pease.⁽³⁾

29th. Wind southwest. Fresh breeze. Went to Chappaquiddick with Thomas Cooke, Jr., Esq. for the purpose of laying out the

(1) One day for a civil and one for a religious service perhaps.

(2) Can this mean that there were cedars on Chappaquiddick big enough to be made into shingles? Or had a vessel loaded with shingles gone ashore?

(3) Newtown was Tisbury (West Tisbury) just as Oldtown was Edgartown.

ground for a meeting and school house for the Indians.

30th. Wind calm A.M. P.M. southwest. Remarkably warm day.

The thermometer stands at ninety-four.

July 1820.

1st. Wind southwest. Light breeze. Very warm and dry weather. The thermometer stands at ninety-six. Boarded schooner from Boston for Richmond. The steeple of the district school house was raised.

4th. Wind southwest. Cloudy. This day ought not be forgotten by any true American.

13th. Wind southwest. Pleasant. Captain Thomas Fisher's house raised. Remarkably dry weather for a long time. The farmers begin to reap their rye.

22nd. Wind east southeast. Light. News arrives by the ship *Charles* of New Bedford of the ship *Apollo* of Edgartown having 1200 bbls. of sperm oil, and a shocking accident happening to her first mate, Mr. William Arey who was hurt by a whale and had his shoulder dislocated. This accident causes great regret among the citizens of this town.⁽¹⁾

26th. Wind southwest. Moderate breeze. Captain Timothy Daggett arrives from the Brazils ⁽²⁾ to the joy of every good citizen. Assist at taking out salt at T. Coke Jr. Esq's. saltworks.

August 1820.

3rd. Wind southwest. Light. Pleasant. This day six years ago gave birth to our first born son, Joseph Thaxter Pease. My feelings on that day can be imagined only by parents.⁽³⁾ This day our two little sons William and Cyrus were brought to the shop for the first time.

7th. Wind northeast. Light. Pleasant. The ship *Apollo* arrives at night which causes great joy.

10th. Wind southwest. Cloudy. Received a visit from Mr. Jonathan Mayhew and lady, Captain Daniel McKinsey and lady, &c &c.

(1) Ship *Apollo* was one of Edgartown's and the Vineyard's first whalers after the hiatus of almost forty years when there were no whaling vessels sailing from the Island. It was a number of successful voyages by ships *Apollo* and *John* of Edgartown that began the renaissance of Vineyard whaling.

(2) Captain Timothy Daggett had just completed a successful whaling voyage in the ship *Richmond* of New Bedford.

(3) In all Jeremiah and Eliza Pease had ten children.

The weather being cloudy and appearance of a thunder shower prevented Thomas Cooke, Jr. Esq. and lady from coming.

12th. Wind southwest. Very warm. This afternoon a subscription was written and money obtained to purchase a new pilot boat of about fifty tons.

13th. Wind north to north northeast and east northeast and flattening. Very warm. The thermometer stood at ninety-eight in the shade. Our brother Baylies comes from Nantucket and returns the same day.

21st. Wind north to southwest. Fresh breeze. Ship *Apollo* begins to discharge the cargo of sperm oil. Sold at eighty-eight cents a gallon ⁽¹⁾ Weather warm and very dry.

22nd. Wind south southwest to south southeast. Light breeze. Mr. Martin Arey arrives from Rhode Island having had his shoulder, collar bone and two fingers set by Dr. Job Sweat which causes great joy among the inhabitants of this town.

26th. Wind south southeast to south southwest. Light breeze. Mr. Levi Fisher dies at about 3 o'clock leaving a wife and three young children to lament his early death. He is the first of my youthful companions which has died. This is a remarkable circumstance and causes many reflections.

28th. Wind northeast. Cloudy. This day attended the funeral of Mr. Levi Fisher as pall bearer. The first time I ever acted in that capacity. Mr. Elisha Dunham in his seventy-fourth year married to Miss Dinah Fisher.⁽²⁾

29th. Wind northeast. Light. Cloudy. This day Mr. William Cooke and myself take a subscription paper for the purpose of purchasing a ship for the south sea whale fishery and obtained \$7,000.00 in a part of the afternoon.

30th. Wind east northeast. Light. Ship *Apollo* goes to Rochester to be repaired. Spent most of this day endeavoring to obtain subscribers for another whale ship.

(1) Twelve hundred barrels of sperm oil at eighty-eight cents a gallon brings the total proceeds of the voyage to something over forty thousand dollars. On Martha's Vineyard in the year 1820 that was a great deal of money. It was the accelerating industrial revolution which was forcing the price of oil ever higher.

(2) Miss Dinah Fisher was fifty-one.

September 1820.

- 2nd. Wind northeast. Capt. Jason Luce dies of a consumption after being sick about two years.
- 9th. Wind southwest. Fresh breeze. Assisted in raising the roof of the meeting house.
- 11th. Wind southwest. Fresh breeze. Went to New Bedford with several ladies and gentlemen passengers in the smack *Democrat*.
- 12th. Wind southeast to south. Boat detained in New Bedford.
- 15th. Wind northeast A. M. Rainy. P. M. south southwest. Pleasant. Ship *Planter* of Nantucket arrives.
- 18th. Wind north northeast. Clear. Cool breeze. Mr. Grafton Norton and Col. T. M. Vinson return from Chilmark having been there for the purpose of obtaining money for another ship for the whaling business.
- 21st. Wind north northeast. Light. Clear and cool. This night freezes. Began to work evenings.
- 28th. Wind northeast to east northeast. Light. A meeting held at Mr. Charles Butler's tavern for the purpose of purchasing a ship for the south sea whaling. Meeting adjourned until fifth of October next.

October 1820.

- 5th. Wind northeast. A meeting held at Mr. C. Butler's to purchase a ship for whaling. Attended the wedding of my brother A. D. Pease ⁽¹⁾
- 6th. Wind northeast. Attended the second part of the wedding of A. D. Pease.
- 8th. Wind northeast to east. Cloudy. Capt. J. Daggett and Mr. G. Norton go to New York to purchase a ship. I sent a copy of the the accounts to F. Allen (?)
- 9th. Wind south southeast. Storm with rain. Ship *Pacific* arrives from Cape Horn, a brig from India, and a schooner from Martinique.
- 10th. Wind south southeast. Foggy. Boarded an English schooner from Jamaica.
- 11th. Wind east northeast to east A. M. P.M. southwest to west southwest. Very high wind.

(1) Abner Pease, Jeremiah's younger brother was twenty-five years old that October day when he married Jedidah Pease, his not too distant cousin. He was lost at sea in October of 1832.

- 15th. Wind south southeast. Storm with rain. Took down the revenue boat's mast.
- 16th. Wind south southeast A. M. P.M. pleasant. This day a meeting was held to choose a delagate for the purpose of altering or amending the constitution of this state, and Thomas Cooke Jr. Esq. was chosen to fill that station.
- 23rd. Wind southwest. Pleasant. I took down the saltworks pump for Hon. Thomas Cooke Jr. Esq.
- 26th. Wind northwest. Fresh breeze. Clear. Capt. Jethro Daggett arrives from Connecticut having bought a new ship for the whaling business. Mr. Clement Norton appointed master at the last meeting for that purpose.
- 27th. Wind north northwest. Assisted T. Cooke Jr. Esq. at his saltworks mill.
- 29th. Wind north northwest to north. Light breeze. Being Sunday the first meeting held in the Presbyterian meeting house since the repairs.

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- 10th. Wind north northwest. Fresh breeze. Ship *Apollo* Capt. Martin Arey arrives from Rochester having been there to be repaired.
- 11th. Wind southwest. Calm. Flattening. Went eeling caught 5½ doz.
- 12th. Wind east southeast. Storm. Ground covered with snow for the first time this fall. Rain and heavy gail.
- 13th. Wind northwest. Fresh breeze. Cauld. Judge of the circuit court being detained at Nantucket court cannot sit. Adjourned until his arrival.
- 14th. This day my grandmother Sarah Dunham dies at about two o'clock A.M. being ninety years and six months old. Wind south southwest very light and calm. The young men had a ball this evening. Part of the crew of a ship of Nantucket intrude upon them and they put five or six of them out of doors after knocking them all down in the room. ⁽¹⁾
- 15th. Wind south southwest. Light. Went to New Bedford.

(1) The rivalry and feeling of hostility between Nantucket and the Vineyard was traditional and it lasted for a very long time.

- 19th. Wind southwest. Ship *Peru* of Nantucket arrives from the Pacific Ocean with fifteen hundred bbls. of sperm oil.
- 20th. Wind southwest. Boarded a brig from Savannah.
- 21st. Wind east southeast to southeast. Gail with thunder and rain. Set the saltworks pump for T. Cooke Jr. Esq.
- 22nd. Wind west southwest. Jonathan Worth quits work for me and gets ready to go in the ship *John* of Edgartown for the Pacific ocean.
- 23rd. Wind south to south southeast. Smack *Democrat* goes to Connecticut after the new ship *John*. Captain Clement Norton and his crew goes in her. This day is set apart by the governoer of this Commonwealth for a day of Thanksgiving and praise to almighty God for the many blessings we have received during the year past. Assisted S. Crocker in repairing T. Cooke Jr. Esq's scistern to his saltworks' pump. (?)
- 24th. Wind east to northeast. Fresh breeze with rain. Ship *Equator* arrives from the Pacific ocean for Nantucket.
- 29th. Wind northwest. Fresh breeze, Very cauld. Cut my foot badly with a knife cutting a piece of sole leather.

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- 2nd. Wind northwest. Very cauld. P. M. moderates a little. Elisha Dunham Jr's wife dies of a consumption. Thomas Cooke, Esq. dies aged about eighty-three.
- 4th. Wind west northwest. This day Mr. Amaziah Fisher's son Freborn dies of a fever at about 8 o'clock P.M. About this time the news of Mr. Jethro Dunham being burnt in his own house on Tuckanuck arrives.
- 8th. Wind north northwest to southwest. Pleasant. Mr. Fisher's son buried.
- 11th. Wind north northwest to north, High wind. Assisted Mr. Thaxter in setting Mr. Thomas Stewart's elbow.
- 12th. Wind north northwest. Very cauld. In company with Rev. Joseph Thaxter I set a young ladie's ancle which she put out by a fall upon the ice.
- 17th. Wind north northwest to west northwest. This day ship *Apollo*, Capt. Martin Arey sails for the Pacific ocean with the good wishes of every good citizen.
- 20th. Wind west to southwest. This day the ship *Apollo* sails from

- the Cove ⁽¹⁾ in company with the ships *Planter*, *Pacific*, *Charles* and *Ruby*. The *Apollo* outsails the famous ship *Planter* ⁽²⁾. Both ships single reefed topsails beating to windward.
- 21st. Wind northeast. Light breeze. Capt. Silvanus Crocker married to Miss Susan Pease.
- 22nd. Wind north northeast to north. Very high wind and cauld. The new pilot boat *Hiram* arrives from Killingsworth, Connecticut.
- 23rd. Wind north northeast to north. Cauld. This day (I am) appointed by the collector to measure the new pilot boat *Hiram* of Edgartown.
- 25th. Wind north northwest. The new ship *John* of Edgartown arrives from the Connecticut River.
- 28th. Wind east northeast to north northwest. Light and calm. Went eeling. Captain Allen Coffin and myself caught forty-three dozen.

(1) The Cove was Tarpaulin Cove.

(2) This, of course was good news to "every good citizen" of Edgartown for ship *Planter* was a Nantucket vessel.

Chilmark In The Year 1850 from the 1850 census

The statistics for this article are from the United States decennial census for the year 1850. Richard L. Pease of Edgartown took the census for the whole County and he was a careful worker. In 1850 there were, of course, only three towns in the county- Edgartown, Tisbury and Chilmark. Chilmark included all of the Elizabeth Islands that now make up the town of Gosnold. Gay Head was not a part of Chilmark in 1850. It was not an Indian reservation. It was a functioning Indian community with seemingly no legal status whatsoever, and as such it seemed to get along very well. In 1860 Gay Head became a "district," and from then until 1870 when it became a town there does seem to have been some sort of tie between it and Chilmark. But in 1850 no census was taken for Gay Head.

Chilmark of the year 1850 bears no resemblance whatsoever except in the broadest physical aspects to the Chilmark of today. And even some of those physical aspects have changed very greatly in a hundred and twenty-five years. Then, in 1850, Chilmark was a land of working farms and subsistence farms. Almost all of the town was cleared - field, meadow and pasture - all separated one from another by stone walls, and in the southern part of the town by split rail fences. There were a few and only a few wood lots. Most of the fuel was peat, dug in the local bogs, though coal was beginning to be used. Very poor families, and there were some, gathered driftwood for fuel as most of the Gay Head people did.

There were 705 inhabitants of Chilmark in 1850. There were 141 dwelling houses and 147 families lived in those houses.

In 1807 James Freeman wrote a paper which he called just "Dukes County - 1807." In it he listed thirty-two family names that he said "comprehended three quarters of the population of the Island."⁽¹⁾ Twenty-one of those thirty-two family names were represented in Chilmark's population in 1850. Others of the thirty-two were resident in Edgartown and Tisbury. The Vineyard was still exceedingly parochial in 1850. Some family names were associated almost entirely with one town as were the Fishers, Coffins and Marchants with Edgartown. Just so other family

(1) See *The Dukes County Intelligencer*, May, 1971 (Vol. 12, No. 4), p. 26.

names were found only in Chilmark and others only in Tisbury. Four of the following family names are not found in Freeman's list but as they were long established in the town of Chilmark they are included here. In 1850 eighty-nine of the one hundred forty-seven families resident in Chilmark bore the following old Vineyard names. And after each name the number of families bearing it is given.

Adams	3	Hillman	3	Reed	1
Allen	4	Lambert	2	Skiff	3
Cottle	2	Look	4	Smith	3
Davis	1	Manter	3	Stewart	1
Ferguson	2	Mayhew	14	Tilton	19
Flanders	5	Norton	2	Vincent	3
Hammett	2	Pease	1	Weeks	1
Hancock	3	Poole	3	West	4

Thus thirty-three of the town's families were either Tiltons or Mayhews.

The occupation of the men of the town, and all boys of fifteen and over were listed as men, and the numbers of men in each are as follows:

Blacksmith	4	Mason	1
Carpenter	5	Minister of the Gospel	2
Farmer	112	Paint Grinder	1
Laborer	28	Painter	2
Light House Keeper	2	Pilot	3
Mariner	103	Trader	1

By far the largest two occupations of the town were farmer or mariner. One might wish that Richard Pease had broken mariner down into merchant seaman, fisherman, whaleman, coaster, etc. But he didn't. He does list three pilots whom he might just as well have included in the mariners. Almost all of the mariners might have been listed as mariner-farmer for almost all of them had a small subsistence farm to come home to. Just so many, perhaps most, of the farmers could have been listed as farmer-mariner for they went fishing from Squibnocket Landing, or Menemsha Creek, or Nomansland for at least part of the year.

In the town's population there were eighteen deaf mutes.

Richard L. Pease listed them as deaf and dumb, and so they were always called on the Island. Eighteen out of a population of 705 is a high incidence, so high that Alexander Graham Bell some years later, because of his great interest in deafness and hearing made a special study of deafmutism on the Vineyard. It is now generally recognized that the Island's, particularly Chilmark's great number of deaf and dumb was caused by excessive intermarriage through too many generations. Only toward the end of the nineteenth century when a great deal of new blood was coming to the Island did the deafmutism end.

Also in the population there was one blind individual and two listed as idiotic. One supposes that that term was used much as today we would use the word moronic - individuals who were greatly retarded. There were also three paupers in the town, two of them insane.

There were a surprisingly large number of foreign-born in the town in 1850. Five from Ireland, four from England, one from Scotland and four from the Azores. Most of these foreign-born Chilmarkers were laborers working on the big farms and at the brickyard and the paintmill. A few of them married Chilmark girls.

Also in 1850 there were fourteen Indians living in Chilmark. In accord with the spirit of the time Richard Pease listed them as black. But they were not that. They were Gay Head people, Francises, Howwaswees and Johnsons.

Richard L. Pease lists a total of ninety-six farms for the town. Evidently the very small subsistence farms were not included among those ninety-six. The listed farms make up a total of 16,365 acres with a value of \$377,850.00. The land is noted as follows: 11,759 acres as improved and 4,606 as unimproved. Perhaps the wood lots and the stoniest and swampiest of the pasture land made up the unimproved.

There were ninety-two horses on the Chilmark farms in 1850. Actually there were probably quite a few more horses in the town than that for many individuals not listed as farmers undoubtedly had a horse or horses.

There were sixty-one yoke of oxen on the farms of the town. That is a total of 122 working cattle. More than the number of horses. Many of the farms had a yoke or yokes of oxen and no horse. That must have meant that a great many people in Chilmark

walked. For one does not usually ride in an ox cart.

There were 247 milk cows on the farms. Only three farms did not have at least one cow. But the number of cows on any one farm was surprisingly small. Only one farm in the town had a herd of more than five cows. Only a little more than a decade later that was to change. For as the Cottage City (Oak Bluffs) grew as a summer resort there was an ever increasing demand there for milk and cream and butter. Much of that demand was met by the Chilmark farms. But in 1850 there were no large herds of dairy cattle up-Island.

On the farms there were 543 other cattle. Those other cattle would have been the calves, heifers, bulls and steers. Many of the steers would go to Nantucket as beef on the hoof in sailing lighters. Also probably on almost every farm there would have been one or more pairs of matched bull calves which would grow up to be working cattle.

In 1850 there were 5,514 sheep on Chilmark farms. Almost every farm had a flock of from only a few to up into the hundreds. If there were only a few sheep the wool would all be used at home. If it was a large flock some would be used at home and the rest sold. Spinning wheels still turned in Chilmark in 1850. Until well after the Civil War when Australian and New Zealand wool began to depress the market, wool was an exceedingly valuable product of Vineyard farms.

In 1850 there were only 154 swine on the farms and very few farms had more than two pigs. That must mean that, in Chilmark at least, pigs were not raised for profit, but rather to be eaten at home mostly as salt pork.

In 1850 only seventeen bushels of wheat were raised in Chilmark. And those seventeen bushels were raised on only two farms. Why wheat was never an important crop on the Vineyard is a mystery. On the other hand every farm grew more or less Indian corn. In all, the town produced 4,458 bushels. Rye was grown on thirty-nine farms for a total of 518 bushels. And sixty-two farms grew a total of 1,741 bushels of oats. Twenty-five farms grew 305 bushels of barley which according to Joe Allen was pronounced burley. And all but five of the town's farms grew potatoes for a total of 2,723 bushels. Orchard products had a value of \$364.00.

10,010 pounds of butter were produced by Chilmark's farms. That seems like a great deal of butter for the relatively small number of milk cows in the town. Also, 4,170 pounds of cheese (probably cheddar) were produced. That must mean that very little milk was used as milk but went into butter and cheese which had a monetary value which milk then did not have.

The farms made 964 tons of hay. That seems like a surprisingly small amount considering the number of cattle, horses and sheep in the town. But that was "English" hay, cultivated hay. A considerable amount of wild marsh or salt hay must also have been made which was not recorded.

There were two important manufacturing plants in the town in 1850. One was Thomas F. Nye's paint works (on the paint mill brook) which produced 46,000 pounds of paint with a value of \$5,000. The other manufacturing plant was Smith and Barrows brick yard at the mouth of the Roaring Brook which in 1850 produced 600,000 bricks with a value of \$2,400.00.

Almost surely there were two and perhaps three grist mills in operation in Chilmark in 1850. But they are not noted in the census. Perhaps that is because they were very small. Or it may have been because they were performing a service and not actually manufacturing.

There were four public schools in Chilmark in 1850. But they are not named but are only listed in the census as school No. 1 with forty-seven pupils, No. 2 with fourteen pupils, No. 3 with 36 pupils and No. 4 with 50 pupils.

There are other odds and ends of information in the census which are interesting. The monthly wage of a farm hand with board was \$12.00. The daily wage of a laborer was \$1.00. The weekly wage of a "female domestic" with board was \$1.00.

Such is the picture of Chilmark in the middle of the last century that we get from the census report. But it is far from a complete picture. It tells us nothing about the social life of the town, or about the religious life except that there were two churches, one Congregational and one Methodist. It tells us nothing about the whaling money that was brought home and some of the beautiful homes that were built with that money. It tells us nothing about the cod fishing at Nomansland or the number of pounds of salt cod that was produced at Nomansland, Squibnocket and

Menemsha.

But Chilmark in the middle of the last century must have been a beautiful place with everywhere the wide vistas of land, ponds, sound and sea, and with the hundreds of miles of stone walls dividing the land and making a living checkerboard of color, shade and texture. One suspects that if a Chilmarker of 1850 could see his town today he would not be happy.

DCHS News - Accessions

Once again we have reached the end of a summer season, and once again we have been pleased by the number of visitors who have enjoyed the attractions of our society. For the period from June through September, 4314 people took the tour through the Thomas Cooke House. By coincidence, this is exactly the same number who visited with us last year. A large number of visitors this year also took advantage of our research facilities; in August, for example, more than thirty people worked in the library. In September, we opened the house on a Sunday so that a tour group from the Victorian Society could have an opportunity to see our collections.

At the annual meeting of the society on August 13, approximately sixty members and guests were entertained by George King's lecture on "Coastal Steamboating." Illustrating his presentation with photos, prints, and slides, Mr. King brought back many memories for people in the audience who had done much of their traveling on steam-powered vessels. As a result of the annual elections, the Council and officers of the society are the same as last year.

Our summer employees have now all departed, and the Thomas Cooke House is closed, but the library continues to be a busy place, and we are fortunate to have a new addition to our staff. As our archivist, Joy Ryan has been doing an excellent job of getting our books, photographs, and manuscripts into order. Of course, she is also a great help in attending to the needs of the many researchers who have been using the library.

As you may have noticed in the *Gazette*, the oral history project has been completed. After more than a year of work, we now have on tape interviews with twenty-three islanders, who represent a cross-section of Vineyard life. The project was financed by a \$1000 grant from the Massachusetts Council on the Arts and Humanities and by a matching grant from our society. Most of the interviews have been transcribed, and researchers can use the tapes or transcripts in the library. Fortunately, the director of the project was the talented photographer Nancy Safford, who provided us with a portrait of most people interviewed. They

were: Mary Araujo, Jane Brehm, Percy Burt, Mary Campos, Sarah Coddington, Robert Cronig, Clara Francis, Mayolla Francis, Sydney Harris, Gratia Harrington, Flossie Jeffers, Jesse Jeffers, Milton Jeffers, Stephen Carey Luce, Daniel Manter, Frederick Moore, Phil Norton, Foster Silva, Tom Tilton, Leonard Vanderhoop, Dorothy West, Everett Whiting, and Mary Jernegan Willey.

We hope that the oral history project will be a continuing program. Although we do not have the funds to make transcripts, there is no reason why we cannot continue to get people down on tape. Please make suggestions for interviews.

All of us who are actively involved with the society were saddened in October to learn that Ken Stoddard had died. Mr. Stoddard was a life member of the society, and he was frequently a generous contributor to our causes. Many people have sent contributions to the society in his memory, and we will acknowledge these gifts in a future issue of the *Intelligencer*.

For those of you wanting to work in our library this winter, we are open from 1-4 on Thursday and Friday afternoons and from 10-12, 1-4 on Saturdays. We will look forward to seeing you.

Thomas Norton
Curator

ACCESSIONS

The following additions have been made to the Society collections between October 1973 and September 1974.

ARTIFACTS

Martha's Vineyard souvenir plate, gift of Mrs. Samuel Hadfield; two models of whale boats made in the Azores, gift of Mr. George Moffett.

BOOKS AND ARTICLES

Five issues of the *New England Historical and Genealogical Register* (1972-1973), gift of Miss Frances McGaw; *The American Descendants of Henry Luce of Martha's Vineyard, Mass.* by Martha F. McCourt, gift of the author; *A First Book in Geology, The Autobiography of Nathaniel Southgate Shaler. From Old Fields: Poems of the Civil War, Elizabeth of England* (5 vols.), *The Individual, a Study of Life and Death*, all by Nathaniel Southgate Shaler, gift of Harold L. Tinker; *The Catboat Book* by John M. Leavens, gift of the author; *Those Pearly Islands* by Harold C. Wilson, gift of the author; *Bible* (1852) and *Dictionary* (1848), gift of Mrs. Babs Brittain; *People to Remember* by Dionis Coffin Riggs, gift of Dr. and Mrs. Sidney Riggs; *Sketch of the History of Attleborough* by John Daggett, 1973 reprint of 1834 book, gift of the author; four reprints of articles on the status of whales by the donor, gift of Edward Mitchell; issue of the *Journal of the Steamship Historical Society*, gift of George King.

PAPERS AND MANUSCRIPTS

Genealogical information on Cornelius Merchant, gift of John L. Briggs; notebooks of the Tisbury Women Voters' Association, 1933-1938, gift of Mrs. Joseph Frisch; map of Martha's Vineyard, gift of Lester M. Peterson; sermon, "Jonathan Mayhew, The Man who Deserves a Monument" delivered and given by Dr. Max A. Kapp.

PHOTOGRAPHS

18 black and white photographs of Edgartown during the hurricane and flood of 1954, gift of Mrs. Arthur Knox; 16 photographs of old Vineyard subjects, gift of Mrs. Martin S. Meigs, Sr.; collection of photographs of the Ben Cromwell family, gift of Mr. and Mrs. Harold Webb; collection of slides with narration prepared by the Martha's Vineyard Camera Club, gift of Gerald R. Bagley.

Marian R. Halperin,
Register

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¢.

People To Remember by Dionis Coffin Riggs. Illustrated, paper. \$4.95.

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

The Fishes of Martha's Vineyard by Joseph B. Elvin. With 36 illustrations of fishes by Will Huntington. Paper, 50¢.

The History of Martha's Vineyard by Charles Edward Banks. A new edition. Indices, illustrations, three volumes. Cloth, \$30.00.

Tales and Trails of Martha's Vineyard by Joseph C. Allen. Illustrated. \$3.95.

"Cap'n George Fred" Himself. The autobiography of Captain George Fred Tilton of Chilmark. A new edition. Cloth. \$6.50.

Wild Flowers of Martha's Vineyard by Nelson Coon. Illustrated. Paper \$3.95.

Indian Legends Of Martha's Vineyard by Dorothy R. Scoville. Paper \$2.50.

An Introduction To Martha's Vineyard by Gale Huntington. Illustrated, paper. A new edition. \$3.95.

Shipwrecks On Martha's Vineyard by Dorothy R. Scoville. Illustrated, paper. \$3.00.