



# THE DUKES COUNTY INTELLIGENCER

VOL. 19, NO. 4

MAY, 1978

## The Burden of Proof: Coercion, Autonomy and Justice in Gay Head

GLORIA LEVITAS

*Gay Head's vote to become a town in 1870 was probably not a free act, but the result of a long history of coercion culminating in a series of legislative actions by the Commonwealth.*

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## As Things Were on-Island Eighty Years Ago

JOSEPH CHASE ALLEN

## Tools of the Trade, A Family Collection

NORMAN R. ROBINSON

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Documents: Jeremiah Pease Diary

Plus: Books, News, Word of the Society

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The articles in The Intelligencer do not represent a consensus of beliefs, and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Society.

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#### COMING EVENTS

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*Sunday, July 9, at 4 p.m.*

Dedication of the Francis Foster Museum Wing of the library, followed by tours of the Society buildings. Do plan to attend and see the many changes made this past year.

*Thursday, August 17, at 8 p.m.*

Annual meeting and election of officers. Edith Blake will give an illustrated talk on "The Vanishing Towers of the Camp Grounds and Cottage City".

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## The Burden of Proof: Coercion, Autonomy and Justice in Gay Head

by GLORIA LEVITAS

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A few years ago, discussions of the relationship between Indian and White residents of Massachusetts were likely to rouse the passions only of the Indians themselves or of scholars for whom the dramas of history remain an abiding concern. Everyone else had snugly consigned skewed visions of the Wampanoag — those welcoming saviours of the Plymouth colony — to the ritual security of Thanksgiving festivities. Vested in memory with a mythic nobility of spirit and bearing, these Indians of the imagination were rarely linked to their living descendants — some of whom make up the small community at Gay Head.

That community's strong sense of cohesion and their firm adherence to Indian identity was in part a product of Gay Head's physical, social and political isolation. But Indian identity was also fostered by its value as a tourist attraction for island entrepreneurs. Whatever the Vineyarders thought privately of the biological and social claims of Gay Head, they were only too pleased to confer recognition on Gay Head as an Indian town as long as such recognition encouraged burgeoning island tourism.

Although the presence of Indians on the Island is still of interest to tour operators who advertise both cliffs and Indians as tourist attractions, other economic considerations

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have come to challenge the revenues commanded by these ventures. The activities of Indians — backed by Federal monies and programs — has become increasingly worrisome to many Vineyard residents.

Chilmarkers are seriously concerned that the Gay Head Tribal Council's shellfish projects and fishing claims threaten their control over some of the waters in which they fish. Conservationists, both on and off the island, are anxiously monitoring the recent transfer by the town of Gay Head to the Tribal Council of 200 acres that were formerly the town common lands. Conservationists — as well as a large number of town residents — fear the Council will allow uncontrolled development of the common lands in the interests of tourism, destroy valuable marshland and bird nesting sites, and mar one of the few unspoiled vistas of dune and pond that still remain on the island. Non-Indian residents of Gay Head fear that all titles in the town may be brought into question if the Wampanoag Tribal Council can, in fact, prove that their ancestors were illegally divested of their land by the state of Massachusetts. A group of these non-Indian residents — the Gay Head Taxpayers Council — consequently brought suit against the town for voting to transfer the Common lands to the Tribal Council. At issue is the question of who is to control tribal lands, how much — if any — land the Council is entitled to, and the possibility that the suit might be enlarged to include privately owned tracts in the town if mediation efforts currently underway fail to resolve the question.

A similar case was brought before Judge Walter Skinner of Federal District Court by the Mashpee Wampanoag — a group related to the Gay Head Indians through ties of kinship — and in recent years through some mutual political action. The Mashpee and Gay Head suits, at the moment, concern the legality of the transfer of town lands to the tribal council. Both Indian communities, however, have based their claims on the Federal non-intercourse act of 1790 which expressly forbade states from dealing with or making treaties with Indian tribes. Both are thus arguing that all rules promulgated by the state of Massachusetts for or about Indians — including the transformation of both communities

into towns in the 1870's — were illegal, in contravention of these nonintercourse acts. Thus resolution of both cases depends ultimately upon whether either or both groups can make a convincing claim to tribal status and further, whether they can then persuade whoever is hearing the case that their surrender of autonomy in the 1870s was the result of coercive acts of the state, and not free choice.

Numerous expert witnesses gave their opinions in the Mashpee case; some arguing that the Indians did constitute a tribe by virtue of their continued residence, ability to trace their ancestry, common myths and customary behavior that differed from the behavior of members of the non-Indian communities around then. Others denied tribal status to the Mashpee, basing their definition of a tribe on the continued existence of a system of self-government. These argued that the Mashpee ceased to be a tribe when they placed themselves under the sovereignty of the Plymouth Colony and converted to Christianity in the 1660's.

The Mashpee have lost the first round in their fight, but the outcome of the Gay Head case is not yet known. The facts of Gay Head history diverge considerably from those of Mashpee; although the Gay Head Wampanoag converted to Christianity very rapidly following the establishment of a colony of the Island in 1642, their only formal concession of sovereignty, a document issued by Sachem Joseph Mittark in 1687 confirming the sale of Gay Head to Governor Dongan of New York, was almost immediately contested by the Gay Head community which objected then, and intermittently over the centuries, to all attempts in Colonial or American officials to divest them of their political autonomy.

There is a certain irony in the situation of the Indians which while rarely apprehended by Whites is blatantly obvious to the Indians and their lawyers. Since the Indians were virtually powerless to prevent their loss of autonomy, the demand that they now prove that they still possess what was taken from them against their will is a mockery of justice. But even more quixotic was Judge Skinner's opinion in the Mashpee case that even if the Mashpee were able to prove the continued existence of a tribe, their abandonment of autonomy — in accepting incorporation as a town in



Massachusetts — implies abandonment of all subsequent Indian claims. Although Judge Skinner's statement is only an opinion without the force of law, it suggests that despite dozens of Indian suits, and the recent development of an enormous literature concerning Indian/White relationships, most Americans, including those in positions of high authority, are as yet unaware of — or refuse to recognize — the fact that Indians were coerced, driven, or forced into acceptance of their own subjugation first by colonists, and later by acts of the state and federal governments of the United States of America.

Because so much hinges on the fact that state documents assert that both Gay Head and Mashpee accepted incorporation as towns in the 1870s, both groups have searched out Massachusetts archives to discover papers which confirm serious schisms in the community over the issue of incorporation. Members of both communities appear to have petitioned the State to maintain their autonomy. State assertions that Gay Head voted unanimously — but for one — in favor of incorporation may thus be fraudulent — although the exact status of these documents has not been determined. No doubt some members of the community favored incorporation. However, whether or not they constituted a majority is at least questionable. And it also seems likely that even if a considerable number voted in favor of incorporation, they can provide proof that their vote was the result of previous legal actions taken by the state of Massachusetts against them and in no way represents a free choice.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See "Report of the Commissioner," 1871. Massachusetts Archives, Resolves, 1860, Chapter 67. Also see Acts of 1870, Massachusetts Archives, Chapter 213. Filed separately from the Acts and Reports are a number of original documents of great pertinence to the case. Two of these are of considerable interest because they suggest the existence of a schism in the community over the question of incorporation. One document, dated May 8, 1869 is signed by several Gay Head Indians and requests incorporation. The second document, signed by the selectmen and overseers is dated June 30th, 1869 and reports that at a duly held meeting of the town incorporation was "unanimously" rejected. These documents are puzzling, inasmuch as the Report indicates that the vote in favor of incorporation was "unanimous but for one". Whether sentiment against incorporation was "unanimous" as claimed by the document of June 30th may be questionable; however, the state's claim of virtual unanimity is even more unlikely — and thus calls into serious question the legality of the entire proceedings.

Moreover, Gay Head's vulnerability in 1870 must be placed within a historical context, since the act of incorporation was simply the last act of coercion to be instituted against the community. The fact that colonists took unfair advantage of the Indians may have little impact on the legal case, but the historical record demands that the true nature of Indian/White contact on Martha's Vineyard be made a matter of public knowledge. For the Vineyard Indians, where relations were free of bloodshed, the case is particularly subtle and difficult to prove and most casual observers have accepted the myths promulgated through the writings of Thomas Mayhew Sr. and his heirs without inquiring into the facts of the matter.

Indian problems of accommodation to White society began, on Martha's Vineyard, at least 100 years before Mayhew and his colonists set foot on the island in 1642. Indian trade with Europe was in full swing by the first years of the 17th century and there are indications that the coastal Wampanoag had even in a few generations been much affected by this contact.<sup>2</sup> Their location on the coast made the Wampanoag an ideal group to act as brokers between the traders and inland Indians, and the very imperfect archeological records of the Wampanoag suggest that they had considerably altered their political structure in response to these trading opportunities by the time the Pilgrims landed. Archeological sites show no evidence of social stratification until the late 16th and early 17th century. Yet the colonists — who reported on the Wampanoag — indicated that they were divided into "Princes, Lords and commoners."<sup>3</sup> Such stratification would have been extraordinarily unlikely before contact, when the Indians' hunting and gathering economy and their system of communal horticulture demanded an egalitarian system of social and political relations. Thus we are justified in

<sup>2</sup> Willoughby, C.C.: *Antiquities of the New England Indians*, The Peabody Museum of American Archeology and Ethnology, Cambridge, 1935, pp. 243-44. Also, Bradford, William: *History of Plymouth Plantation 1620-47*, vol II, Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston, 1912, pp. 52-3.

<sup>3</sup> Morton, Thomas: *The New English Canaan*. The Prince Society, Boston, 1883, pp. 170-71. Also, Banks, Charles Edward, M.D.: *History of Martha's Vineyard*, Vol. I, Dukes County Historical Society, Edgartown, 1966, p. 38.



assuming that such stratification was of relatively recent origin and owed its existence to differences in degree of access of various Sachems to the resources of the foreign traders.

The degree to which such political change reflected changes in the day to day life of these Indians is also unclear from the archeological record. We do know that the first evidence of horticulture does not appear on Martha's Vineyard until the mid-sixteenth century — whether some aspects of such horticulture were at least indirectly a response to white contact, or were an indigenous development, is again, not known.<sup>4</sup> The increase in horticultural activities during the 16th century may have increased the demand for metal tools, since by and large, they are superior to stone technologies, particularly in the difficult New England terrain; and the presence of only a few metal tools (attested to by the archeological records) could have had profound effects on internal social relations among the Wampanoag.<sup>5</sup>

Aside from its effects on social organization, the substitution of metal for stone tools created an immediate problem for the Indians who rapidly lost many of their native skills. As might be expected, the women, who were less in contact with the colonists, maintained their abilities at

<sup>4</sup> Ceci, Lynn: "Fish Fertilizer: A Native North American Practice?" in *Science*, No. 188, 1975, pp. 26-30. See also Letters, in *Science*, No. 189, 1975, pp. 946-49. Dr. Ceci uses documents and cultural analysis to suggest that Indian cultivation did not include fish fertilizers and that Squanto may have learned of fish fertilizers during his captivity. "Squanto's advice at Plymouth is probably best viewed as an interesting example of culture contact, one in which a native culture bearer conveyed a technological idea from one group of Europeans to another." See, also Jennings, Francis: *The Invasion of America*, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1975, p. 62. Jennings quotes G. Melvin Herndon: "European improvements in cultivation methods 'provided the chief requisite for soil erosion by stirring the soil over the entire field... For this reason it appears that the Indians were above to grow corn on the same field longer than the white settlers.'"

<sup>5</sup> The relationship between social organization and technology is complex and is convincingly described in numerous anthropological monographs attesting to the rapid changes consequent upon the introduction of iron tools. For a clear example of one such case see Sharp, Lauriston: "Steel Axes for Stone Age Australians" in Spicer, Edward H. (ed): *Human Problems in Technological Change: A Casebook*, The Russell Sage Foundation, New York, 1952. Sharp documents the change in status and social organization that occurred within one year after introduction of steel axes to the Yir Yoront people in Australia.

bag- and basket-making and embroidery, and some of the men persisted in their working of wooden bowls and drinking cups. At the same time, some of the Indians learned very quickly a number of the useful techniques of the English. They were particularly adept at forms of metallurgy, but their very ability ultimately increased their dependency on the raw materials that they needed to pursue these interests.<sup>6</sup>

Highly suggestive data on the rapid date of change to which coastal Indians were subjected comes from other research which indicates that east coast Indians rapidly became dependent upon wampum for trade following European contact. Anthropologist Lynn Ceci has made a strong case for the fact that sedentary Indian communities did not exist on Long Island until English desire for wampum made such settlements possible. Long Island Indian settlements, located wherever the two shells needed to make wampum belts were found, appear to be of post-contact origin.<sup>7</sup> Further corroborative evidence is available in historical records which indicate extraordinarily rapid change in the political and economic structure of numerous Indian groups — particularly for the Indians of the plains for whom the introduction of the horse completely altered traditional ways.<sup>8</sup>

Another aspect of change, for which we have considerable evidence, was the increased prevalence of disease and soaring death rates among the Indians following contact. Europeans, who had survived the numerous epidemics consequent upon their alteration of their own environments and the establishment of European cities and conquest states, brought to America diseases which decimated previously unexposed Indian populations. There was no magic in European resistance to such diseases: the traders of the 16th century, and the colonists of the 17th, were the fortunate resistant heirs of those who had survived the "plagues" that

<sup>6</sup> Bradford, William, *op. cit.*

<sup>7</sup> Ceci, Lynn: "The Effect of European Contact and Trade on the Settlement Pattern of Indians in Coastal New York, 1524-1665: the Archeological and Documentary Evidence." Unpublished PhD. Thesis, CUNY, 1977.

<sup>8</sup> Lowie, Robert: *Indians of the Plains*, Natural History Press, New York, 1963, pp. 226-234.



had had a similar effect on European populations during the previous thousand years. Such epidemics had taken an enormous toll of Indians even before colonization — particularly among those groups who, like the Wampanoag, appeared to have established relatively continuous trade relationships with the Europeans. And their impact increased almost immediately after colonization, probably as a function of more extensive and sustained Indian/White relationships.

By 1642 the Wampanoag had had considerable experience with European traders. Trade had brought them new tools, new social and political organizations, and on occasion had resulted in the capture and enslavement of some of their number. Some Wampanoag had been captured, taken to England and the continent to be exhibited as curiosities or to furnish further information for potential colonists and traders. Two of their number, the famous Squanto of Plymouth and Appanowe or Epanow of Gay Head, had later escaped and rejoined their people. Of the two Appanow appears to have been more mistreated and legend at least suggests that he had little love for his captors. Legend also suggests that he was behind the massacre in 1624 of a landing party sent to the Vineyard by Captain Thomas Dermer.<sup>9</sup>

Despite this rather dismal history of deteriorating relationships, when Thomas Mayhew and his settlers landed on the island in 1642, they met no resistance from the Indians. According to estimates, there were at least 1500 — and more likely 3,000 — Wampanoag on the island at the time and they could easily have destroyed the settlers by sheer weight of numbers. There is also evidence, provided by Thomas Mayhew himself, of Indian dislike of the colonists. Why they allowed Mayhew to get a foothold at that time is therefore something of a mystery.

Vine de Loria has facetiously claimed that the Wampanoag Indians welcomed the Pilgrims at Plymouth in 1620 primarily because a plague had wiped out so many of their own people that they were longing for company. Facetiousness aside, the explanation contains an element of truth. Wampanoag had been devastated by a plague which had not affected the rival

Narrangansett, and the Wampanoag were undoubtedly in need of allies — if not of company — at the moment when the Puritans fortuitously made their landing. Although the Plymouth colony would not have survived without Indian aid, their weakness was only temporary. Squanto's presence may well have been the factor that decided the then local Sachem, Oussamequem, to enter into a compact with the colonists and to help them. Oussamequem, subsequently known as Massasoit — a term which means Great Leader and which was apparently conferred upon him by the colonists — probably decided to help the colonists because he knew that they were the representatives of powerful and wealthy people on another continent. Undoubtedly Massasoit was as wary of his new allies as they were wary of the Wampanoag. Whatever his initial feelings, his subsequent actions were undoubtedly influenced by a number of events. Traditional history has credited the peace that endured between colonists and Indians in these early days to Massasoit's statesmanship, and they attribute Massasoit's good will primarily to the fact that Governor Winthrop of the Plymouth colony had nursed him back to health during a serious illness. Massasoit was undoubtedly grateful, but he had other obligations to his people which might have turned him against the colonists were it not for the Wampanoag's need for trade goods and allies. Later, gratitude undoubtedly mingled with genuine fear of the power of English.<sup>10</sup>

By the mid 1630s, the balance had begun to shift in favor of the English who, though still small in number, had managed to establish several colonies and held clear superiority over the Indians in weaponry. They provided early and decisive evidence of their superiority in the Pequot War of 1637.

That war is usually described in traditional histories as an act of revenge by English colonists on the Pequot Indians of Connecticut for the murder of two English traders. The actual facts of the war — or massacre — belie this history. The war was, in fact, a series of skirmishes which culminated in 1637 with the arbitrary and merciless massacre by the colonists of several hundred men, women and children. The massacre was

<sup>9</sup> Banks, Charles Edward: *op. cit.*, p. 70.

<sup>10</sup> Jennings, Francis: *op. cit.*, pp. 288-289.



followed by deliberate and methodic broadcasting of British success and it is generally agreed that the colonists seized the occasion to terrorize not only the Pequots but all the coastal Indians with whom they might have had occasion to deal. Some historians attribute the massacre to rivalry between Connecticut and Massachusetts colonists for control of the northeastern areas of Connecticut in which the Pequot were located. Anthropologist Lynn Ceci has suggested that the English committed the atrocities because of Pequot refusal to accept English terms for the production of wampum; this defiance, she believes, threatened colonial control over the price paid for wampum needed for trade with the interior Indians. Whatever the reasons for the war it was relentlessly pursued by the colonists, resulted in the scattering of the remnant Pequots, and its terrors were widely disseminated both by the colonists eager to use the massacre as an example of their power, and by the few survivors fortunate enough to have escaped the carnage.<sup>11</sup>

The Vineyard Indians undoubtedly knew of the massacre: Pequot survivors had taken refuge with the eastern Niantics, and given the fact that enmity existed between Pequot and Narragansett, it is even possible that some Pequot sought haven among those other rivals or the Narragansett: the Wampanoag. Indian scholar Francis Jennings attributes the moderate conduct of Vineyard Indians to their knowledge of the Pequot war, and he attributes the colonists' desire to accommodate to the Indians to their own distance from aid should hostilities erupt.<sup>12</sup>

Descriptions of the Island Indians — particularly those at Gay Head — hardly suggest a people who would have surrendered without a struggle. Their failure to act may have resulted from some disagreement among themselves as to the intentions of the English, or they may have been reasonably ambivalent about colonial power: fearing the English even as they desperately desired the goods upon which they had become significantly dependent.

Their political system, which linked local sachems in a hierarchy of subordination to Massasoit also served to inhibit

<sup>11</sup> Ceci, Lynn: *op. cit.* 1977. Also Jennings, Francis: *op. cit.*, pp. 186-227.

<sup>12</sup> Jennings, Francis: *op. cit.*, p. 230.

the kind of immediate response that had produced the deaths of Dermer and his men some 22 years previously.

Not choice, then, but fear, dependency, and the exigencies of expanded tribal government served as a brake on potential Indian hostility.

Similarly, the rapid conversion to Christianity of the Island Indians has frequently been viewed as evidence of Indian eagerness to absorb English customs. Conversion too, was undoubtedly a result of need, rather than choice. Anthropological case studies indicate that adoption of new religious beliefs virtually always follows upon and is a reaction to the breakdown of society. That Wampanoag society as a whole was in the process of such breakdown even before the establishment of the Plymouth colony may be inferred from the statistics suggesting a rapid decline in that group's population from 25,000 people in the early 17th century to perhaps little more than 5,000 at the time of the Pilgrim's landing.<sup>13</sup>

The decline was primarily the result of disease brought by contact, and the Indians recognized that the presence of the Europeans was responsible for their desperate situation. But the Indians were also soon aware that the English, by and large, were more resistant to these diseases and they credited their resistance — with considerable encouragement from the English themselves — to the power of the colonists' Gods. On the Vineyard, through one of those acts of fate which so often leads observers to believe in the power of historical accident, the first Indian to covert, Hiacoomes, survived together with his family an epidemic that destroyed several hundred of their Indian neighbors in 1643. The survivors, quite understandably, sought out the successful new

<sup>13</sup> Marten, Catherine: *The Wampanoags in the Seventeenth Century*, Plimoth Plantation, Inc. Occasional Papers in Old Colony Studies, No. 2, December, 1970, p. 4. Marten uses population estimates made originally by James Mooney in "The Aboriginal Population of American North of Mexico". Mooney suggested that there were approximately 25,000 Indians in the New England area prior to the plague of 1616-17 which reduced this number to 5000. Mooney's estimations have been severely criticized on a number of grounds as a gross underestimation. Indeed, Mayhew's estimate of 3000 Indians on Martha's Vineyard alone in 1642 (after further "plagues" had taken an even greater toll of numbers) suggests that Mooney was wildly wrong. For criticisms of Mooney — which Jennings believes derived from English desire to perceive the continent as empty and awaiting their settlement — see Jennings, Francis: *op. cit.*, pp. 15-31.



"medicine" — making conversion relatively easier for the zealous and hardworking Mayhews. The fact that Christian Indians undoubtedly died from subsequent epidemics may have tested the faith of these new converts, and no doubt there would have been considerable backsliding in these religious affairs were it not for the isolation of the Island from external influences, or if the decline in population had been less precipitous. Once the step to conversion has been taken, in any event, the will to believe provides a powerful force in the maintenance of a new religion.<sup>14</sup>

Mayhew's own political acumen also helped maintain Island peace. Having purchased the Island with the intent, as his grandson and chronicler Matthew Mayhew informs me, of ultimately obtaining complete control of the land from the Indians,<sup>15</sup> he was both shrewd and cautious in announcing to the Indians that acceptance of Christianity did not require Indian subjugation to English political control. This statement, together with his ability to prevent his more impatient colonists from superceding his authority, won him the neutrality — and sometimes the active support of some of the Island Sachems. Mayhew assured the continued loyalty of the Sachems by incorporating into his Christian teachings, firm insistence that Christian Indians continue to pay expected tribute to their sachems.

The Gay Head Indians were thus able to accept Christianity while evading the political subjugation that normally accompanied conversion in the colonies. Mayhew's

<sup>14</sup> Wallace, Anthony, F. C.: "Revitalization Movements" in *American Anthropologist*, Vol. XVIII, 1956, pp. 264-81. Also see David Aberle: "A Note on Relative Deprivation Theory as Applied to Millenarian and Other Cult Movements" in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Supplement II, Mouton & Co., The Hague, 1962, pp. 209-214. Aberle discusses the relationship between religious conversion and peoples' perception of their deprivation relative to others. The conversion to Christianity of the Gay Head Indians was not in a strict sense a millenarian movement because the term implies the creation of a new form of religion rather than the simple acceptance of someone else's religion. It seems likely that if we knew more about Indian practice of Christianity and the ways in which they wedded it to their native belief during the early years of conversion, we might understand it as a millenarian movement, rather than a simple conversion. The introduction of the devil, Cheepie, for example, into Gay Head legends, suggests the fusion of the Christian idea of the opposition between good and evil, with the Indian stories of Moshup — who was originally neither good, nor evil, but gradually begins to take on characteristics of a Christian deity.

<sup>15</sup> Banks, C. E.: *op. cit.*, p. 81.

successor, Thomas Dongan, then Governor of New York, however, pursued another course — one more consonant with his absentee ownership of the Island. Dongan produced a document signed by Sachem Joseph Mittark which turned over all rights to Gay Head to Dongan and his steward Matthew Mayhew. The legal status of this document was certainly questionable. The Indians claimed that Joseph Mittark had no right to sell Gay Head and produced, in support of their argument, a previous document written by Sachem Metaark and signed by a number of other tributary sachems in 1675. This document declared all land in Gay Head to be the property of Indians living there and further asserted that such lands were "now and forever" to be free of alienation. Metaark appears to have written the document to prevent passage of some Gay Head land to non-resident Wampanoags.<sup>16</sup> However, the petitioners used the document to defend themselves against Dongan's feudal rule.

Dongan had asserted his control over Gay Head by demanding token quitrents and by distributing plots of land to various natives. Many such properties soon passed from tribal ownership into the hands of colonists as a consequence of the usual vulnerability of the Indians to debt, alcohol, misunderstanding of English notions of land tenure, and

<sup>16</sup> Banks, C. E., *History of Martha's Vineyard*, Vol. II, "Annals of Gay Head," pp. 8-10. Several aspects of this story are disturbing inasmuch as it was clearly to the benefit of colonial officials to believe that the original will of Sachem Metaark was a forgery. One would have expected such a document to be issued on the Vineyard during the turbulent era of King Phillip's War as a result of the strained relationships that developed consequent upon the Vineyard Indians refusal to take up arms with their mainland kin against the colonists. The testimony of Indian Josiah Hosewit swearing that he forged the Metaark document must be put in context: although he is described by the colonists as an honest and temperate man, we have no references to the Indian view of his character. Quite often, Indians indebted to colonists because of alcohol or gullibility could be induced to support colonial claims in return for the cancellation of the debt. In a number of disputes on the Vineyard, Indians were often diametrically opposed on various issues, and the perspective of the White community regarding the character of the Indians was often not shared by the Indians themselves. In one such case, documented in Massachusetts Archives, Acts 1811, Chapter 78, a number of Indians claiming to be honest and upright men petitioned for the imposition of Guardians. Their petition was opposed vehemently by a majority of the Indian community which indicated that the petitioners were luckless — and some, intemperate — people whose difficult financial straits forced them into asking for state interference.



outright chicanery. In 1703 the Gay Head community petitioned the General Court of Massachusetts for the return of their rights in the land. The petition produced no results, and Dongan continued to alienate Gay Head land until his death in 1710. At that time, the rights to Gay Head were sold by Dongan's heirs to the Society for the Preservation of the Gospel which thereafter undertook management of the community's spiritual and physical welfare.<sup>17</sup> Though rights to Gay Head had been bought and sold, and passed on to the Society, such sales never had been sanctioned by Island Sachems, were accomplished without the knowledge of the Gay Headers (at least in the case of the sale to Dongan) and certainly without their consent.

As relations between England and her colonies deteriorated and more serious problems with Indians of the interior developed, the Society's interest in Gay Head appears to have lapsed for some years before and during the revolution and the Gay Head community was largely free of outside interference in its affairs. Although nominally subject to colonial law, the Indians appear to have remained aloof from most Island concerns, and while many had been economically integrated into the colonial economy, they were politically more or less autonomous.

Some years passed before the impact of the American revolution reached Gay Head. However, whether the community knew it or not, the establishment of the United States of America had significantly altered the legal status of the community. Control of Gay Head passed from the Society to the state of Massachusetts (although the Indians are arguing that, in fact, the state had no right to take such control), and the Indians subsequently became wards of the state. As "wards" they held the status of minors, could exert no legal rights over their lands and homes, could sell property only to other members of their tribe and could make no

<sup>17</sup> Just how the Society cared for the Indians can be best gauged by its immediate appropriation of 800 of prime acres of Gay Head land. The Society, which had paid 550 pounds for Gay Head, subsequently leased this land for a total of 845 pounds — all of which monies went to the Society. The Indians often disagreed with the Society and issued a number of complaints against the leasing of their land by the Society. See Banks, C. E.: *op. cit.*, Vol. II, Annals of Gay Head, p. 12.

contracts binding in law. Further, they could not sue or be sued — except for trifling sums — in the county courts.

Wardship — like the establishment of Indian reservations later on — had devastating effects on many Indian groups in the state of Massachusetts and the extent of impact was directly related to the extent to which the state succeeded in implementing control of the Indian districts established in the Acts of 1811 and 1828. Although the legal prohibition against land sales by Indians helped maintain Gay Head landholdings intact, only Gay Head's own intransigence prevented further erosion of the community's autonomy. Gay Head refused to accept the rules governing Indian Districts, and they refused to surrender their political rights to White overseers imposed upon them by Massachusetts law. Gay Head succeeded in these evasions of state authority for a number of reasons: its remote location and its relative poverty of natural resources attracted the predatory interest of farmers or speculators only sporadically. The Island population, furthermore, was declining as a result of emigration to growing opportunities on the nearby mainland and because of a high death rate consequent upon seagoing. Finally, opportunity in the whaling industry drew off most of the energies of the Island's male population. Gay Head had also developed its own economic system — and while Gay Headers were well known participants in the whaling economy of late 19th century New England, they conducted many of their economic transactions off-Island, preferring the easier sea route to New Bedford to the tortuous overland journey down-Island.<sup>18</sup>

Because relationships with their neighbors were relatively more tenuous than those of mainland Indian communities, Gay Head drew attention to itself only rarely. A boundary dispute was brought to the attention of the General Court in 1856, and its settlement resulted in the loss of much valuable Gay Head acreage. Few Indian records exist of the reaction to these depredations. Comments by a number of observers

<sup>18</sup> The nature of available transportation, the condition of the road linking Gay Head to the rest of the island, and the presence of numerous "gates" setting off properties made the trip down-Island time-consuming and difficult. Reference to these problems is made in the Gay Head petition for funds for a Grist Mill. Mass. Archives, Chapter 84, p. 515; also Resolve, 1839, Chapter 75.



during the 1850's, however, suggest that the community was fearful and suspicious of foreigners and quite jealous of its prerogatives.<sup>19</sup>

In 1862, the Indian District of Gay Head was established by an act of the Massachusetts General Court as part of the rationalization of government in the state.<sup>20</sup>

During the mid-nineteenth century when the issue of states rights versus federal rights had yet to be resolved by the outcome of the Civil War, the anomalous legal position of Indians posed a problem for state officials anxious to prevent incursions into state affairs by the Federal Government. Indians constituted a peculiar problem: some were living in towns without citizenship, some occupied lands without clear legal boundaries or rights. Disputes over land ownership or Indian rights in towns found their way into state courts and the need became apparent for consistent state policy to govern such potentially litigious situations. Poverty stricken Indians living without citizenship in towns required financial aid and while the total costs of benefits to the Indians were very small, the situation was sufficiently disturbing to state officials to result in the appointment of John Milton Earle as Commissioner of Indian Affairs in 1861. Earle was enjoined to survey the condition of all Indians in the state, and he found Indians living in towns, without citizenship or legal standing, in state Districts as "wards" of the state, and in Gay Head, Indians were living on their own land and governing themselves in their own manner.

Having refused to accept "guardians" or White overseers, the Gay Head Community had worked out a system of government that resembled that of other island towns. They elected three "overseers" from among their own population (the equivalent of selectmen), a clerk, treasurer, and school committee. They supported the community's widows, orphans, aged, sick and indigent by selling clay from the cliffs and cranberries from their productive marshland. Many of

<sup>19</sup> Indian outrage at the gradual erosion of their rights and their land was expressed in a number of documents. See *Resolve*, 1839, Chapter 75. Petition of Zaccheus How-was-we; and letter from Leavitt Thaxter; also Chapter 23. *Resolve* of 1851. Report by Charles C. Nutter, *Harper's New Monthly*, Vol. CXXI, September, 1860, describes the Gay Head population as suspicious of outsiders.

<sup>20</sup> Senate Document No. 14, 1870. Mass. Archives.

them had achieved a reasonable standard of comfort as a result of their participation in the whaling industry. Marriage with non-Indians may have improved their immunity to disease and had introduced a number of foreigners — seamen brought to the island through acquaintance with Gay Head whalers, Blacks brought by the abolition movement, and Indians and Whites from other Massachusetts communities. Despite the presence of non-Indians, the community had retained its Indian identity and, just as Americans absorbed and transformed her immigrants, Gay Head appeared to absorb its foreigners and acculturate them in its communal ways. Most significantly, the community held its land in common and decided by democratic vote where to plant, graze and fence its lands each year. Internal quarrels were settled informally and although Gay Headers traded with other Islanders, and with New Bedford merchants, they had maintained a level of economic self sufficiency that kept them remarkably free of legal entanglements.

From time to time the tight boundary the community had erected around itself appeared to loosen slightly. Gay Head had petitioned the government for aid in occasional quarrels with non-Gay Headers, and in 1849 they even gone so far as to petition — and obtain — a small sum of money from the state for the erection of a grist mill so that they could grind their own corn without having to make the tiring journey over rutted roads to Chilmark. The mill was destroyed in a storm and the community made no further requests for aid to rebuild it. They did ask, subsequently, for some monies for their school and they did become involved in the boundary dispute of 1856. Commissioner Earle found them living reasonably well in Island-style houses constructed during the twenty previous years. Their school was well attended and had been in operation — with interruptions — for some 200 years. All were Christians and while many did not attend church regularly the Commissioner appeared to be impressed by the sobriety, diligence and temperate nature of the community.

Accordingly, he suggested that no changes be made in the legal status of the community — less because this was the desire of the Indians than because of the examples set by



Mashpee where land divisions had created enormous problems for the state. Mashpee had been declared a District in 1834, and division of its common lands had rapidly impoverished the previously self-sufficient community. While recognizing the havoc created by state interference with land tenure, Earle was, nonetheless, a state official and bound "to look ahead to the moment when Gay Head could take its place beside other Island towns."<sup>21</sup> This time would arrive, in his opinion, when the Indians, having been properly instructed in the art of land ownership, were wise enough to defend themselves against the land claims of their neighbors. Earle thus promised an eventual change in the status of the community and suggested that in the interim, while the community was instructed in citizenship, it be supplied with various kinds of aid.

Earle consequently advised the General Court to establish an Indian Commissioner to oversee all Indian affairs in the state, thus laying the groundwork for creation of a permanent authority over the Indians to replace the transient rules and personages of the past. In the case of Gay Head, Earle made several specific suggestions which appear innocent enough but which, if implemented, would most certainly have assured the ultimate collapse of Gay Head's communal way of life, the dispersal of Indian lands, and loss of Indian control of Gay Head.

The Legislature was asked to provide instructional aids for the school at the community's request and to establish sanctions whereby school officials could refuse admission to "unruly or contumacious scholars". Since school officials were often recruited from outside the community, the innocent-seeming suggestion heralded interference with the community's right of self-government. Moreover, because attendance at a common school is an important factor in forgoing community bonds, the right of the school officials to reject community members promised to create profound schisms in the community and to erode the base which made feasible the cooperation needed for communal land tenure.

Earle also suggested that the sanction of state law imposed on land arrangements already in existence. The Gay Head

<sup>21</sup> Senate Document No. 96, 1861. Mass. Archives.

community recognized the right of individuals to fence or enclose land which was thereafter considered to belong to such individuals.<sup>22</sup>

Such land was "private" only as long as the individual who claimed it maintained his interest in it, and did not necessarily pass intact to his heirs. If the Indians can be faulted for not understanding white rules of land tenure, the Whites, on their part, often chose not to understand Indian law. Such "private" Indian land could pass back to the community for any number of reasons: disinterest, death, lack of heirs who wanted the land. By suggesting that the state sanction ownership of enclosed land, Earle had taken an important step in altering the communal basis of the town economy.

However, the land was "private" only as long as the individual maintained his fences, and did not necessarily pass intact to his heirs. Such land passed back to the community, if its "owner" ceased to fence it, or if he died. By suggesting that the state sanction ownership of enclosed land, Earle had taken an important step in altering the communal basis of the town economy. Common ownership works only when the community has considerable flexibility in its ability to allocate lands for various purposes. Granting rights in perpetuity to those who enclosed land removed their land permanently from the control of the community. Because there was no guarantee that the owner would continue to use his land either for his own or the community's benefit, this action would have gradually eroded the ability of the community to provide for itself. Worse, granting rights in perpetuity to individuals implied their right to sell such land. Finally, the very act of imposing a state sanction on Indian law superceded the rights of the Indians to dispose of their lands in their own way.

The first step taken toward the adjustment of land titles was the passage of a resolve, Chapter 42, by the Legislature of 1863, which provided that all boundary lines between

<sup>22</sup> The notion that Indian ideas of property were identical to those of whites undoubtedly lies behind this statement made by Commissioner Earle in House Document No. 215, 1862, Mass. Archives. For a brief discussion and complete bibliography of the land tenure question, see Sutton, Imre: *Indian Land Tenure*, Clearwater Press, 1975.



individual landowners located in the Indian District of Gay Head be determined. Richard L. Pease was subsequently appointed to complete the census which had been halted by the death of Charles Marston, the original appointee. The ostensible reason for undertaking this research was the belief that serious legal problems would arise unless such proprietorship were confirmed.

Since the only reports of serious legal problems derived from boundary disputes, the commissioner's motive must be questioned. Most other "official" comments on Gay Head testified to the fact that the Indians had worked out a reasonable system. White observers, in fact, expressed great astonishment at the efficient manner in which the informal rules of tenure operated. While difficulties may well have arisen in the future, the Indians had managed, despite more than 200 years of contact, to work within their system of tenure. It is difficult, therefore, not to believe the "fear of litigation" was simply an excuse to initiate the process by which the Indian system of land tenure — and the basis of the community — could be destroyed.

The Commissioner made one other suggestion, this one at the behest of the community — that the state establish rules to control residence in Gay Head. Indians who left, married, and later returned with their children, were to be denied residence. Some of these persons obviously strained town resources when they returned destitute and without prospect of employment. The Gay Head community may have made the request because they could not support any major influx of dependent "strangers." However, establishment of a state rule determining residency constituted yet another interference with Indian control. Furthermore, while the Indians were interested only in limiting readmission to the children of women who married out, the Commissioner proposed extending the prohibition to children of emigrant males as well. The restriction might well have protected the integrity of the community for a short while, but assured its demise in the long run if descendants of all emigrant Indians were barred. Ultimately the community might fail to replenish population losses through death, out-marriage or emigration.

Were the Commissioner's suggestions carried out? Certainly the process of land allotment was begun, although there is no record of any other action taken to enforce the recommendations regarding schools and residence. Nevertheless, the attention of the state had now been focused upon the community and despite the Commissioners' pronouncement that nothing was to be changed, the simple legal establishment of the District in 1862 by the General Court, transformed Gay Head into "a body corporate and although a court document states that they held a note of obligation. According to court records, the community disagreed about paying the bill. The minister, Zachariah Howwosswee argued for payment while others opposed him. The lawyer representing Gay Head argued that the District, which had no corporate existence prior to 1862, could not be held liable for debts incurred before this time but the jury nonetheless decided in favor of the plaintiff.

Another suit involved both Gay Headers and Christiantown Indians (who had also been granted District status in 1861) in a dispute over medical bills totaling politic" and had an immediate impact upon the community. As a corporation, Gay Head now had state sanction of its power of perpetual succession, the power to grant and receive grants, to purchase, renew, hold and transmit lands. It also had the power to sue and be sued, to enter into contracts as a community and as a corporation it could be indicted for crimes.

It was this last provision that impacted almost immediately on the community. In 1866, the merchant William D. Mayhew sued to recover \$61.25 allegedly due him for goods delivered to the community by order of the elected officials of the town. The community voted against payment \$396.98 — a considerable sum in those days when the entire town income from the sale of clay from the cliffs hardly amounted to \$100 a year. The complaint, in this case brought by the Indians, alleged that the bills were fraudulent. Citing the fact that some of those billed for medical services had been dead for several years preceding the date of the supposed medical treatment, the Gay Headers claimed that



the doctors had also failed to provide for the living.<sup>23</sup>

Because Christiantown had never rejected the earlier Guardian Acts, it was subject to the control of White overseers, and they certified that the Christiantown portion of the bills were fair. Once again the decision went against the Indians, but this decision was overturned in 1867 by a Judge of the Superior Court who stated that Indians could not contract debts without the permission of their overseers; that the District was not the successor to the tribe of Indians; and that the District Indians were, consequently, not liable for debts incurred prior to incorporation.

Although the Indians won this case, the grounds on which they won it augured future problems. The need for the permission of overseers destroyed the autonomy of individuals in such personal matters as contracting for medical care, groceries or housing materials for which an individual might not be able to pay cash. The community was also now liable for debts contracted as a result of decisions of their overseers. Since then, as now, there were undoubtedly differences of opinion between community members and their elected officials, and since there was no way for overseers — having entered into a contract — to raise monies to pay their debts, there would seem to have been no way in which either individual members of the community or the community as a whole could guarantee payment even for small purchases for which they needed credit. What effects this might have had on the economy of the community can only be surmised — certainly Indians would have had even more difficulty obtaining credit under the new system than they had previously. And the way was now open for suits against the community as a whole for any debts entered into by overseers, or by community members who managed, despite the legal constraints, to enter into individual contracts.

The recommendations of the Commissioner and the legal establishment of the District thus placed the community in jeopardy. Establishment of the District as a legal corporation lay the groundwork for the development of codified laws and thus endangered the communal system of land tenure which

functions efficiently only through the use of a flexible and adaptive system of customary law. The suggestion that individuals be granted the right to hold enclosed land in perpetuity provided the entering wedge for a system of individual land ownership. The conferring of power by the state on elected officials interfered with the egalitarian system of the community by increasing the power of officials in relation to other community members. Finally, while the failure to grant the District any power to raise taxes might be construed as a check on the power of the overseers to engage in unpopular economic activities, in fact this lack of the power to tax, together with the loss of individual autonomy to make contracts for small debts, would appear to have put an end to the community's access to all outside resources.

Given the problems created by the establishment of the District it would hardly have been surprising if some Gay Headers had voted in favor of incorporation as a town. Certainly those who were engaged in trade, or who had need of credit to purchase necessities might be expected to vote for incorporation rather than accept the economic stagnation which District status had imposed upon them. It is likely, nonetheless, that the state imposed town status on the community despite the protestations of many members of the community. The events set into motion by establishment of the District were, however, quite sufficient in themselves to force the community to relinquish whatever remained of its sovereignty if it were to survive at all.

The early years of Indian/White contact were marked by a rough equality that rapidly gave way to White superiority in numbers and weaponry. During this phase of Indian/White contact, however, at least on the Vineyard, interference in Indian affairs was accomplished primarily through conversion of the Indians to Christianity. This conversion followed upon the Indian's loss of faith in their Gods as a result of contact-created epidemics. Mayhew's policy of non-interference with Indian political or economic affairs derived from Christian beliefs that emphasized only the conversion of the Indians. Once Christianized, Indians were presumed to have the same chances of "grace" or survival as their English fellows; thus no attempts were made to provide

<sup>23</sup> Superior Court Docket No. 102, Dukes County.



the Indians at this time with technological knowledge or other information that might have eased their transition into the White world or bettered their chances of accommodating to it. The beliefs of the time supporting such non-interference were not accidents but aspects of colonization occurring at a time when the mother country was not strong enough and technology was insufficiently advanced to provide rapid and predictable aid to colonial outposts. Colonists took with them, to buttress their own precarious situation, a firm belief in the power of Christianity, and an equally firm belief that all Christians had an equal chance of survival providing, of course, that they worked and maintained Christian values. The colonists' only responsibility to the Indians was to convert them. After conversion, as Christians, the Indians were left to their own devices. Those who failed to survive were viewed as victims only of their own inadequacy. From the colonists' perspective, such behavior was hardly coercion. However, once we recognize that the Indian was unable, because of his own culture, to fully grasp the legal system of the colonists, his immediate disadvantage becomes obvious, and colonial failure to instruct the Indian in anything other than Christian belief becomes a sin of omission, and a form of coercion as difficult to prove as it is easy to recognize.

Considerable interference by the state in Indian affairs marked the era of Indian/White relationships following the Revolution. Here we can see more clearly the way in which legal decisions of the state of Massachusetts gradually eroded the remnants of Indian sovereignty despite the best efforts of Indians to prevent it. Pronouncements of state officials are filled with sympathy for the plight of the Indians, but such sympathy was merely the accompaniment of attempts to assimilate the Indians as ordinary citizens of the state. While officials claimed only to be maintaining the status quo, by giving preexisting arrangements the force of law the establishment of the District of Gay Head in fact totally altered the community's legal status. By later proclaiming that they had obtained a virtually unanimous vote in favor of incorporation of the district as a town, state officials could persuade themselves and their descendants that the Indians

freely chose to surrender their autonomy for ordinary citizenship in the state of Massachusetts.

We would like to believe that we learn something from history and that we know better than to repeat the errors of our forbears. Current court proceedings, however, are nothing more than the logical and inevitable extension of the process of assimilation — or destruction — of the Indians that began over 400 years ago. As in the past, the burdens have been placed upon the Indians who are being asked to prove that they are Indians, to prove that they are tribes, to prove that necessity, rather than free will, lay behind their surrender of autonomy. Furthermore, they are being asked to prove their case to Americans and within a legal context that adheres firmly to the belief that free will and moral choice, rather than necessity, rules the affairs of men.





## As Things Were on-Island Eighty Years Ago

by JOSEPH CHASE ALLEN

A sea captain, putting out to sea and opening with comments upon such activity will note "a point of departure" which is a definite statement. Thus it seems to be necessary to note such a point in this narrative, through it is not well to be too definite about everything to be mentioned hereinafter. For the majority of matters to be mentioned and recalled are thus filed in memory as having been seen and studied to some degree; others only as being subjects of discussion by elders who paid no attention to an eager listener of very tender years. Such as Edgartown's last whaler, the schooner, *Hattie E. Smith*, never seen, but mentioned by Capt. John E. Johnson who took her to sea. Interesting to the listener, who lived in an atmosphere that was almost redolent of whales and whalers, whale-oil and whale-ships. But Edgartown — it was almost a foreign country, being so distant as regards travel and not too attractive, for the county court-house and jail were there, never mentioned by many up-Islanders without a slight shudder, a throw-back to a distant time when those ancestors of the place judged that it was well to keep entirely away from those landmarks and strove to abide by their own council.

Yet it is necessary to mention some such matters, for they help to complete the Island scene as it was eighty years ago and to acquaint the reader of today with a setting that was so primitive in nature that it is difficult indeed to connect it

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with or recognize it in the Island of the present, modernized to a high degree and populated by the native-born or adopted who would be entirely lost should they be forced to return to that era of the past. Indeed it is a matter for astonishment that even one who remembers the Island of that time so well, can realize the drastic change and the ease and smoothness with which even the oldest inhabitants of the time forsook inherited customs and usages and adopted the new, with mutterings, of course, but a certain gratified acceptance.

The Island had resisted change; resisted until there were sections that had succumbed to the dry rot that results in ghost towns; yet no one appeared to notice this or comment upon the obvious fact. In point, this was probably most noticable in the town of Chilmark.

The highway system, the Island-over, differed but slightly from that of the present, and then, as now, three highways crossed Chilmark from east to west, each one measuring around four miles, until they merged at Menemsha, now called Chilmark Center, at which point the state highway extended to the Gay Head town lines and continued to the lighthouse in that town. These estimated measurements were taken from the West Tibury town line.

Capigan Valley extended roughly from North Tisbury to Menemsha Creek and farms laid on both sides of this road. From any elevation twinkled the lights of a dozen occupied dwellings. Not all of them were on working farms, but all lands lying around them were either under tillage or pastured, and thus were kept clear of brush and trees except for the stands of wood. But there were eight houses that could be seen from the public road which were vacant, some falling to decay, others still resisting wind and weather, and there were some three or four other vacant houses that were concealed in dimples between the hills and gaping cellar-holes filled with briary growth could be found in various places.

On Middle Road there were seven occupied houses, as it passed through Chilmark, five of them on farmland that was either planted or pastured or both. One of these was the Methodist parsonage at least half a mile distant from any other occupied house. But there were five vacant houses.

On South Road there were six or seven more occupied

houses, three or four occupied only part of the year, and a school house, permanently closed. The farms of Quansoo and Quenames laid off this road, and where it extended as State Highway west of Menemsha Center there were several more houses, some occupied the year round and some only part time. Yet the entire list of occupied dwellings, the vacant houses, and cellar-holes, offered ample evidence of change since the census that gave Chilmark the heaviest population of any town in Dukes County. Still resisting change, there were men and their families living on farms inherited from ancestors, who were continuing to live as their fathers and grandfathers did on the same acreage, which yielded physical comfort and bountiful food supplies, but very little actual cash, which commodity was becoming more and more important.

Actually, the principal reason for the isolation of so many persons was a sprawling population — which was true of the greater part of the Island — and the difficulty in travelling, for there were but a few rods of paved road on the Island eighty years ago and all other miles of highway were rutted and narrow roads, where little grading had ever been done and where the grades were steep, the soft sandy places frequent, and boggy stretches were soft and muddy in summer and frozen ridges in winter, blocked here and there by snow-drifts.

The pattern of settlement had brought all this about. People had crowded into the locations where there was some business, and here the influence of whaling and fishing could be seen though the whaling business had become of less and less importance and very few Islanders were engaged in it, this being largely confined to the Arctic Ocean.

Yet Edgartown contained buildings that had been associated with whaling and still were used for some purposes. Edgartown had its blacksmith, livery stable and boat-builders shops, together with a fleet of small boats and vessels engaged in fishing. Oak Bluffs had its blacksmith shop, livery stable and at least one drug-store open throughout the year. Its Camp Ground contained many more houses than it has today, but scarcely any of these were occupied in winter and the town's farms were few (but among the best on the



Island) and Oak Bluffs, then Cottage City, was beginning to grow.

Vineyard Haven was flourishing, fleets of coasting vessels, tugs with tows of barges and occasional molasses brigs, coming to anchor in its harbor because of weather conditions or for water and provisions. There were five grocery markets in Vineyard Haven and a ship-chandler's store where certain provisions could be purchased. The town had three blacksmith-shops, one of them keeping two men busy, a boat-yard capable of hauling small schooners, the U. S. Marine Hospital, Customs House office, and telegraph office, and there was a telephone line between Vineyard Haven and Edgartown, by way of East Chop and the Beach Road. It was at about this time that it was decreed that every post office must have a telephone which required that a line be constructed westerly to the up-Island towns. West Tisbury had two post offices, and each had its telephone.

But the bunching of population which marked the beginning of settlement continued to plague everyone. Vineyard Haven was divided into three distinct sections with space between the Chop, Down- Neck and Up-head. There were also tiny communities in the Chappaquansett area. Edgartown had a similar situation, with a community on Chappaquiddick Island, where the inhabitants had their own church and a school. Another school was located on the Katama plain and before the separation of Oak Bluffs from Edgartown there had been a school there. West Tisbury, the largest township in area, had more outlying settlements than any of them. Lamberts Cove was a tiny village in and of itself with its church and school. North Tisbury, best known then as Middletown, had its church, a school, a blacksmith shop, harness shop and post office. Going the other way from West Tisbury village, there was a settlement at Scrubby Neck with sufficient population to have supported a store and a school. The dainty little lady, Miss Eleanor Allen, had taught at the Scrubby Neck school not many years before, but when there were no more children to attend the school was discontinued.

Thus the tiny neighborhoods and hamlets were widely scattered, with people clinging to the properties which they loved, being a heritage from generations in many cases, and

yet enduring hardships in order to live upon them. They had to travel to do any marketing, in spite of a quite orderly system of visiting "order-wagons" from most Island stores, and a huge "peddle-cart" that covered most of the Island on a regular weekly schedule. Although the up-Island stores in West Tisbury, Chilmark, and Gay Head, carried dry groceries, canned goods, salt pork, butter, and cheese, they carried no fresh meats. The big peddle-cart carried a good supply of fresh beef and pork, canned lard and bacon, but no chickens. Even so, there had to be visits to the larger stores that became expeditions. For consider: if a resident of Quitsa wanted a ton of coal, he had to travel about fifteen miles to obtain it in the coal yard of Vineyard Haven and haul it fifteen miles to get it home. This was just one example.

Abijah Hammett of North Road severely injured one of his hands; some bones were broken protruding through the skin and the man was alone on his farm at the time. He managed to hitch up his horse and drive to the nearest doctor, who was in West Tisbury. An active man could have walked across the hills in twenty minutes, but Hammett was not youthful and besides he was in pain, and he drove about five miles to have his hand treated.

Captain Frank Cottle gashed one of his feet with an axe and he drove seven miles for surgery. There were doctors in all the down-Island towns and one in West Tisbury as noted, but when they were needed some one had to hitch up and drive to notify them of the need. Of course, once the telephones were installed in the post offices, they were a great convenience and saved much exertion and worry.

There were no snow-plows — only men with shovels who would open roads sufficiently to allow a horse to haul a light wagon through.

They did not receive pay for such services — in the gale of 1898, with North Road blocked for quarter-mile stretches, every man and boy in Chilmark able to handle a shovel was drafted by the selectmen to open this road. According to snap-shots taken of this gang of shovelers it was an impressive scene. But, the town paid no wages. "If," said the selectmen, "any of you men are injured or taken sick, or any of your family should die, you would want a doctor or



undertaker without delay, so get busy," and the selectmen also shovelled.

But that was only part of the story. Those families who were thus isolated — and there were many of them who lived long distances from the larger villages and even from the public ways — laid in supplies of groceries and fuel in anticipation of being snowed-in. A half-mile of driveway filled two feet deep with snow meant much shovelling for a horse to get through, and shortages would occur so it had to be done. One man whose barn was very small ran low on hay to feed his cow and horse. The snow was not deep but it had drifted in spots and the travelling was difficult when he and his brother, both large and powerful men, set out with horse and farm-wagon for a supply of hay. Once loaded, the horse got stuck in a drift and could not stir the load. The brothers were not daunted, but un-hitching the horse, they took hold of the loaded cart and hauled it through the drift by hand. But there were not too many men who could have done this even in emergency.

How such people stocked up for winter was by laying in large supplies of staples, flour, molasses, sugar, spices, and the like. Neighborhood men would sail out of Menemsha Creek, in the fall, in a fishing boat and in New Bedford they would make their purchases of this kind as wholesale establishments. They divided the cargo and hauled it to the various homes. Such men would have ample supplies for themselves and some to lend to less fortunate neighbors who did not hesitate to seek such assistance.

Those scattered and more-or-less isolated people dealt with their various problems arising out of such circumstances in various ways. One of those arrangements by-mutual-consent is worthy of mention; this was the handling of the North Road mail.

All but one family on North Road were residents of Chilmark. The one exception was the family of Asa R. Luce who lived just east of the town line on the West Tisbury side. The Chilmark post office was located no more than a few yards from its present location, and thus North Road residents would be obliged to travel four to five miles to reach their post office. But West Tisbury had two post offices

and one of these was located in the building which now houses the Red Cat book store. North Road residents, therefore, had their mail dropped at North Tisbury which was within easy walking distance of a number of North Road homes. Arose from this custom the system.

Asa Luce had operated the store established long before by John Ferguson and there Luce had sold dry groceries, boots, shoes, and various other commodities. But he had discontinued the store sometime before this date and the little store, kept in one of the parlors of the low, double house, was empty. But Asa never forgot the men who assembled there and continued to offer one simple service to his neighbors. In the little vestibule which was built around his kitchen door, there hung a big bag of printed calico. When man or boy arrived at the North Tisbury post office for mail, Tom Merry, the post master, would ask if he wanted to take the North Road mail and he was seldom refused. Such boy or man would take the bundle, and it was often quite bulky with letters, magazines and newspapers, and arriving at the home of Asa Luce, would take all save his own mail and put it in the bag in Asa's vestibule. All others along North Road knew of this arrangement and would stop at Asa's place on their way to the post office, often finding all their mail there.

Should this person or party plan to proceed only part way up North Road and observe in the collection in Asa's bag some mail for those who lived farther west on North Road, he would take the rest, for Nahum Norton had a large and weather-proofed mail box on his front fence and the mail was dropped into that box-which meant that the addressees had a much shorter trip to make. This system endured for many years, disrupted only when Asa finally died, but even after that the mail-box of Nahum Norton continued to be used in the same manner. Probably every detail of this neighborhood arrangement was in violation of all the laws and statutes made and provided, but there was never any complaint, and no mail was ever known to have been lost or tampered with although some very young boys often carried the North Road mail.

There was temptation to examine some of this mail more



fully, for there was always much reading matter and the boys knew and recognized the Farm Journal, New England Homestead, and the Montreal Herald and Weekly Star which was subscribed to by a number of North Roaders. But the boys knew that they could have these publications after the subscribers had finished with them and with this certainty, they were content.

There was a very general and accepted system of swapping among those who lived far from the larger stores. Many farmers even on the smaller estates had pigs and sheep and would slaughter an animal for meat, a pig in the fall, or a sheep in warm weather. There were very few who had any sort of refrigeration, and meat would spoil in warm weather. Thus they divided it among their neighbors who would return a like quantity when they themselves killed an animal. Likewise, such men "changed works", helping each other over difficult passages when two men could handle matters easily but one man alone was handicapped. This would occur throughout the year, with plowing, harvesting, chopping wood and slaughtering large, heavy animals. No man liked to travel far into the woods to chop firewood alone; there was too much risk involved in case an accident should occur.

Once winter had begun beef could be hung and allowed to freeze, but it had to be hung where the moon could not shine on it. This was the accepted rule; moon-beams could poison meat, they said. Fish, especially the chilled varieties that came ashore during winter storms and were gathered before the gulls found them, could be buried in snow-banks and would keep as long as the snow lasted, which was usually sufficient in those days of hard winters. And in case of sickness (in those days epidemics were frequent and severe when people lived on salt pork and potatoes and suffered from cabin-fever from being housed for long periods) neighbors would rally around with herb tea and other home remedies, "until," as old Dr. C. F. Lane swore that certain people never called a doctor until the patient was dying, which was only a partial exaggeration.

Instinctively, people longed for fresh vegetables and would go into swamps in early spring to gather the first green sprouts of skunk-cabbage or other plants which they would

boil and eat eagerly and shortly after whole families would be prostrated with illness, which "never killed anyone, but only made them wish they were dead", as one man declared.

Yet there was another side to the story. Was there a church supper, or entertainment put on by local talent, either one was well attended. Regardless of the wicked travelling conditions, even in stormy weather, there were always some persons who would drive for miles at such times. Some of these were fishermen who were obliged to remain ashore in winter. A few were whalers, home from a voyage and waiting for spring to fit-out. Still more were those who had no small children, or perhaps no children at all, and thus the gate receipts were rewarding.

The Mite Society was something that drew attendance from afar. It was usually held in private homes, and the houses were literally packed. Nothing cost over ten cents, chicken chowder, ice cream made by hand, pie, cake and coffee, each was a dime, which was the "Mite" and anyone could have as many servings as he or she cared for at ten cents a serving. Should the assembly prove to be larger than planned, milk was added to the oyster stew, and more butter, until, as an elderly sage remarked: "What them women can do with one old Shanghai rooster beats hell out of the story of the miracle of the loaves and fishes!" But no one ever complained, and all would be right back when the next occasion arose.

The majority of these affairs were held to raise money for the support of some church, and after such an event, zealous persons canvassed those who never attended services or the benefit suppers. Such persons would usually contribute folding money, not less than a dollar, perhaps grumbling that they never heard the parson preach. One such parson heard that expression and snapped back. "All right if that's the way you want it, but you're going to die one of these days and I suspect you would want a Christian burial!" For there was plain talk among the folks of the period, caustic remarks at times. Called to attend the sick wife of a farmer, the doctor found her in a dark bedroom more or less cluttered with soiled clothing. He opened window and threw the clothing outside. The farmer expostulated. But the doctor, unmoved,



retorted: "They're going to stay there and it wouldn't do you any harm if the dew fell on you a few times!"

A neighbor visited a sick man: "Do you think I will get well?" he asked in a weak voice. "You don't stand a chance!" was the reply. Later he explained: "I saw the doctor take out them little black pills — he always gives em to speed up the end!"

A vigorous and out-spoken young lady approached by another who asked: "Are you going to marry Bill?" referring to some casual appearances of the couple. "Huh! replied the gal: "I'd rather go farrow all my days than marry him!" — an expression well understood in a farm district where an unbred cow was called "farrow"; likewise an un-seeded field.

But all this changed when the automobile came to the Island. The first one arrived about eighty years ago and caused a fatality on the state highway at Tashmoo Hill. Others followed, slowly, but they followed, and as they came — the paved roads, macadam first, and later, much later, a smoother paving, with mile after mile added as the highways widened and were graded — more and more of the traditional atmosphere disappeared, and more and more acreage was abandoned and left "farrow". As this occurred it was as if a curtain had dropped over the traditional scene blotting out and burying the beauty that had thrilled and delighted generations. Nature reclaimed the hills and vales, choked the brooks, and broadened the swamps and fens as the jungle of the present extended and thickened, blotting out entirely the old homesteads where nothing remained save the cellar-holes of which was once written:

"Hard work for even time to fill  
These holes or trace of toil to kill,  
And there they stand, the empty shell  
That housed humanity a spell". . .

But even they have disappeared, and their locations are lost and forgotten.



## Tools of the Trade, A Family Collection

by NORMAN F. ROBINSON

**M**artha's Vineyard, well known for producing generations of seafaring men, also produced generations of craftsmen skilled in boatbuilding, carpentry, leather work and other trades. Often, they were the same men who practiced these other occupations between voyages or after retirement from seafaring.

The late Edward D. Robinson (1866-1945) of Vineyard Haven and Chilmark had acquired a variety of hand tools used by himself, plus some passed from his father, grandfather, father-in-law and perhaps others.

He was my grandfather. I last visited him at his Chilmark house when I was about 16. He was by then pretty much retired, but I remember accompanying him in his Model T to do some minor repairs on the old Great House which he rented out in the summers.

After Ed Robinson died, my father, Onslow Robinson, found the old tools among his belongings. He put some of them on display at the county fair in West Tisbury in the 1950's, where they received much favorable notice.

Around 1960, Onslow's barn burned and it was thought that the tool collection was lost. Last summer, however, I came across it stored in another location.

We can't always identify the original user, but we can make some educated guesses, and the tools of the trade may tell us something of the state of the "mechanik arts", as Eli Whitney called them.

NORMAN F. ROBINSON is the son of Edna Baldwin Robinson and her late husband, Onslow, of Chilmark. Mr. Robinson is now an aircraft engineer in California, and returns to the Island periodically to visit his family here.



The story might have started in Dexter's Boat Shop, a two-story building which stood in Vineyard Haven about where Owen's Park is now. The Dexters produced a number of noted seafarers, but whether or not Dennis Dexter (1811-1883) was among them, I cannot tell. He was the proprietor of the boat shop, or one of them, and DCHS lists him as a boat builder. His daughter Sophia (1837-1891) married Joseph E. Robinson, a wandering seaman originally from Louisiana. Together, Joseph and Sophia raised five children in the loft of the boat shop, though Joseph died in 1874 when his youngest son, Chester, was just two months old.

Tools in Edward Robinson's collection, which may have been used in the boat shop, include various auger drills. The earliest of these used a simple T-handle, and must have been most tedious to use, though it would generate more torque than the later models. The first crank-handle, or brace, was of wood, with no ratchet, but perhaps it speeded the job a bit. There is also a steel brace, still with no ratchet. This one allowed you to stand a little closer to your work, but you still needed plenty of room in which to operate. Today, of course, such tools would employ a reversible ratchet, but even that improvement has been almost totally displaced by the electric drill motor, unless the work is beyond the reach of an extension cord.

Some of the collection of axes, hammers, and adzes could also have been used in the boat shop. Builders of wooden boats employed the axe and adze extensively in shaping stem and keel members and similar large timbers. An adze is an axe with the cutting edge set crosswise, like a hoe. The precision with which a timber can be shaped with one is amazing. In the summer of 1943 I worked in Palmer Scott's boatyard in New Bedford, and had the chance to watch a good adze man at work. The adze used on heavy ship timbers is larger than the one in this collection. The axes, on the other hand, cover a wide range of sizes. Each size and shape had its particular application, just as an assortment of knives is used for all the operations of an accomplished cook.

Edward was probably too young to have picked up much from watching the boat builders when he was packed off to

sea. At age 12, Captain Valentine Lewis took him as a cabin boy on the bark *Ocean*, allegedly "to get him off his mother's hands". His brothers William and Chester each made a whaling voyage too, but apparently not until they were old enough to sign on as seamen.

When the *Ocean* returned 3½ years later, Edward was nearly 16. It seems doubtful that he received much formal education, but he was good with his hands. It appears that his first regular job ashore was at the Crocker harness factory in Vineyard Haven. If he received a share of the profit from the whaling voyage, it is likely that he invested it in leather working tools, for he had a good assortment of what were probably the best such tools available.

There were tools for cutting, punching, sewing, decorating, carving and finishing leathers. One obviously expensive tool is a splitter, or skive, which was used to shave a piece of leather to a uniform thickness. That's not the way nature provides it.

Edward told of the time he was issued a piece of leather with which to make a harness. He told his foreman that the leather didn't appear to be strong enough. To which the foreman replied, "Anything is strong enough that's long enough and wide enough!" This may cast a different light on the expression, "They just don't make them like they used to."

Most of the leather-working tools have Edward's initials, EDR, stamped into them. In addition, many bear the manufacturer's stamp. Some are marked "G S Osborne & Co", others "C C Osborne & Co", and still others "H F Osborne". There was obviously a split in the house of Osborne, though whether friendly or otherwise we can only speculate.

The harness factory burned and wasn't rebuilt, though the automobile hadn't yet affected the demand for harnesses. At any rate, Edward's career in leather working fizzled out, and he took up carpentry. Eventually, he became one of the elite — a finish carpenter. He did things like cabinet work, installing locks, etc. But he probably got his start at his grandfather's boat shop. The building stood until World War I or thereabouts, but just how long it served as a boat shop we don't know. During the summers, Edward went fishing at



Lobsterville, the little village on the shore at Gay Head. It was there he met Hattie Stewart, whom he married in Chilmark in March, 1898. Hattie's father, Onslow Stewart (1838-1920), is said to have spent something like 30 years at sea, and one of the tools of his trade was a sextant. In the wooden case of what is presumed to be his sextant are pencilled notations such as "Bk Herald of New Bedford, 34½ months out, 1205 Bbls all holds." But no starting date.

Like many whalers, he became adept at working with whalebone. Among the items he made were an ebony serving tray inlaid with whalebone and bearing his wife's initials, dice and other game pieces from whale tooth ivory, and dominoes laminated of ebony and whalebone. Whether he made these things while sailing or after retiring, we can't say. When he did give up whaling, however, he became a leading citizen of Lobsterville during the summers, and lived at his house in Chilmark, the "Four Winds", during the winters. He had the hull of a Nomans Land boat (the *Orca*, now at Mystic Seaport) made in 1882, but finished her himself in his Chilmark shop.

Onslow Stewart kept busy in his workshops in Chilmark and Lobsterville right up to the time of his death in 1920, at age 82. Aside from the try-square, I couldn't guess which other tools may have belonged to him. Edward and Hattie Robinson acquired Onslow's house, and the "Great House" in Chilmark, and sold their Vineyard Haven house, out on Main Street toward West Chop. In the process of these moves, the various collections of tools were merged, and the identities of the original owners lost for the most part. But Ed no doubt kept the tools for use more than as keepsakes, for most of them show signs of having led a hard life. Ed worked as a carpenter for many years, sometimes as a contractor, and sometimes for others, such as the late Roger Allen of Chilmark.

His collection of wood planes was extensive. Wooden-bodied planes varied from the shortest "block" planes to extra long "smooth" planes with several sizes in between. In addition, he had special tongue and groove planes, and its been a good while since that was done by hand. The tonguing and grooving planes were designed to

dress boards which were an honest inch thick, and its been a while since you could buy those, too. Standard "one-inch" lumber has been ¾-inch thick throughout my lifetime. However, I find that my mother's house, built about a hundred years ago, has real one inch boards in it.

The tongue and groove planes are each marked "Greenfield Tool Co., Greenfield, Mass., No. 383", so they must have been sold as a set. This makes sense, because one would be pretty useless without the other. However, a variable groover, designed to make a groove any desired distance from the edge of a board, is stamped "J. H. Lamb, New Bedford." It must have been fairly costly, but was probably quite useful in the construction of cabinets, drawers and so on. Other planes are not marked by the manufacturer, but I would hesitate to say any of them were homemade. Also in his collection are more modern planes with cast iron bodies, and special planes, such as the one which allows you to take a shaving right up to a corner (imagine planing the inside bottom of a box.) The corner plane is by Sargent and Company.

It would be interesting to know whether one of the mallets in the collection was made from a "beetlebung" tree from Chilmark Corners. The wood from these trees, actually the Hornbeam according to Dr. Banks, resisted splitting and splintering, so was valued for beetles or mallets, which were used to loosen the bungs of casks and hogsheads.

A craft not practiced by Edward, as far as we know, was stone-splitting. However, Onslow Stewart's father-in-law Rodney R. Reed (1825-1894) and other relatives of upper Chilmark were accomplished at that trade. A dozen years ago, my father, Onslow Robinson, wrote an article for the Vineyard Gazette about these men, with photos of the rock drills, iron wedges, etc., they used. Somehow these tools also found their way into Edward's collection.

Although some of the old tools are obsolete, some have endured and may be purchased essentially unchanged today. For example, Sears tool catalog still lists the Nail Cutting Nippers. "14 in. long, cuts up to 16-penny nails." About \$7. A very similar tool is listed in the catalog of Brookstone Company, Peterborough, N. H., except the jaws are offset. It is described as a "Nail Outener." The idea is to grip the nail



with the jaws and by rocking the tool sideways to pull it with more authority than an ordinary claw hammer. A marking gage very similar to the one in one of those in the collection can be purchased from Brookstone for about \$4, and Consumers Bargain Corp., of Pleasantville, New York, sells a gage very similar to one of those in the collection can be purchased from Brookstone for about \$4, and Consumers Bargain Corp., of Pleasantville, New York, sells a drawknife for about \$10. I didn't find a spokeshave in the catalogs at my disposal, but feel sure they are still available.

Today's hammers, hatchets, chisels, etc., may look more streamlined, and are often chrome-plated for rustproofing and bright appearance. Some may indeed be made of better steels. But most of them haven't changed greatly, either in design or in the job they will do, in the last hundred years or so. Neither has the pleasure of working seasoned hardwoods with good sharp tools.

## Documents

*Jeremiah Pease (1792-1857) of Edgartown was a Customs House officer, land surveyor, bone setter, and an important figure in the early Methodist Church here. He married Eliza Worth in 1813. The Intelligencer commenced publication of these excerpts from his diary in Vol. 16, No. 2.*

May 1836.

1st. Wind SW. Went to Chilmark. Attended meetings at the Methodist Meetinghouse and at Br. J. Look's at ½ past 5 P.M. Had a pleasant and interesting season.

3rd. Wind SW. Went to Pohognut on business for J. Gorham.

5th. Wind S to SW. U. S. Revenue Cutter *McLane* brought in a schooner from the island of Cuba having on board a great quantity of segars not inserted in the manifest which the Collector seizes. Schooner and Cutter sail.

7th. Wind SE. Rainstorm in the afternoon. Engaged in plowing A.M.

9th. Wind NE. Surveyed land for Capt. Abijah Luce and others at West Chop. Returned at night.

10th. Wind SW. Engaged at the Custom House. The Ship *Mary* lately bought at New York for the whaling business arrives on Sunday from New York.

12th. Wind SSW to SW. Engaged in

plowing. Plowed in ice which had made in the seaweed.<sup>1</sup>

13th. Wind SW. Went to Holmes Hole to survey land for the parties being engaged by. Returned at night.

16th. Wind SW. Fresh breeze. Engaged in surveying land at West Chop for T. Brown, J. Hillmand and others.

18th. Calm and SW. Went to Holmes Hole on business of the Custom House. Returned the same day. Did not go to East Side Holmes Hole to attend Class meeting on account of the appearance of rain.

21st. Wind SW. Rains a little early in the morning. Engaged in plowing and planting.

23rd. Wind SSW to SW. Foggy. Light Boat is hauled up on the railway to copper &c.<sup>2</sup> Revenue Cutter *McLane*, Capt. Day, arrives.

27th. Wind ENE. Blows Fresh. Very cold. Eliza and Velina sick with measles.

30th. Wind NE. Strong. Court sets.

31st. Wind NE. Cold. Went to Quampacy with Dr. Lucas. Set the leg of Mr. Allen which was broken by a cart wheel running over it. A bad case.

June 1836.

7th. Wind ESE to SE. Rains a little. Caught a few bass at Catamia.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Seaweed, called rockweed in Chilmark to distinguish it from eel grass was considered to be a better fertilizer even than barn manure. Eel grass was thought to have little value. Snow and ice plowed in was always considered valuable and was often called poor man's manure.

<sup>2</sup> Were lightships called light boats in Jeremiah's time? It must have been a fairly large vessel to have used the marine railway.

<sup>3</sup> One wonders if Katama really was pronounced Catamia in Jeremiah's day.



9th: Wind S to SW. 50 sail of vessels sail for eastern ports.

11th. Wind SE to SW. Foggy. Br. Whittlesy arrives from Salem, Connecticut.

13th. Wind NE. Rains a little. Engaged in surveying the road at Holmes Hole.

15th. Wind S and calm. Went to East Side Holmes Hole. Attended prayer meeting. Br. Whittlesey expected to preach but was unwell and did not go.

19th. Wind Light calm and SSW. Very warm. Went to East Side Holmes Hole with Br. Whittlesy. Attended prayer meeting. He being unwill did not preach according to appointment. Returned at night.

22nd. Wind NE to E. Rainy. Cold. Did not attend Class meeting at East Side Holmes Hole on account of the weather.

30th. Wind SW. Ship *Mary*, Henry Pease master sails for the Indian Ocean on a whaling voyage.

#### July 1836

1st. Wind SW. Warm. Engaged in the Custom House.

3rd. Wind SW. Warm. Went to East Side Holmes Hole with Br. Sherman of Nantucket. Attended prayer meeting. Returned at evening.

4th. Wind SSW. Oration by Hon. L. Thaxter. Poem by D. Davis. Reading the Declaration of Independence by Mr. Clark. The proceedings of this day were very pleasant to most of the people.

6th. Wind SW. Went to East Side Holmes Hole. Br. Bonteceau preaches

at Br. Linton's in the afternoon. Baptised Sisters Prudence Luce and Marsha Butler and received 7 into full connection in the Church. Attended prayer meeting in the evening and returned at night. Br. Bonteceau returned at evening.

7th. Wind SW. Painted the Revenue Boat. Went to East Side Holmes Hole. Attended meetings. Returned at night.

11th. Wind E. Foggy and rainy. Br. Bonteceau leaves town for conference in Springfield.

13th. Wind ESE and NE. Light. Foggy. Went to East Side Holmes Hole. Attended Class meeting at W. Butler Esq's. Returned at night.

14th. Wind ENE. Light Foggy. Schooner *Gazelle* arrives with supplies for the Light House &c.

15th. Wind NE. Rains a little. Capt. William Beetle dies of a cancer in the face. J. P. Norton returns from visiting the Chatham Light House.

19th. Wind SW. Warm. Had the meadow mowed at the back of the house.

20th. Wind SW. Warm. Had the meadow mowed at the back of the house.<sup>4</sup>

21st. Wind SW. Went to Christiantown. Surveyed land for Hepsy Goodrich and Samuel Goodrich being included with the land of George

<sup>4</sup> Mowing with a scythe was slow business even for a skilled man. The horse drawn mowing machine was not invented until some years later. So Jeremiah's labors and his so many trips to Eastville were finally rewarded. Those two church buildings must have been at Eastville. One wonders what became of them.

Peters when the division was made a few years ago.

25th. Wind S. Light. Warm. The Hon. Dutee J. Pearce arrives from Nantucket via Holmes Hole Having come as far as Holmes Hole in the *Vigilant*.

26th. Wind NE. A. M. The Honorable Dutee J. Pearce, Judge Clark, and Lieutenant H. N. Tracy visit us this afternoon and take tea with us.

27th. Wind NE. A. M. The *Vigilant* sails for New Bedford. J. P. Norton Esq., D. J. Peace, Esq. and Judge Clark go in her. Ship *Vineyard* hauls into the stream, Attended Class meeting at East Side Holmes Hole. Returned at night.

31st. Wind SSW. Went to East Side Holmes Hole. Attended meetings. Returned at evening. Ship *Vineyard*, Samuel Tilton, Jr., master sails for the Pacific Ocean.

#### August 1836.

3rd. Wind SSW. Went to East Side. Attended Class meetings. Returned at night. The Methodist Meeting House is raised at East Side Holmes Hole. The Lord make it a blessing to the people. The Baptist Meetinghouse likewise raised this day. The Lord make that a blessing to them likewise.

7th. Wind SW. Went to East Side Holmes Hole. Attended meetings. Br. Charles Worth was there. It was a blessed season. Returned at night. Quarterly meeting at this place. Br. Webb preaches.

8th. Wind SW. Brig *Gold Hunter*, Bart Allen master, hauls down being fitted for a whaling voyage in the Atlantic Ocean.

9th. Wind NE. Storm. Rains. Went to

East Side Holmes Hole on a visit with Eliza. Returned at night.

10th. Wind E to S. Went to East Side Holmes Hole. Attended meetings. Brig *Gold Hunter* sails.

14th. Wind SSW. Went to East Side Holmes Hole. Attended meetings. Br. Bicknell preached at Br. R. Davis'. Returned at night.

20th. Wind SW. Went to East Chop. Erected my tent for Camp Meeting.

22nd. Wind W. Light. Went to East Chop. Camp Meeting commences. Remained until the 27th when the meeting broke up. Then returned home. It was an interesting season. The particulars of the meeting will be published in the *Herald* hereafter.<sup>6</sup> We had much enjoyment of the good spirit of God with our brethren from various parts, but most particularly from Nantucket their tent being next to the one in which I resided.

28th. Wind SW. Went to East Side Holmes Hole. Attended meetings. Sister Lucy Norris having been for several months very serious speaks in meeting of enjoyment and resolutions to persevere in the cause of our Redeemer. It was a precious season. Oh the kindness and mercy of our Heavenly Father. How it is dayly witnessed. Returned at evening and attended meeting in the Vestry of the Methodist Church. That was also an interesting time.

#### September 1836.

12th. Wind NE to ESE. Hauled up the

<sup>6</sup> *Zion's Herald*, a publication of the Methodist Church.



Revenue Boat. Repaired her bottom and launched her.

14th. Wind S. Went to West Side Holmes Hole. Attended prayer meeting. Br. Brown was there. It was an interesting season.

15th. Wind NE. Mrs. Beetle dies at East Side Holmes Hole.

16th. Wind ENE. Went to East Side Holmes Hole to attend the funeral of Mrs. Beetle. But it was not attended. I was misinformed.

17th. Wind SSE. Attended funeral of Widow Beetle. Service by Rev'd J. C. Bonteceau. Returned at night. U. S. Revenue Cutter *Vigilant*, Lieutenant H. N. Tracy arrives.

24th. Wind SW. U. S. Revenue Cutter *McLane* arrives. Came in for Lieutenant Sturgis and Mr. Tailor.

#### October 1836

2nd. Wind SE. Fresh breeze. Went to East Side Holmes Hole. Br. Whittelsey preached.

3rd. Wind N. to NE. 40 to 50 vessels arrive.<sup>7</sup>

10th. Wind NE. Went to East Side Holmes Hole. Attended meeting in the evening. Br. Brown from the west side of the harbor preached. U. S. Revenue Cutter *McLane*, Capt. Howard arrived. Went to Holmes Hole. Attended County Temperance meeting. Gale at night. Returned at night.

13th. Wind SW. Ship *Levi Starbuck*

<sup>7</sup> These were coasters. Edgartown had one of the finest harbors of refuge on the coast.

arrives from the Pacific Ocean.

14th. Wind SSW. Pleasant. Went to Tisbury. Returned at evening.

19th. Wind S. Isabella goes to Fairhaven on a visit. Attended Class meeting at East Side Holmes Hole. Returned at night.

20th. Wind S to W. Rainy. Storm. P.M. clears off. Went to West Side Holmes Hole. Attended prayer meeting in the vestry agreeably to the request of Br. Brown.<sup>8</sup> Returned at night.

21st. Wind NW. Very cold. Makes ice ½ inch thick.

31st. Wind NE. Light. This month has been remarkably cold.

#### November 1836.

1st. Wind WSW. Light. Surveyed a piece of land for Jonathan Vincent which he sold to Benjamin Dunham.

3rd. Wind NE. Storm. Brig *Junius* goes a shore near Old Stark.<sup>9</sup>

4th. Wind NE. Storm. Brig *Junius* discharged part of her cargo.

10th. Wind SW. Went to West Side Holmes Hole. Attended enquiring meeting at Br. William Daggett's.<sup>10</sup>

13th. Wind WNW. Went to East Side Holmes Hole. Attended meetings. Isabella returned from a visit to Fairhaven. The corps of Rev'd

<sup>8</sup> As an exhorter Jeremiah's services seem to have been in demand all over the Island.

<sup>9</sup> Does any reader of the *Intelligencer* know for sure where Old Stark was?

<sup>10</sup> Was this a meeting at which those present wanted to know what all the stir was all about? If so surely Jeremiah could tell them.

Frederick Baylies arrives from the State of New York, he having died of apoplexy while on his way to visit his sister.

14th. Wind N. Cold. Funeral of Mr. Baylies. Service by Rev'ds Mr. Tilton and J. C. Bonteceau.

18th. Wind NW. Went to East Side Holmes Hole. Br. Brown preaches at Br. Limton's, after which Sister Fanny Norton and Sister Sarah H. Davis are baptised and received into full connection with the M. E. P. Church. A blessed season. Returned at night.

22nd. Wind NNW. Went to Tarpaulin Cove to a brig castaway there yesterday loaded with rum and fermentau (?) from Jamaica. Arrived there about 1 o'clock P.M. Attended to the business relating to her.

23rd. Wind W. Returned home in Sloop *Hero*, Capt. Darrow. Arrived here about 4 P.M.

#### December 1836.

1st. Wind W. This day set apart for a day of Thanksgiving through this State. Went to West Side Holmes Hole, from there to North Shore. Attended meeting at Widow Lambert's. Br. Brown preached, and baptized 6 males and 4 females. It was an interesting season. A great number of people attended. Returned to West Side Holmes Hole and attended prayer meeting in the evening. This was also an interesting time. Returned at night.

2nd. Wind WSW. Attended discharging Brig *William and James* that was wrecked at the Cove.

20th. Wind S. Went to East Side

Holmes Hole with Eliza. Br. Brown preached at Linton's. Had a pleasant time. Returned at night.

26th. Wind SE to SW. Gale. Brig *Antaries* of Beverly from Aux Cayes run ashore on Skiff's Island yesterday at 5 o'clock P.M. At 6 or 7 o'clock A.M. this day the captain and crew leave her. Shortly after she comes off by herself it would seem. William King and others go on board and bring her into this port. I boarded her immediately and found her in charge of William King and others. The captain came on board about this time, found the brig at Mr. E. G. Pease's store. Took her crew list and manifests and went on board again. Called a crew. Attended to my business as boarding officer.<sup>11</sup> Gale increases in afternoon.

28th. Wind NNW. Cold. The ground is covered with snow. Did not go to East Side Holmes Hole on account of the storm.

#### January 1837.

3rd. Wind calm A.M. P.M. West to SW. A brig wrecked on Skiff Island.

5th. Wind N. Cold and storm. The crew of the wrecked brig got on board the Light Vessel.

8th. Wind NW. Cold. Went to East Side Holmes Hole. Attended meeting in the afternoon. Returned at evening.

<sup>11</sup> All of this is not entirely clear. Because the brig had been abandoned by her captain and crew did Jeremiah decide that she had been salvaged by William King and others? Or perhaps did he suspect that William King and others had hauled her off the beach to be able to claim her?



Ship *Ohio* of Nantucket arrives from the Pacific Ocean via Newport.

16th. Wind NNW. More moderate. Attended meeting at Br. Constant Norton's Br. Brown preached. Eliza went with me.

19th. Wind WNW. Moderate. Went to North Shore. Attended meeting. Br. Brown preached. Br. Willard was there. It was a reformation season. One soul hopefully converted. Returned to Holmes Hole. Stayed there all night.

20th. Wind W to WNW. Engaged all day in surveying land for Br. William Daggett and Br. T. H. Smith. Attended general class meeting in the vestry. It was a blessed season. Returned at night.

23rd. Wind NW. Much ice in the Sound and harbour.

24th. Wind NW. Cold. Went to West Side Holmes Hole. Surveyed land for T. H. Smith and William Daggett ½ day. Snows a little at night. Stayed all night.

25th. Wind NW. Surveyed land for Nathan Smith and others all day. Returned at night. This night a remarkable appearance in the sky or clouds. The appearance was large red clouds and streaks from N to W. and N to ESE. This was the appearance of what is called Northern Lights. Also history will no doubt record a more particular record. Such a sight has not been witnessed here since the memory of man. Did not attend class at East Side Holmes Hole. Slippery.

28th. Wind SE to WSW. Snows a little and thaws all day. The ice goes out of the harbour, or so much as to allow

vessels to pass out and in.

#### February 1837.

1st. Wind SW. Rains a little. Did not attend class at East Side Holmes Hole on account of bad riding and rain.

2nd. Wind NW. Went to East Side Holmes Hole. Returned at night. Ship *Almira* H. H. Marchant, arrives from the Pacific Ocean.

3rd. Wind NW. Ship *Phoenix* arrives from the Pacific Ocean. Br. J. C. Bonteceau and wife visit us today.

6th. Wind NW. Cold. Went to West Side Holmes Hole. Surveyed land for N. Smith and T. Brown. Stayed all night.

7th. Wind SW. to ENE. Light. Foggy. Surveyed land on the West Chop for a situation for a Light House, it being necessary to remove the one now there.<sup>12</sup>

8th. Wind NE. Cold. Did not attend Class meeting at the East Side Holmes Hole on account of the storm.

10th. Wind WNW. More Moderate. Sloop *Hero* goes out and brings in the Light Vessel she having been driven from her moorings by the ice.

13th. Wind N. Heavy gale and very cold.

17th. Wind NE. Snows rains and freezes. Icicles make on the trees, and remarkably cold at night.

22nd. Wind ENE to N. Rains a little. Harbour free of drift ice. One sloop arrives from Nantucket being the

<sup>12</sup> It was erosion of the cliff that made moving the lighthouse necessary.

second arrival from that place since December. Went to East Side Holmes Hole. Attended Class Meeting. Returned at night.

#### March 1837.

1st. Wind NW. Very cold. Temperance meeting of the Edgartown Temperance Society. Rev'd Br. W. Hull of Falmouth delivers the address to a large and interested audience. Did not attend Class meeting at East Side Holmes Hole on account of the cold.

2nd. Wind NW. Light. Very cold. Harbour all frozen over again making no less than four times this winter which is very unusual. Temperance meeting.

3rd. Wind NNW. Very cold. Harbour closed up with ice. No passing with vessels.

4th. Wind N to NNE. Light. Cold. President Van Buren takes his seat today.

5th. Wind NW. Light. Went to East Side Holmes Hole. Attended meetings. Returned at evening. Br. Hull delivers a lecture on the absurdity of Universal Salvation.<sup>13</sup>

7th. Wind SE. The ice goes out. This has been a very severe winter. I never recollect seeing so much ice. The harbour has been closed up 5 times, and has continued freezing later than I ever saw it before to my recollection.

15th. Wind WNW. Moderate. Surveyed land for W. Jernegan, W. King and P. Smith above Little Pond. Received 75¢

<sup>13</sup> I.e., only those who were saved — born again — Methodists would get to Heaven.

of W. King. Went to East Side Holmes Hole. Attended Class meeting. Returned at night.

19th. Wind NW to N. Went to East Side Holmes Hole. Attended Prayer meeting at Br. R. Davis'. P.M. attended the funeral of Mr. Samuel Williams of Richmond Maine who was landed at this place from New Orleans, sick, and died at Mr. Smith's. A Solemn Season.

29th. Wind WSW. Went to East Side Holmes Hole. Attended Class. Returned at night. Maria born.

30th. Wind N. Very cold. About 20 vessels arrive.

#### April 1837.

3rd. Wind SW. Town meeting. This day a sail boat went off the south side of this island a fishing. George Smith and Zadoc Pease were in her. She was last seen near the south side of the reef.<sup>14</sup> At night the wind blew heavy.

4th. Wind WNW Clear. The boat above mentioned is still missing.

6th. Wind WNW. Clear weather. This day is set apart as a day of fasting and prayer by the governor and Council.

8th. Wind NW. Another year of my short life is past.

9th. Wind W. Gale. Clear. Went to East Side Holmes Hole. Attended meetings. Returned to Sister Fanny Norton's who was very sick. Remained there until 1 o'clock at night. She was in a very happy frame of mind expecting

<sup>14</sup> This must mean the shoal near the ocean end of Muskeget Channel.



to die every hour.

12th. Wind SW. Went to Tisbury. Attended Temperance meeting at the Congregational meeting house. E. P. Norton, Esq. delivered an address. Went from there to East Side Holmes Hole to Class meeting. Returned at night.

17th. Wind SW. Went to East Side Holmes Hole. Attended meeting at Br. Linton's in the evening. Br. F. Sherman preached. It was a very interesting time. Stayed all night. Went to Nantucket in the Steam Boat on Tuesday morning.<sup>15</sup> Arrived at Nantucket at 2 P.M. Attended sermon and prayer meeting in the vestry. Several were awakened to a sense of their danger while in sin. I remained there until Saturday morning when I set out for home in the steam boat. Arrived home about 2 P.M. During the time I remained there, there were meetings held every evening, one morning and one afternoon. The awakening and converting power of God manifested as I trust.

23rd. Wind SE. Light. Went to East Side Holmes Hole. Attended meeting at night. Two men, brothers of Mr. Samuel Williams widow arrived, come to attend to business of his estate.

26th. Wind SW. Pleasant. U. S. Cutter *Vigilant*, Lieutenant Tracy arrives with Commander Craton and Captain Hunter of the U. S. Navy for the purpose of locating Light Houses and buoys &c. in this district.

27th. Wind SW. Pleasant. Br. J.

<sup>15</sup> At that period the steamboat seems to have stopped at both Holmes Hole and Eastville, but not at Edgartown.

Whittlesy arrives from Connecticut. Attended meeting at East Side Holmes Hole. Sister Mary Morse is baptised by Br. Brown.

28th. Wind SW. Light breeze. Cutter *Vigilant* sails for Buzzards Bay and other places. Engaged in surveying land at Chappaquiddick for Isiah Belain.  $\frac{1}{2}$  day, he paid me \$1.50 in full.

29th. Wind SW. Engaged as above for Simon Goodrich. He paid me \$3.00 in full.

#### May 1837.

1st. Wind NNW. Gale. Cold. Freezes at night nearly  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch thick.

2nd. Wind WSW. Sowed oats.

4th. Wind WSW. Sowed oats, and went to C. Beetle's to survey land for J. H. Beetle. Stayed all night.

6th. Wind SW. Engaged in surveying. Finished and returned home.

9th. Wind NE to SE. Rains at night. Mr. Jonathan Fisher dies.

10th. Wind SW. Schooner *Richmond* of and from Thomaston for New York loaded with lime was perceived to be on fire when she was off Nantucket. She arrived here early this morning. They save sails and rigging. Vessel and cargo burns down to the waters edge. She being sunk.

13th. Wind SE. Br. Hull comes from Falmouth with his wife and visits us. He arrived in town the 12th.

14th. Wind SSW to SW. Went to East Side Holmes Hole. Attended meetings. Returned at night. Br. Hull preaches today. Ships *Susan* and *Aurora* arrive

from the Pacific via Holmes Hole.

15th. Wind ENE. News of the death of Joseph Ripley and Capt. John Bunting arrives. Boarded the ships and went to Cape Poge.

24th. Wind SE. Mrs. R. Norton and daughter visits us. Rains a little at evening. Did not attend class meeting at East Side Holmes Hole on account of the rain.

25th. Wind ESE. Rainy. The Collector goes to New Bedford.

28th. Wind SW. Went to East Side Holmes Hole. Attended meetings. Returned at night. Br. H. Chase and Br. Davis of Falmouth were there. Esq. C. Norton of the State of Maine was there.

29th. Wind SW. Esq. C. Norton visits us a short time.

30th. Wind calm A.M. P.M. SW. Ship *Almira*, Capt. Flanders goes down to the outer harbour. Nearly ready for sea.

#### June 1837.

1st. Wind SW. Fresh breeze. Warm. The Collector goes to Nantucket.

2nd. Wind SW. Fresh breeze. The Collector returns from Nantucket. Ship *Almira*, Capt. Richard Flanders sails for the Indian Ocean.

4th. Wind SW. Went to East Side Holmes Hole. Attended meeting. Sister Judith Earl of Nantucket and Jane W. Norton went with me. Returned at night.

12th. Wind SW. Ships *Three Brothers* and *Nantucket* of Nantucket sail for

the Pacific Ocean. U. S. Cutter *Vigilant*, Lieutenant Tracy arrives.

19th. Wind SW. U. S. Cutter *Vigilant* sails with the Collector to visit Light Houses. Ship *Ann* arrives from Nantucket to fit for a whaling voyage.

22nd. Wind S to WNW and SW. This day sold a number of house lots near L. S. Crocker's dwelling.

23rd. Wind SW. Pleasant. Br. James Bonteceau leaves town for Bristol, R.I. being stationed there after two years labour with us, and having conducted himself with great propriety during the time he has been with us.

#### July 1837.

1st. Wind SSW. Engaged at the Custom House.

2nd. Wind SW. Rev'd Willard preached to a large congregation. After the sermon in P.M. the Sacraments of the Lord's Supper was administered by him at which time a number partook who had never partaken before. It was an interesting time. May the Lord make it a blessing to all. Miss Eliza Osborn dies of consumption.

3rd. Wind S. Rains. Funeral of Miss Osborn. Services by Rev'd Mr. Tilton. Engaged at the Custom House.

4th. Wind NW. Fresh breeze. This day an Abolition address was delivered in the Congregational Meeting House by a man from Boston.

12th. Wind ENE to E. Br. F. Sherman and wife arrive from Nantucket to visit us. Br. Sherman and myself went to East Side Holmes Hole and attended meeting. Br. Hallway preaches at Esq.



Butler's. Returned at night.

13th. Wind SW. Fresh breeze. Got in my hay from the meadow near my house.

16th. Wind SW. Went to East Side Holmes Hole with Br. Sherman. Attended meeting with him at E. B. Smith's.

18th. Wind S. Light. Br. Sherman goes to Chilmark on a visit. Returns at night. Cut my meadow at Ox Pond.

19th. Wind SW. Warm. Mr. Peter Norton dies — Coll's father. Meeting at East Chop.

20th. Wind W. Br. Sherman and wife go to East Side Holmes Hole.

21st. Wind S to SW. Light. Warm. Got in my hay from Ox Pond meadow.

26th. Wind WSW. Br. Sherman and wife return from East Side Holmes Hole. Br. Joseph Linton visits us today. Br. Sherman and wife return to Nantucket after making us and others a very pleasant visit. U. S. Revenue Cutter *McLane*, Lieutenant Sturgis arrives.

#### August 1837.

1st. Wind SW. Engaged in cradling oats.

3rd. Wind SW. Warm. Ship *Montano* clears out for the Pacific Ocean. Rains. A very pleasant shower. It has been very dry for a long time. This rain is a great blessing. The fruits of the earth have been suffering for some time.

4th. Wind NW. At about 15 minutes past 1 o'clock we had another son born which appears very feeble.

5th. Wind N. Clear, Cool. At about 10 minutes past 9 o'clock P.M. our little infant son dies. It was taken ill at about 4 o'clock A.M. and grew worse until death relieved its pain.

8th. Wind SW. Went to the Camp Ground to make arrangements about the Camp Meeting which is to commence on the 14th.

11th. Wind NE to E. Went to visit Samuel Butler on business of the Camp Meeting.

14th. Wind NE. Went to Camp Meeting. Engaged in erecting tents. Meeting commences at night.

15th. Wind NE. Cloudy. Preachers are present today. Br. Hawlway preaches the first sermon from "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength" &c. Returned home at 4 P. M.

16th. Wind SW to S. Rains a little. The Collector goes to New Bedford. Engaged at the Custom House until 4 P.M. then went to Camp Meeting.

17th. Wind NE. Rainy. Attended Camp Meeting after office hours.

18th. Wind NE. Rainy. Br. Allen Gibbs visits us from Camp Meeting.

19th. Wind W. Light. Camp Meeting closes having been a very interesting season.

22nd. Wind SW. Went to West Side Holmes Hole on business of the Custom House. Attended to weighing 5 bbls sugar on board Brig *Commerce* from Charlston, S. C. Returned at evening.

23rd. Wind NW. Fresh breeze. Clear. Went to Holmes Hole on business.

Went to East Side Holmes Hole. Attended Class meeting. Returned at night.

30th. Wind SW to NNW. Thunders and Lightens with a heavy wind. Squall from the west. Went to Chappaquidick with L. Thaxter on business of Indian land relating to a claim of Paul Warren. Returned at noon. Did not attend Class meeting at East Side Holmes Hole on account of rain.

31st. Wind NW. Light. Brig *Gold Hunter*, Bartlett Allen, master on a whaling cruise. News arrives she was wrecked in a gale of wind to the south of the Gulf. Lost her foremast, main topmast, bulwarks, stanchions and reports her cargo to be 400 bbls of sperm oil.

#### September 1837.

1st. Wind SW. Attended meeting with Br. Lutton at the Plain schoolhouse this evening.

2nd. Wind ENE. Capt. Caleb Thaxter's wife brought here a corps from New Bedford.

3rd. Wind SW. Attended meeting at the Camp Ground. Br. Willard preached. Brethren from Chilmark, North Shore and West Side of Holmes Hole were there. It was a very profitable season, a quickening time. Funeral of Capt. Caleb Thaxter's wife is attended at the Congregational Meeting House by Rev'd Mr. Spear, the Universalist minister of New Bedford. He having come with the corps for that purpose.

5th. Wind S to SW. Ship *Loan* arrives from the Pacific Ocean.

11th. Wind S. Foggy. U. S. Ship *Erie*<sup>16</sup> arrives in Woods Hole from the Pacific Ocean.

12th. Wind NW. Went to Tisbury and Holmes Hole. Ship *Champion* arrives from the Pacific Ocean.

13th. Wind NW. Fresh breeze A.M. P.M. light SW. U. S. Revenue Cutter *Vigilant*, Lieutenant Tracy arrives. Ship *Champion*, B. Worth master hauls up to the wharf. Attended class meeting at East Side Holmes Hole.

14th. Wind S. Foggy. Cutter sails for Newport. The Collector goes in her.

16th. Wind NE to ENE. Fresh breeze. Ships *Obed Mitchel* clears for the Pacific Ocean.

17th. Wind NE. Clear A.M. Went to Br. West Luce's. Attended meetings in the forenoon and afternoon there. Br. Willard preached to a large congregation. Some brethren were there from Holmes Hole, from the East Side Holmes Hole and North Shore. It was an interesting time. The awakening power of the Lord was there. At evening Br. Willard, Br. Lambert and others attended prayer meeting at East Side Holmes Hole. I attended with them. Returned at night. Foggy.

22nd. Wind NE to ESE. Went to Tisbury and Chilmark with Br. Lawton.

25th. Wind SW. Went to Cape Poge. Carried two loads with the Revenue Boat.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Was this *Erie* a United States Naval vessel? The whaleship *Erie* of Newport is not listed as having completed a voyage in 1837.

<sup>17</sup> This must mean two loads of oil, etc. for the lighthouse.



28th. Wind SSE. News of the death of Mrs. Margaret Coffin arrives.

29th. Wind NW. Light. Schooner *Lucy Blake*, Blake master, from Camden arrives. A young man named George Hobbs died on board by the accidental discharge of a gun. He is brought here and buried today.

30th. Wind NE. Storm. Rain. Took down the Custom House boat's masts.

#### October 1837.

1st. Wind SW. Went to East Side Holmes Hole. Attended meeting at Br. Samuel Butler's. Br. Willard preached. Returned at night.

2nd. Wind SW. Engaged at the Custom House.

5th. Wind SE. Rains a little at night. Hauled up the Revenue Boat to repair her.

6th. Wind SW. Revenue Cutter *Vigilant*, Lieutenant H. N. Tracy arrives. Samuel Mayhew and William Coffin arrive having been engaged in trying to find out the circumstances of

the death of Mrs. Margaret Coffin. A meeting held this morning at the old Congregational Meeting House at which time William Coffin gives a public statement of the facts as far as he could obtain them. It is the general opinion at this time that she came to her death by taking medicine to produce abortion — and —

7th. Wind NE. A meeting held at the same place when E. P. Norton, Esq. and Holmes Mayhew are chosen to go to Boston and obtain more particularly the circumstances of the death of Mrs. Coffin if possible.

16th. Wind NE. Light. Engaged on the Revenue Boat's repairs.

27th. Wind NE. Light. Br. Sherman arrives from Nantucket.

29th. Wind ENE to NE. Gale. Went to East Side Holmes Hole with Br. Sherman. Attended meetings. Returned at night.

30th. Wind NE. Gale High tide.

EDITED BY E. G. HUNTINGTON

## Books

*Noman's Land Island: History and Legends*, by Bertrand T. Wood. Privately printed, Jewett City, Conn. 1978. 120 pp. \$4.50.

When strolling along the peaceful shores of Squibnocket, beach walkers occasionally see the strange sight of jet aircraft streaking through the skies to once again attack an island that appears to be — and possibly once was — an extension of Gay Head. The damage inflicted by bombs and rockets on this small neighbor of Martha's Vineyard can only be estimated since the last human inhabitants left shortly before World War II when the Navy began to use it as a target area. Places such as Noman's Land Island that have lost their people also are likely to lose their past, but for the "Isle of Romance", men and women including Indian and possibly even Viking story tellers have always taken time to record the tales of this 628 — acre outpost on the Atlantic, which seems to guard its sister islands from those mysterious perils that roll in both on the waves of the ocean and on the waves of our imaginations.

Having recently published *Noman's Land Island: History and Legends*, Bertrand T. Wood has become the latest contributor to the preservation of the many stories about this little island. A large part of his book is the reminiscences of the years from 1924 to 1933 when Mr. Wood and various members of his family lived there as caretakers. His accounts of rum

runners who harassed the residents and stored contraband near their homes are exciting and may enlighten a few retired Coast Guardsmen as to the methods employed by smugglers to escape detection. In addition to his experiences, Mr. Wood also retells many of the stories that he heard from people who lived on Nomans before his arrival, and from these sources we learn that the island once had haunted houses (before they were blown apart by our intrepid Navy flyers) and that it may still have buried treasure left by pirates as long as 275 years ago.

Although ghostly apparitions and pieces-of-eight best fit into the category of legendary tales, Mr. Wood also deals with several interesting historical questions about his former home. As one will learn from reading the first chapter, the name Nomans Land probably did not result from a lack of population; Indians lived there for centuries and whitemen inhabited the place from the 1720s until the 1930s. It is even possible that Norse settlers lived there seven centuries before the first English residents, and Mr. Wood analyzes this possibility carefully before reaching the reluctant conclusion that the evidence is tainted.

Along with interesting stories and historical discussions, the book contains a number of illustrations, photographs, and poems written by Mr. Wood's father. For those readers with a Vineyard bookshelf, it will fit neatly along side *Noman's Land: Isle of Romance*, written by Annie M. Wood, who was the author's aunt.

THOMAS E. NORTON

Edgartown



*The Thin Edge: Coast and Man in Crisis*, by Anne W. Simon. Harper and Row, New York. 180 pp. \$10.

Man is universally drawn to the coast in awe of its beauty, in search of serenity and inspiration and, perhaps, some mysterious communion with the place of his primordial beginning. Yet today as he stands on that once constant shore he sees behind and before him the irreversible crush of civilization, the appalling abuse it has heaped upon the coasts. Bordering that narrow line is the concrete required by an ever-increasing population eager for seashore leisure and the ocean shelves holding 90 percent of the earth's fish resources and \$70 billion of mineral resources. And while the complex interconnections of the natural functions of the coast as protective barrier, shelter for coastal species and manufacturer of food for the marine life chain are still not fully understood by scientists, even the layman is aware that pillage and pollution of coast and sea will surely mean its eventual destruction. Still, we continue to balk at the urgency in the voices of the environmentalists.

Anne Simon's voice is impelling. With expertise and simplicity she suggests that some of the limits of the thin edge have already been passed and the saturation point, beyond which the functions of the coast may cease, is distinctly possible. She writes a horror story of wet-land reclamation, sand manipulation, resort development, sewage and industrial waste dumping and oil spills. Into that she weaves a sad love story of the birds

and fish, dunes and grasses. The book is a warning, a plea. Some may deride it as an overstated voice of doom.

We read elsewhere that there is hope for the future. Scientists have discovered innovative techniques to revive depleted fish stocks. Oil companies assure us that not only can we drill safely offshore but that the rigs will provide new marine life habitats. Man's chances of survival without many presently endangered species of birds and fish, while esthetically deprived, are still good. Well, perhaps so. Meanwhile the simple facts of our continuing destruction of a major life source are clear. Mrs. Simon calls for some champion of the coastal cause to put forward an equally pressing agreement as the developers and industrialists. The reader is compelled by her words and the spectre they present to become involved.

NANCY P. HASKELL

Edgartown

## News

Dorothy Cottle Poole is putting the finishing touches on her new book, *Vineyard Sampler*, which will be available at bookstores (and the Society) this summer.

It will be a collection of 22 articles, some of which have been published in the *Intelligencer* or the *Vineyard Gazette*, some of which are unpublished, all written over the past ten years. They cover a wonderful variety of subjects, including character portraits of a whaling captain and a

whaling captain's wife, a description of the Edgartown schooner fleet, why men fish for a living, what can be found to eat on the Island with no cost and little trouble (which means almost everything you might want, Mrs. Poole says), a description of the Island and life here in the last century, the story of a West African Negro who came to the Island and settled, to name just a few.

The soft bound book will be privately published. It will include a number of photographs.

Transcripts of all the wills probated in Dukes County between 1691 and 1800 will be available sometime next year when Leroy F. Hazelton completes his new book, *Wills of Martha's Vineyard, 1681 - 1800*. In addition to the wills (there are about 150 of them, Mr. Hazelton says) the book will contain thumbnail sketches of some of the makers of the wills, and a complete index of all persons and places named in the wills and all witnesses. The wills include several Indian wills. The format of the book will be similar to *Sargent's Maine Wills*. The book will be published privately.

Mr. Hazleton is an English teacher at the Martha's Vineyard High School, and teaches a genealogy course in the high school's adult education program.

Connie Sanborn was led into a project when she read her great-grandmother's diaries (from 1883 to 1925) which included descriptions of summers spent on West Chop. Mrs. Sanborn has now collected 100 oral history recordings about the

Chop and photographs of early and recent times.

This will all become a book to be called *View From West Chop*. The emphasis will be on the latter part of the 19th century.

With an eye toward celebration of its centennial in 1980, Oak Bluffs this February began a complete survey of its historical places, buildings, and landmarks. It is hoped that the task can be largely completed in six months.

According to the Massachusetts Historical Commission, the only other Massachusetts town to attempt such a survey is Cambridge, which has been at it for ten years and has not reached the end.

The Oak Bluffs survey is funded by the federal Comprehensive Employment Training Act (CETA), through the town selectmen. The survey is headed by Jill Bouck, an anthropologist by training.

The survey workers are attempting to identify every spot and structure of historic interest in the town. Descriptions, histories, and photographs (when available) of each spot are being gathered in a file which ultimately will be kept at the Oak Bluffs Library.

The information will be used to support nominations to the National Register of Historic Places. Acceptance on the Register protects sites from federal and state activities, and makes the owner eligible for certain federal tax advantages, low interest loans, and grants. The information is also being used by the town to support another grant application, for funds to restore



the old architecture of the town and revitalize the parks left by the town's original developers.

**E**dgartown voters this spring established an historical commission which will have no regulatory powers but will be able to encourage preservation of the town's architecture much as an historic district commission could. The town's voters have repeatedly rejected establishing an historic district.

**T**he Martha's Vineyard Historical Preservation Society completed all the exterior work on its Vincent House, with the completion of the

kitchen ell and the chimney this spring.

The interior work necessary to opening the building as a museum is keeping pace with the fund-raising. The society is hopeful of being able to open the house to the public late this summer or early this coming fall.

**I**n Vineyard Haven the Ritter House committee has come up with a fund-raising approach which has not before been tried on the Island: a weekly engagement calendar illustrated with photographs of the Island. The black-and-white 1979 calendar will be available this summer.

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## Word of the Society

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**T**he ringing of hammers and the buzzing of saws have ceased, and we can at long last announce the completion of the Francis Foster Museum. The difficulty of setting up exhibits will leave the museum with a somewhat empty look for the time being, but we have already moved in all the displays from the library, which now has much additional work space. The main floor of the building, which is entered through the library, will be used almost entirely to display museum artifacts with an emphasis on scrimshaw and paintings. We designed the attic for storage, and we will also use the new basement for storage as well as for work space. On July 9 all members of the Society are invited to an open house when we will dedicate the new museum.

The extra space and other changes in the library make it seem almost like new. There are now wall-to-wall carpentering, new bookcases, and a boxed-in fireplace. Doris Stoddard designed this change in the fireplace so that it provides us with more display area and with more shelf space. Genealogists will be glad to know that we have taken the many volumes of the Massachusetts vital records from their location downstairs and put them in these new bookshelves, where people have been making great use of them.

We have been busy processing annual dues, and if you have not already sent in your check, we would appreciate your doing so before we have to send out a third notice. Again this year, our members have been generous with their contributions to the Preservation Fund, and we would like to express our gratitude to all who have helped.

The Preservation Fund has enabled us to make many repairs and restorations that would probably have been neglected if we did not have a source of money outside our normal operating budget. Once again we thank all of the contributors, and in a future issue we will describe the projects being accomplished with the Preservation Fund. We would also like to take this opportunity to thank our sustaining members, who pay higher dues so that the Society



can remain solvent. These generous people (who paid their dues before April 1) are: Mrs. Aarne J. Anderson, Mr. Jack Aron, Mrs. William Murray Black, Ms. Emily Bramhall, Mr. B. D. Burhoe, Mr. and Mrs. Edward Cox, Mr. Norris Darrell, Mr. Hollis Fisher, Mr. Lauress Fisher, Miss Nancy Hamilton, Mr. Sinclair Hamilton, Mrs. Clara S. Hough, Miss Dorris Hough, Mrs. Ralph Hornblower, Mrs. R. Anthony Hubbard, Mrs. Harriet M. Isaacs, Miss Margaret Love, Brig. General Wilmer F. Lucas, Mrs. Angell McAlpin, Miss Mary L. Norton, Mr. Arthur Railton, Mrs. Walter Slocum, Mrs. Herbert Stewart, Mr. Lynn B. Tipson, Mr. and Mrs. Keith Urmey, and Mr. John C. Vibberts.

The Thomas Cooke House and our other attractions will be open this summer from June 15 to September 16 (Closed Sundays, Mondays, and holidays). As usual the hours will be from 10:00 to 4:30 and we hope that many of you will be able to visit with us.

THOMAS E. NORTON,  
Director

The Society would like to thank the following persons who contributed to the Preservation fund. (The list is complete to April 1.)

Mrs. J. Findlay Allen  
Mrs. Henry R. Anderson  
Mr. and Mrs. George Arkwell  
Mr. Leonard B. Athearn  
Mr. and Mrs. Stuart Avery

Mr. and Mrs. Russell W. Ballard  
Mr. and Mrs. Stuart A. Bangs  
Mr. and Mrs. Donald Bermudes  
Mrs. William M. Black  
Mr. G. E. Bolloten  
Miss Mabel V. Brooks  
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Mr. B. D. Burhoe  
Mr. and Mrs. Richard Burt  
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Mr. John G. Chantiny  
Mr. and Mrs. Melville Chapin  
Mrs. Frederick Coffin  
Mr. S. David Cronig  
Mrs. Thomas Coffin Crosby  
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Mr. and Mrs. James Douglas, Jr.  
Mr. and Mrs. Morris Drogin

Mr. and Mrs. John R. Ferris  
Mr. Hollis Fisher  
Mr. and Mrs. Richard Fligor

Mrs. Thomas Goethals

Mrs. Leroy Goff, Jr.  
Mr. and Mrs. Standish Graham

Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Halperin  
Miss Ester Hancock  
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Mr. and Mrs. William Hickie  
Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence Hillyer  
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Dr. and Mrs. Frank Mansure  
Miss Gladys Mason  
Mr. Harding T. Mason  
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Mr. and Mrs. Thomas C. Mendenhall  
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Mr. Robert Nordenswan  
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Miss Ruth Todd  
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Mr. and Mrs. Donald Vose

Mrs. Leslie Webster  
Mr. and Mrs. Wellington Wells  
Mrs. Theodore White, Jr.  
Mr. and Mrs. Walter Wrigley

Miss Elizabeth Yerrinton



## DUKES COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

### OFFICERS OF THE SOCIETY

Doris C. Stoddard, *President*  
Stanley Murphy, *Vice President*  
John Worth Osborn, *Treasurer*  
Marian R. Halperin, *Secretary*

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Melville G. MacKay; Edith Bliss; Gale Huntington; Dorothy Cottle Poole; John H. Montgomery; Henry Beetle Hough; Dorris S. Hough; Nelson Coon; Rachael Williams; Alfred Hall

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Thomas E. Norton, *Curator*; Muriel Crossman, *Librarian*; Dorothy Cottle Poole, *Historian*; Doris C. Stoddard, *Genealogist*; Marian R. Halperin, *Registrar*.

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The Dukes County Historical Society was founded in 1922 to preserve the history of Dukes County for the public benefit.

The Society maintains the Thomas Cooke House, the Francis Foster Museum, and a library, all located on its grounds at the corner of School and Cooke Streets in Edgartown.

The Thomas Cooke House was built about 1765. The Society acquired the building in 1935 and established it as a museum. Its 12 rooms are now devoted to historical displays and period rooms which reflect various eras of Vineyard life. Displays of whaling equipment, exotica brought home by sea captains, children's toys, early china and furniture, and portraits of Islanders may be seen on informal tours of the house.

The new Francis Foster Museum and the library are in an adjacent building. The library is devoted to Vineyard history, and has interesting collections of whaling logs and genealogical works. The Francis Foster Museum contains displays of scrimshaw and paintings.

The attractive grounds include an herb garden, a boatshed exhibit, and the famous Fresnel lens from the old Gay Head lighthouse.

The buildings and grounds are open during the summer (June 15 to Sept. 15) on Tuesdays through Saturdays, 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Off-season, the Francis Foster Museum and the library are open Thursdays and Fridays, 1-4 p.m., and Saturdays, 10-12 a.m., and 1-4 p.m.

The Society is a nonprofit institution supported entirely by membership dues, gifts, and bequests. All contributions are tax-deductible.

### TO JOIN THE SOCIETY AND SUBSCRIBE TO THE INTELLIGENCER:

Please enter me as a member of the Society for the current year (beginning Jan. 1). This entitles me to the *Intelligencer* and all other membership benefits.

- ☐ Single Annual Dues .....\$8.00  
☐ Family Membership for Husband, Wife,  
and Children 18 or under .....\$15.00  
☐ Sustaining Membership .....\$25.00  
☐ Life Membership .....\$200.00  
☐ I enclose \$ ..... ☐ Please bill me.

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Permanent Address .....

Summer Address .....



## Some Publications

*The Mammals of Martha's Vineyard* by Allan R. Keith. Illustrated, paper. \$1.00, \$0.30 postage.

*People To Remember* by Dionis Coffin Riggs. Illustrated, paper. \$4.95, \$0.65 postage.

*The Heath Hen's Journey to Extinction* by Henry Beetle Hough. Illustrated, paper. \$1.00, \$0.30 postage.

*The Fishes of Martha's Vineyard* by Joseph B. Elvin. With 36 illustrations of fishes by Will Huntington. Paper. \$1.00, \$0.30 postage.

*The History of Martha's Vineyard* by Charles Edward Banks. A new edition. Indices, illustrations, three volumes. Cloth. \$30.00, \$1.00 postage.

*Cap'n George Fred'' Himself*. The autobiography of Captain George Fred Tilton of Chilmark. A new edition. Cloth. \$6.50, \$0.65 postage.

*Wild Flowers of Martha's Vineyard* by Nelson Coon. Illustrated, paper. \$3.95, \$0.65 postage.

*An Introduction To Martha's Vineyard* by Gale Huntington. Illustrated, paper. A new edition. \$3.95, \$0.65 postage.

*A New Vineyard* by Dorothy Cottle Poole. Illustrated, cloth. \$12.95, \$0.65 postage.

*Shipwrecks on Martha's Vineyard* by Dorothy Scoville. Paper. \$3.00, \$0.65 postage.