



THE DUKES COUNTY INTELLIGENCER

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A Brief History of the Herring Creek at Mattakeset

DOROTHY COTTLE POOLE



Captain Nathan Daggett: An Island Pilot and Patriot

DOROTHY DAGGETT JOHNSTON

Documents: Jeremiah Pease Diary

Plus: Books, News, Director's Report

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by DOROTHY COTTLE POOLE

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When nature did not alter the creek, humans often did. Rebellious at the restrictions regulating fishing the creek, "insurgents on the plain opened the pond to the sea. When this happened, seining, eel-spearing and fishing with hook and line were not limited by lease or franchise. Then the beach closed and the herring fishery was restored to some extent; but on a moonless night in 1868, the lawless digging was

DOROTHY COTTLE POOLE has been an important contributor to the study of Island history through her articles in *The Dukes County Intelligencer* and the *Vineyard Gazette*, and her books. Her most recent book, *A Vineyard Sampler*, was published this summer.



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repeated,"¹ the pond was so reduced that the creek was useless, the herring shoaled in large masses and could be taken by illegal seining. The suspected parties were arrested, given bail and tried. Their lawyer, Benjamin F. Butler, won an acquittal on grounds that the creek was so nearly obstructed with sand that there was no free flow of water and he couldn't see that anyone's rights were invaded since no herring fishery existed at that time. Some of the lessors of the creek wondered loudly if this was because Ben Butler was cross-eyed.

Many such incidents occurred over the years. As long as Great Pond was a pond, Mattakeset Creek Company had undisputed control of the herring fishery. But when the ocean broke through the beach, the pond became an arm of the sea, so many people said the Creek Company had no rights. Stockholders prayed for the beach to close. Gunners and others hoped it would remain open to be a source of shellfish, bringing more revenue to the town as a whole.

The fishery at Mattakeset Herring Creek existed for about three hundred years and yielded substantial enough returns so that men were willing to work opening the creek, erecting or replacing buildings and making the sandy roads passable. Legally, the control of Great Ponds rests with the Commonwealth, but it is usually given to the towns if they guarantee that provisions will be made for reasonable public access to fish. A town may control and operate the fishery or lease the rights to a private operator, as is usually done on Martha's Vineyard.

In the very early days, a dozen or so men set seines in the herring creeks, surrounding a school of fish and then allowing it to lie in the net awaiting a call for bait from a Bank trawler. Sometimes they used a "surf net" and waded into the water, filling the net with as many fish as they could handle. Then with the poles over their shoulders, they waded ashore and dumped the catch on the sand. These nets or scoops were ovals made of a curved frame of steamed oak about two feet long, with five-foot handles resembling axe handles. The closely woven net was carefully attached to the

¹: Alfred Eisenstaedt & Henry Beetle Hough, *Martha's Vineyard*, New York: Viking Press, 1970.



Courtesy Vineyard Gazette

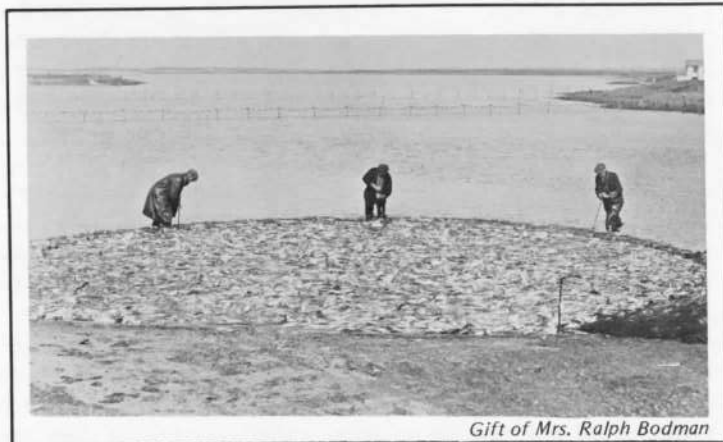
Closing in on the last of the catch. . .

inside edge of the frame to prevent fraying as the scoop was dragged across the creek bottom. Some of these scoops were used for generations and are still sound and workable. The twine may wear out, but the wood is everlasting.

Later, there were small houses, called "ballicators", resembling sentry boxes, at intervals along the creek to afford shelter from wind and rain. Waiting for the herring was tedious and the long hours were whiled away with song and story — not always very refined. Sometimes a man would try to sleep on a makeshift bunk in the ballicator, but he might awaken to find himself hauled to the rafters by a rope around his ankles. Or he might awaken choking because some one had stuffed his chimney with wet hay and, when he dashed to the door for air, he might fall into a tub of slimy water. Sometimes the sleeper would not be aroused, but later when he saw his reflection, he'd find his face had been covered with lampblack. Even those who stayed awake were not entirely immune. Some of the whiled away the hours waiting for the call, "They're showering," by casting baited hooks far

out into the bay and leaving them with only an occasional inspection, hoping to catch a bass. But after a long, hard pull, they not infrequently found at the end of their line an overgrown sheep which some prankster had obtained from a nearby farm. Hard feelings between farmers and fishermen were engendered by such incidents and by the destruction of the farmers' fences, used to keep the fishermen warm on their long night vigils. Disputes over the division of fish were common and often led to fist fights, lasting until one or the other fell into the creek and cooled off. Then business was resumed.

The first catch was often as early as March and fishing continued until June, except from sunset Saturday until



Gift of Mrs. Ralph Bodman

Clarence Collins, Edwin T. Smith, and Harry Smith. . .

sunset Sunday. When herring were plentiful, there was great excitement at the creek which attracted visitors, "ladies as well as gentlemen".

Thirty or forty men and boys tended the nets, sometimes catching three or four hundred barrels in a twenty-four hour period. If the fish didn't swim up the creek fast enough, the "King" and his long-booted subjects would go with long sticks to where the creek emptied into the salt water. When a large number of herring entered the creek, their retreat was

cut off by very deep nets. Pounding and splashing with their sticks the men persuaded the fish to go up the creek, making a beeline for the nets so that twenty or thirty barrels were quickly secured. Then it was easy to bail the herring from the water into barrels ready for shipping and the returns were impressive. Trawlers paid as high as ten cents a piece for the herring, and two or three cents was common.

In the nineteenth century, fishing Mattakeset Creek was limited to those holding shares in the "Mattakeset Creek Enterprise". Once ownership was established, these shares were jealously held and were handed down from father to son. The entire interest was divided into quarters bearing the names Jenkins, Plain, Town and Chappaquidic, each supervised by an agent hired by the shareholders. Each quarter was divided and subdivided down to sixty-fourths (one fish out of every sixty-four taken.) Each full share, one sixth, had to supply a workman. A person owning two-sixths was very fortunate for that was considered a competency, especially in a good season.

Six nets, three on each side of the creek, were generally used, the catches being emptied into large boxes, called "kids," holding sixty barrels of fish. When these were full, the fish were bailed into half-barrel strap tubs and credited to the proper share, the account being chalked on the tailboard of somebody's cart by the agent of the quarter. Then each person's share was paid after necessary expenses had been deducted. This fishery was the source of "considerable income to the inhabitants of the islands",² and after the middle of the nineteenth century, was still netting four to five thousand dollars a season. But every now and then the pond broke open to the sea, naturally at first and then aided by men who objected to franchise holders being the only ones to seine the silvery harvest. The old creek was finally abandoned to be replaced, near the end of the century, by a straight ditch from Katama Bay to Great Pond.

A "Net Mattakeset Herring Creek Company" was formed in 1889. The creek route was divided into thirty foot sections and lots were drawn to see which stockholders should work

² C. Cornell, *Eighty Years Ashore and Afloat*, Boston: Andrew T. Graves, 1873 pp. 41-49.

each section. Most of the work was done with horses and scoops, but George Ripley and Grafton Smith did all the work on their sections with shovels and brawn. The entire 6200-foot ditch, seven to eight feet wide at the weirs, had to be dug two feet deep to protect the herring from predatory seagulls. Late in the afternoon of May 14, 1890, the bulkheads were knocked out and water gushed through the creek. The first herring was caught the next morning by George Mitchell and George Cleveland. Salted, smoked and handsomely decorated with a red ribbon around its tail and a miniature flag in its mouth, it was placed on display in Pent's Grocery Store on Summer Street.

For many years this new creek exceeded the productivity of the old.³ Henry Smith, heir to shares held by his grandfather and then his father, helped to keep this creek dug out and fished it for some time. This was when many halibut schooners from Boston and Gloucester came into Edgartown to buy large quantities of herring for bait. Sometimes so many of these vessels were in the harbor at once that a person could walk from the town dock to Chappaquiddick Beach across their decks. But in 1928, Great Pond broke through to the sea and the herring enterprise languished.

Herring, or alewives, are also known as swayback, sawbelly, gaspereau and, on Martha's Vineyard, as Old Town Turkey. They belong to the same family as shad and sardines. Herring are anadromous, returning from the sea to their birthplace every spring to spawn, laying a skein of 60 million eggs which adhere to the bottom of the pond. Then the herring return to the sea, followed later in the summer by those of their "fry" who, against enormous odds, hatch and grow large enough for the journey. After six to eight weeks, most herring are two inches long. They spend most of their lives in the sea where they congregate in large schools, feeding chiefly on plankton. They grow to about a foot long and some live as long as seven years.

Herring are important as food, fresh, canned, salted, or cured in salt and vinegar and made into delicacies like Bismarck herring. Old-timers tossed herring into a barrel of

³. Alfred Eisenstaedt & Henry Beetle Hough, *Martha's Vineyard*, New York: Viking Press, 1970.

brine for thirty-six hours until the strong solution softened the bones. Smoking the herring tended to soften the bones, too, and a little vinegar sprinkled on them as they cooked had the same effect.

At one time there was considerable demand for salt and smoked herring to be shipped to the West Indies, where they were used to feed the slaves. These fish were not dressed nor scalded, but salted in a pickle strong enough to float an egg. Then they were strung with sticks through their eye sockets, two dozen to a stick, and hung in the smoke house. A small, slow burning fire of pine cones and sweet fern wafted smoke constantly over the fish for days and weeks. Fish thus cured would keep indefinitely.

Herring are also a staple of all food fish and so at one time were in great demand by the trawlers all along the coast. They were also used as lobster bait, for pet food and for fish meal. Still, tons and tons of herring were wasted. The Indians always planted herring with their maize and showed the settlers how to do it. Herring are an excellent fertilizer planted in rows two inches deep. They attract earthworms which improve the condition of the soil, making humus for plant growth and leaving miniature tunnels which hold moisture, producing superior plants. Another use of herring is for their oil. The roe is still in demand but otherwise herring as human food has no great market locally.

Herring has many scales, and large ones. At one time Edgartown had a flourishing pearl business initiated by Ralph H. Bodman. Mr. Bodman used the scales of the Mattakeset herring to manufacture pearl essence and for some years he bought a large share of the herring seined there. His industry was carried on in a building near the creek and was shrouded in mystery. After he had patented his process, the building at Mattakeset was used for scaling the herring and the pearl essence was manufactured in a building on Kelley Street (later Sibley's Garage).

Mr. Bodman came from Attleboro. He had attended the Rhode Island School of Design and, for a number of years, he was a partner in the jewelry firm of Bodman Brothers in his native town. On the Vineyard he became associated with Mrs. Lina Call who conducted a gift shop in part of the building



Gift of Mrs. Ralph Bodman

Some went by horse. . .

which housed her husband's plumbing business on the corner of Winter and North Water Streets. The gift shop was renamed The Priscilla Pearl Shop and flourished for some time. Bodman's simulated pearls were reputed to be indistinguishable from genuine cultured pearls. Several wealthy summer visitors challenged this claim and at least one of them lost. A Mrs. Phillips from Eastville forfeited her exquisite necklace because she could not distinguish the herring scale pearls from cultured ones. Some time later, Mrs. Call and Mr. Bodman, as co-owners of their property, became entangled in lengthy litigation and the business was placed in trusteeship.

Still later, Mr. Bodman was associated with Robert E. Laidlaw in building a chowder plant on the Edgartown-Vineyard Haven Road. This venture failed and in 1940, the plant was converted to a plastics factory where Bodman planned to mix fish scale essence with synthetic resin to produce a new high gloss plastic substance. To use pearl essence with plastics is difficult because the substance has to withstand very high temperature and at 475°F it would cloud and deteriorate. Bodman found the answer which had baffled many chemists: the correct proportion of



Courtesy Vineyard Gazette

. . . And some went by truck.

pearl essence to resin should be $\frac{1}{4}$ ounce of the former to 1 pound of the latter and must be subjected to extreme heat. The end product was to be a basic, mixed, raw material out of which manufacturers of plastics would mold their products. These would be confined to the luxury field such as vanity cases, cigarette boxes, et cetera, because of the comparative scarcity of fish scales. Production had not started, but the equipment was all installed, when disaster struck. Mr. Bodman was working alone in the building, attempting to loosen some bolts when his blow torch fell and landed in a heap of paper boxes and cotton batting. The fire extinguisher was of no use and by the time the fire department could arrive the fire was out of control and the factory was completely destroyed in less than an hour.

The Second World War, with its food shortages, brought about renewed activity at Mattakeset. The B.A. Griffin Company of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, contracted with the Mattakeset Creek Co. to install a power plant, conveyors, sluiceways, scaling machinery and automatic salter and boning machines in the building that had been constructed in 1917. So automatic was this process that the herring "practically swam into the corning process." There was a

great demand for coopers, for these processed fish were barreled, sent to Wisconsin where they were reprocessed, and then sold to the War Foods Administration for "out of the country" use. Edwin T. Smith, who had been in charge of the Mattakeset Creek for 35 years, supervised the seining and made arrangements to truck the barrels to the steamer and thence by railroad to Wisconsin. Then Mr. Smith's duties were taken over by his son, Henry, who supervised the fishery for about five years. Since 1954, there has been little demand for herring in any form.

Currently, however, Mattakeset is once more in the headlines, locally at least. All available land on Martha's Vineyard, especially shorefront, is being bought by developers. Edgartown has asked for state assistance in purchasing the privately owned sections of South Beach, and the state is examining the question. The successors of the New Mattakeset Creek Company, Ed Bannister, Atwood Realty Trust, and George D. Flynn are the four major land holders of the 2200 feet of beach and its abutting land between the two main access points, the Herring Creek and Katama roads. So again, although herring have no bearing on the subject, Mattakeset Herring Creek is important to the town.

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Personal communication, Henry Smith, who inherited shares from his father and grandfather, and who actually "worked the creek".

Captain Nathan Daggett: An Island Pilot and Patriot

by DOROTHY DAGGETT JOHNSTON

In 1781, Capt. Nathan Daggett was called from his home in Holmes Hole on "a secret mission of vital importance to the Colonies".

He had already served the revolutionary cause well on French and American vessels. This secret mission proved to be his last, for it directly contributed to the defeat of Lord Cornwallis at Yorktown, and the end of the Revolutionary War.

By a tricky bit of piloting and a naval feint, Capt. Daggett brought the French fleet commanded by the Conte de Grasse to the mouth of Chesapeake Bay in time to disembark 3,200 troops under the command of the Marquis de Saint-Simon to aid Lafayette, and to prevent the British fleet (under Admiral Graves) from aiding Cornwallis. Pressed sorely by the troops ashore, and cut off from relief or retreat by sea, Cornwallis promptly surrendered.

The story shall be told from the beginning.

Nathan was born in 1750, the fourth son of Seth and Elizabeth (West) Daggett. He lived on the Neck overlooking the harbor. All the members of Nathan's family were connected with the sea. His brothers, Samuel, Silas, Peter and William, were captains of vessels or served in the Sea Coast Defence. His grandfather, Capt. Samuel Daggett, hailed from Edgartown, and his great uncle, Thomas Chase, was master of the coasting sloop, the *Vineyard*. Even his two younger

DOROTHY DAGGETT JOHNSTON began her research for this article when she was studying the genealogy of the Island Daggett family, of which she is a member. Mrs. Johnston now lives in South Dennis, and is an active member of the Cape Cod Genealogical Society.

brothers were connected with the sea in a sad sort of way. West died from a fall at sea when 15 years old, and Seth, aged six, died from smallpox caught from a sick sailor.

Nathan Daggett's sister was Polly (Mary) Daggett, one of the Liberty Pole girls of 1778. Young Polly, with the help of Maria Allen and Parnell Manter, blew up the Liberty Pole rather than have this symbol of their town's independence cut for a spar for an English ship.

Nathan grew up as most boys did on the Neck loving the sea, the strong smell of tarred rope in the chandler's shop, the smell of salt fish and the cry of the gulls. He was always at the wharf watching the loading and unloading of the cargo of schooners, or hearing the laughter and song from the nearby taverns. Sometimes he listened to tales of the sea in the sail loft above his uncle's cooper's shed where the sailmakers sat stitching great piles of white canvas, and sometimes he listened to strange tales from a young tar with a green parrot on his shoulder. He was off at sea by the time he was nine years old, learning to love the sounds of a schooner straining and groaning as the wind filled her sails and she settled on her course.

Nathan's first job was helping his brother sail the ferry sloop between Holmes Hole and Falmouth Town. Then Nathan sailed the sounds on coasting schooners belonging to his brothers. When learning to pilot in the coasting trade he sailed Vineyard Sound to Rhode Island Sound past Block Island down Long Island Sound to South Wharf at New York. Sometimes the coaster carried cargo far down beyond Chesapeake Bay to plantations at Charlestown and Savannah. Sometimes the coasting trade took him east from Holmes Hole to Boston, Salem, or far down east to Machais Port. He was well trained, and when he was 18 years old he was handed a pilot's warrant and became Capt. Daggett.

The ports of New Bedford, Bristol, Portsmouth, Newport and New London were hives of activity, but Newport, not too far from Nathan's home, was the greatest port of all and here he spent most of his piloting days. Voyages began and ended in Newport, then (1765) the second largest colonial port. Here merchants grew rich on the triangular trade: Newport was one of its corners. It was during this time that

he learned the waters of the West Indies and the southern colonies.

Over the years a series of events had taken place that were ever bringing the colonies and the mother country closer to war: the irritation of the Stamp Act which forced a man to buy an English stamp for every legal document; the tea tax on a favorite drink; the Quartering Act of 1774 which forced families to quarter English soldiers in their homes. When the colonists of Boston rebelled and dumped a shipload of tea into Boston harbor an angry King George ordered all colonial ports closed until the tea should be paid for. The 13 colonies were in open rebellion against England. The great ports of Boston and Newport were blockaded, the coasting commerce and all business and traffic by sea came to an end. The commerce at Newport, Edgartown, Holmes Hole, and in all the ports was over. Ships lay idle in the harbors, their seams opening from disuse.

Then a great British Fleet arrived from England under the command of Lord Richard Howe bringing 2000 English soldiers who were quartered in the homes of Boston, in Newport and in Bristol. Men of Holmes Hole had to decide to be a Patriot or to be a Tory. Some people left the Island at this time to go to Newport and Rochester to live. Liberty Poles went up in every village. Some men marched off to enlist and fight in the war on land with General Washington at Cambridge. Some men served in the Sea Coast Defence on the Island, but most of the mariners, like Nathan, left on any vessel they could find to fight the British on the sea. In April of 1775 word came to the Neck of the Battle at Lexington and the American colonies were at war.

The English blockade of the seaports was very effective. Food supplies could not get through and times were hard for the people of Holmes Hole. Shut off from the mainland they had to shift for themselves; nor could Washington use the sea lanes to move his soldiers or to get his supplies. He pleaded with the Continental Congress for a Continental Navy, and in 1775 eighteen ships were built and commissioned.

But, brave as the sailors were, the little navy was no match for the great English fleet, and most of the ships were sunk or burned. Washington appealed to the seamen of Holmes Hole

and to all the colonies. He issued Letters of Marque to colonial ship owners and asked them to arm their snows, sloops, schooners and brigs with swivel guns and cannon and to sail out into the sea lanes to capture British supply vessels coming from England. These armed vessels were called privateers and many mariners from Holmes Hole and seamen all along the coast responded, for they liked the excitement and they needed the prize money of which each man on a privateer had a share. Every privateer carried a prize master and a prize crew who went aboard and sailed the captured vessel into an open port. Here a Magistrate Court determined the disposal of ship and cargo.

The life of a privateersman was dangerous, for capture by the British meant imprisonment in the dread *Jersey* prison ship at New York or Mill Prison in Halifax. By British law colonial seamen on privateers were considered rebels and pirates from a rebellious colony, and deserving of no quarter. Few sailors survived the disease-ridden prison ships. Only when the colonists had won the war and the peace was signed in 1783 did the cruel treatment of colonial sailors by the British Navy cease. But Capt. Daggett and most mariners still chose to serve on the sea.

As the clouds of war formed, he joined Capt. Seth Harding as branch pilot of the Connecticut Navy brigantine *Defence*, of New London. He was to serve with Capt. Harding for five years (1775-1780), although, after the French joined in the struggle, his service was sometimes interrupted by tours of duty aboard French vessels.

In his pension log,¹ he writes of an encounter which took place June 7, 1776 off Cape Fear in the Carolinas. The *Defence* and other (American) vessels fell in with three British troop transports from Scotland. "After a hard fought battle we took 2 ships and a brig with 600 Scottish soldiers of Col. Campbell's 71st Regiment."

The log tells of an incident in 1777. "Cruising Long Island

¹ Long after the war (in 1818), Capt. Daggett applied to the federal government for a pension. As part of his application he prepared a "pension log" which included a sworn affidavit of his wartime activities, and was supported by logs and diaries. Much of the material in this article is drawn from it. The original now lies in the National Archives, in Washington, D.C.

Sound, British transports (18) came out of White Stone and crossed to the Connecticut colony of Fairfield where they landed 2,000 troops on the beach. A sharp battle took place, the colonists firing two cannon from the beach. Many patriots went down. Then the English marched on leaving soldiers to fire the town of Fairfield. I went ashore with crew and beat out a fair piece."

In 1778 after the French had become the ally of the colonies (and Capt. Daggett was piloting for the French) his log reads, "I piloted the *Concord*, a frigate of 36 guns, to the north end of St. Georges Banks where we picked up a fleet of French transports, 12 sail, convoyed by the French *Surgitair* of 50 guns and piloted the fleet into Boston Town." Capt. Nathan's service in the Continental Navy of Connecticut under Capt. Harding covered many missions in the *Defence* including privateering.

The colonial privateers were so successful that they took 299 English supply ships in one year and the much needed provisions now came regularly through the English blockade for General Washington's army, and for the people. The French king noticed the success of the brave American seamen and he saw a way to get back at his old English enemy. With the persuasion of the continental ambassador, Benjamin Franklin, and the urging of Washington's friend, the Marquis de Lafayette, the King of France in 1778 formerly recognized the 13 united colonies as independent from England, and France became an ally. This was the turning point in the war.

In May of 1773 Capt. Nathan Daggett had married Anna Wilkins. She was the daughter of Thomas Wilkins of Nantucket who had just moved his family to West Tisbury. While Nathan was away in the Connecticut Navy he left his young wife living in Holmes Hole near his parents on the Neck. In 1778, a daughter, Catherine, was born and another child, Lydia, in 1780. Nathan's visits to the Neck were infrequent and were made at night so great was the danger of impressment to pilots of Holmes Hole. English seamen lurked in every port ready to capture pilots.

Times were very hard for people on the whole Island. English ships were regularly harassing them, coming ashore to

frighten them and take away their livestock. On November 16, 1776, the Massachusetts General Court sent the following order to Major Barachiah Bassett at Martha's Vineyard: "You are hereby ... ordered forthwith to discharge the officers and men stationed at Martha's Vineyard excepting 25 men, including one lieutenant, one sergeant, and one corporal..." Maj. Bassett complied at once, and the Island was essentially without defense. The committee for the town of Tisbury did not give up easily, and on December 27, 1776, Shubael Cottle, Elisha West, and Nathan Smith wrote the General Court: "We are much alarmed at the Dismission of the soldiers which were allowed as a Defence for our Island...."

The plea was ignored, and the Island was left exposed and unguarded. The General Court simply recommended that the people of the Island send to the mainland all livestock and other goods "not absolutely necessary to their present support", and abandoned them.

The worst of all came when General Grey raided the Island in 1778.

In the summer of that year, when an expected naval battle between the French and English fleets failed to take place because of a great storm which damaged both fleets, and when the expected Battle of Rhode Island on Quaker Hill across Block Island Sound from the Vineyard also failed from lack of expected French reinforcements, the English fort at Newport lay abandoned. On September 3, Lord Howe sailed his English ships-of-the-line with 4,000 English soldiers into Newport Harbor to reinforce the fort. He found the fort without provisions and ordered out a foraging party of great strength commanded by Grey who had 48 ships anchored at White Stone, Long Island. Grey set sail at once. He entered Mt. Hope Bay and pillaged and fired the settlements of Providence and Bristol. Then he sailed to New Bedford where a Tory informer had reported that large stores from prize ships were hidden. The soldiers foraged and burned to the ground the homes along the harbor.

Then Grey set sail for Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard and ordered two frigates to follow in two days to bring back the stock he planned to take. Passing Falmouth his boats cut out two sloops in the harbor, but seeing the great number of

militia gathered there (from all of Cape Cod) he continued on. He crossed the Sound and dropped anchor just outside Holmes Hole harbor.

Under a flag of truce Col. Beriah Norton and two other committeemen met the British officers aboard the flagship *Carysfort*, and received orders to deliver immediately 10,000 sheep, 300 head of cattle, all the arms and munitions of the militia, and all the collected taxes.

Unsatisfied with the efforts being made by the Islanders to comply, Grey set troops ashore who worked havoc. "They wrung the red rooster's neck and even went into the root cellar," wrote Anna Daggett to her husband away at sea on the *Defence*. "I was greatly hurt in my property," Capt. Daggett wrote of the effects of the raid, later.

For all of the year 1779 Col. Norton and the Island selectmen tried to get payment from the English for the losses in stock that the farmers of the Island had suffered in Grey's raid. Norton even went under a white flag to British General Carlton's headquarters in New York. The claim was proved valid, but the British debt was never paid.

On July 9th in 1780, a captain just off his fishing vessel came into Capt. Isaac Daggett's tavern near the wharf at Holmes Hole with the good news that a French fleet lay off the Island at Nomans Land, waiting to enter Newport harbor. The good news passed swiftly from vessel to vessel in the harbor, and in the Sounds from port to port. On the next day by fast sloop from Newport word came to Anna Daggett that her husband would soon be home. By the same sloop, word came to Holmes Hole that the great French general Rochambeau would soon arrive in Newport harbor, and take up residence in Newport at Vernon House on Clark Street. There was great rejoicing on the Island that day for the mariners of Holmes Hole knew that the turning point of the war could be near.

That same day Capt. Daggett left the service of the Connecticut Continental Navy, where he had served his country for five years under Capt. Harding, and returned to Newport. There he was hired as a pilot by his old friend, Capt. Caleb Gardner, Continental Agent of Rhode Island, who knew Nathan to be a trusted patriot. For the next two

critical years (1780-1781), Capt. Daggett was pilot on ships of the French Fleet. He took his orders from Capt. Gardner, but his papers were signed by Rochambeau.

Capt. Daggett was now living with his family at Holmes Hole between piloting missions. One wonders if on a stormy evening when the vessels were weatherbound in the harbor, he might have been found at his brother Silas's tavern smoking in the dim candlelight and quietly talking about the war with other mariners. But life was very serious in those war days and we know that Capt. Nathan Daggett kept mostly out of sight while at Holmes Hole, and while at his home he was probably always ready to push open the panel door beside his fireplace to enter and climb the crude stairs that rose around the chimney to the little secret chamber above where his seed corn hung, for pilots were still being hunted.

The Island had little means of following the course of the war, but it was heard that the year of 1780 had gone badly for the cause of liberty. Then, in 1781, came good news that a French fleet under the Comte de Grasse was in the West Indies and was ready to help the colonies.

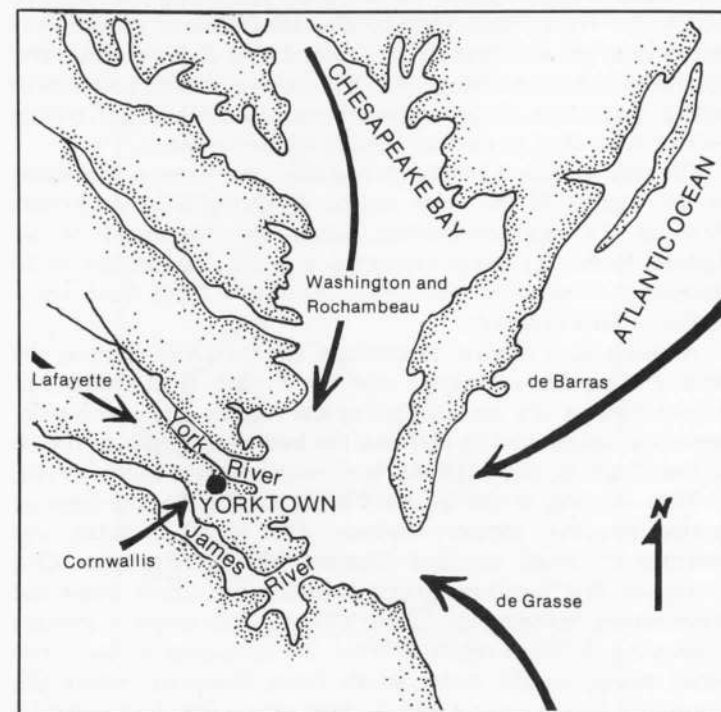
The French had assembled the powerful fleet to wrest control of Jamaica from the British, and had assigned de Grasse as commander. He had also been advised to assist the colonial struggle in any way he could.

De Grasse's fleet would utterly upset the balance of naval power, and Washington saw that immediately. He and Rochambeau conceived two schemes. One was a combined attack upon New York which would draw support from Cornwallis. The other — the bolder and more decisive plan — was to sweep down from the north upon Cornwallis, who had retreated into Yorktown.

Both plans depends on the support of de Grasse, and it was left to the admiral to decide where he could help. On August 14, 1781, Washington received word from de Grasse that the fleet would proceed to the Chesapeake, and could stay for part of the fall.

Other parts of the plan were already underway. One night in July, a messenger rowed quietly away from Gardner's wharf at the foot of Thames Street in Newport. In his breast

pocket was a message from Capt. Gardner. Late that night there was a knock on the door at the home of Capt. Daggett in Holmes Hole, and the message was delivered. The bearer disappeared into the darkness to pick up his hidden boat on the shore and get back to Gardner's wharf before dawn.



The elements of the Yorktown siege. . .

The message, signed by Capt. Gardner, said: "Be ready at six bells to pilot on a secret mission of vital importance to the colonies."

The next day, the *President*, a continental brig loaned to the French, appeared in the outer harbor at the Hole. A tender picked up Capt. Daggett at the staging at the foot of Beach Street, and he was gone.

Capt. Daggett was not told of his destination and he was

quietly kept in his cabin with a guard, but when the vessel got clear of the Islands and he felt the roll of the Gulf Stream under his feet, he judged the vessel was heading south for the French West Indies.

On the way a sharp encounter took place with the British, and Capt. Daggett stuck his head up the companionway to watch the fight. According to tradition, this so alarmed the guard that he was tethered with ball and chain to his bunk for the rest of the voyage; the nervous French officer was so afraid that Capt. Daggett's head would be blown off before he had been able to perform his important mission.

On this date in 1781 both England and France had fleets in the islands of the West Indies. At Antigua was a British fleet of 14 ships-of-the-line under the command of Sir Samuel Hood. At Santo Domingo was the French fleet of 28 ships of the line under the command of de Grasse. Each knew of the other's presence.

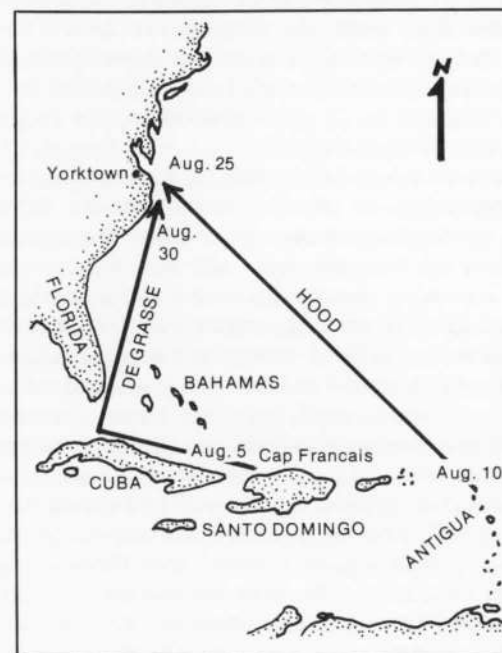
Arriving at Francais Hispaniola (Santo Domingo) in the West Indies, Capt. Daggett saw the French fleet spread out before him in the beautiful tropical harbor. He was hastily tendered across and he climbed the boarding ladder of the de Grasse flagship, the *Ville de Paris*, which waited ready to sail.

That evening in the quarters of de Grasse, by the light of gently swaying copper lanterns, the secret mission was revealed in detail to Capt. Daggett for the first time. One prong of this naval campaign would move north from the West Indies, bringing de Grasse's fleet of 28 ships-of-the-line conveying 3,000 French soldiers to Chesapeake Bay. The other prong would move south from Newport, where the Comte de Barras waited with 8 ships-of-the-line conveying 18 vessels loaded with arms and supplies.

On orders of Rochambeau, Capt. Daggett had been assigned the duty and responsibility of piloting the De Grasse fleet to Chesapeake Bay. The plan was intended to deceive the British navy anchored at Antigua. Capt. Daggett would not sail the usual direct sea route but chart his course westward by less known sea lanes through the islands and closer to the mainland. By this route the French flotilla would disappear from sight for several days and, it was hoped, confuse Hood. Hood undoubtedly would take the

direct sea route planning to outsail the French fleet to be first at Chesapeake Bay, ready in battle line to fight when the French fleet should later arrive.

In Santo Domingo harbor on the morning of August 5, 1781, Capt. Nathan Daggett stood at his pilot post on the quarterdeck of the *Ville de Paris*, his course charted west, and on order of de Grasse, the French fleet sailed. The flotilla left Cap Francais and sailed across the Windward Passage to the northern coast of Cuba. It continued along the Cuban coast



The fleets converge. . .

to the Straits of Florida, then turned north and followed the Gulf Stream along the eastern coast of Florida, and shortly sailed straight for the Virginia Capes.

On August 31, the French fleet arrived at the mouth of the Chesapeake safely and without mishap. The bay was empty of vessels, and there was no sign of the British fleet. De

Grasse set ashore the Marquis de Saint-Simon and his 3,200 troops to support Lafayette's army. Expecting the approach of the British fleet, de Grasse promptly put back to sea with 24 of his vessels, leaving the remainder (and a number of seamen) to blockade the York and James Rivers.

In the meantime, Hood had left Antigua on August 10, five days after de Grasse sailed from Cap Francais, and had sailed straight to the Chesapeake. He arrived there on August 25, and found no sign of the French. Surprised and baffled, he waited for a day, then sailed north to New York. He brought with him the first word the English had heard about the impending threat from de Grasse. At New York, Admiral Graves took command of Hood's fleet, and added five vessels to it. Now enlarged to 19 ships-of-the-line, the English fleet returned to the Chesapeake.

Upon his arrival on September 5, Graves found he had missed intercepting de Barras, and that de Grasse was established at the Chesapeake. After some maneuvering, the vans and parts of the centers of the two fleets engaged on September 7 in what shortly became a sharp battle. Neither commander wished to press the matter. De Grasse drew off as night fell; Graves, his fleet seriously damaged, stood off to sea, and returned to New York in despair a few days later.

Just before Hood departed, de Barras arrived from Newport with troops and supplies which safely slipped past the British fleet while its eyes were cast elsewhere.

The net was closing around Cornwallis ashore as well.

On August 19, five days after he received word of de Grasse's plans, Washington crossed the Hudson and with Rochambeau, headed south with his troops on a 400 mile march which military historians consider the most daring and most brilliant maneuver of the war. On the same day that Graves arrived off the Chesapeake, Washington arrived at the head of the bay and began convoying his troops south.

Washington and Rochambeau reached Lafayette in Williamsburg on September 14. Three days later they paid their respects to de Grasse on his flagship, and the strategy of the coming battle was reviewed. Standing by the helmsman on the quarter deck, Capt. Daggett saw the two generals leave to return to Williamsburg, while the yards of the assembled

fleet were manned and a parting salute was fired from the *Ville De Paris*.

At Williamsburg on September 27, the united troops began their march toward Yorktown. Siege lines were laid down, and the siege — and then the battle — began.

By this time it was reported that another British fleet (under Admiral Digby) was making plans to come to Cornwallis' aid, and de Grasse was under some pressure to head for the open sea where he would be better able to defend his fleet. However, he ultimately agreed to station the bulk of his fleet at the mouth of the York River where it could overlook Yorktown, and to put four or five other vessels on patrol in the James River to the south of the peninsula in which Yorktown sits.

In Chesapeake Bay, Capt. Daggett, standing with the other mariners on the deck of the *Ville de Paris*, could hear the faint boom of cannons and see the sharp flashes of fire and the pall of smoke that hung over the battlefield. At night he saw the red sky over the York River where several British vessels had been set afire.

On October 17 the bombardment ended, and de Grasse sent a sloop ashore for news. It returned with news that Cornwallis, deprived of his reinforcements and greatly outnumbered, was prepared to surrender. Terms were reached in two days, and the British army marched out of its garrison to lay down its arms.

Several days later Capt. Daggett's log reads, "after wooding and watering I piloted the French ships (back) ten leagues without the Bay" where they anchored in the Roads. He then returned to the Yorktown aboard the French frigate *Servilante* and was taken to de Grasse at Williamsburg where he received a "fair discharge" and "recommendation". Then it is likely he stepped out into the street to watch the festivities.

He sailed for Philadelphia 10 days later to deliver his papers to the Second Continental Congress. One wonders how he looked and how he felt as he found himself standing in the large colonial chamber. The November sun was slanting through high-arched small paned windows to the oak floor below where sat assembled the distinguished white-wigged

representatives of the 13 colonies; the sunlight touching the green felt-covered desks appointed with quill, inkpot and sander, at which each gentleman sat in his Windsor chair. Before Capt. Daggett, on a slightly raised platform enclosed by a balustered railing, sat President Thomas McKean, who came forward to shake his hand and receive his papers. A feeling of jubilation prevailed in the room and they listened closely as he related the account of his piloting service from Francais Hispaniola to the Chesapeake Bay and to his details of the surrender at Yorktown. After that he received a "general discharge" and was dismissed.

Free from the service, a few days later he was on his way home to Holmes Hole. No record has been found to tell us how Capt. Daggett returned but it may be presumed that he booked passage on a vessel heading east for Narragansett Bay. He likely put in at Newport, Rhode Island to make his report to Capt. Gardner. One can imagine a happy reunion at Gardner's Wharf as seamen gathered around him, and a glass of port enjoyed at the White Horse Tavern. Later, at Capt. Gardner's home on Thames Street, one can imagine there was an extra guest at Mistress Gardner's dinner table that evening and the two Sound pilots, captains in the war, old friends and patriots, talked together far into the night.

Capt. Daggett did not tarry overlong in Newport. Anxious to see his wife and children he was probably away the next day, and with a fair wind and tide soon sailing through Quick's Hole and seeing before him the sparkling waters of beautiful Vineyard Sound. Then, cruising along the Island past Lambert's Cove, he reached West Chop and was entering Holmes Hole harbor. The topsails quivered, the rattling anchor struck water and the vessel turned gently into the wind.

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.

June 1838.

1st. Wind S. Went to Br. Josiah Smith's at Pohoganut. Attended prayer meeting. Returned at night.

3rd. Wind SW. Went to Pohogonut. Attended meeting at Br. Josiah Smith's A.M. Attended meeting at Quampachy P.M. at Br. E.P. Norton's. Attended meeting at 5 P.M. at the schoolhouse near Ichabod Norton's. Returned at night.

4th. Wind SW to S. Engaged as one of the arbitrators in settling a dispute about the line and land &c. &c. between William Brown and Francis Smith at Chapaquidick.

6th. Wind SW. Attended meeting at East Side Holmes Hole. Br. Holway preached. Br. Paul Luce was appointed Class leader by Br. Holway with the request and consent of the brethren. Returned at night. Rains at night.

7th. Wind S. to W. Rains a little. Watched with a sick child of David Davis this night.

8th. Wind SW. Fresh breeze. Went to Cape Poge with Mr. Gifford to look at

the Light House, there being talk of moving it.¹

9th. Wind SW. Finished planting potatoes.²

11th. Wind SW. Warm. Boiled out the lamps in the Light House.

16th. Wind SW. Pleasant. Thomas Butlar, alas, drowned in attempting to cross the lagoon at Chapaquidick.³

18th. Wind NE. Gale. Funeral of Thomas Butler. Service by Rev'd Mr. Halls. (?)

20th. Wind SW. The Cutter *McLane* sails with the Collector on another cruise to visit Light Houses. Went to East Side Holmes Hole. Attended class meeting. Returned at night.

26th. Wind W to SW. Very dry and warm. L. B. plastered the chamber.

July 1838.

2nd. Wind SW. Moved my meadow near the house.

3rd. Wind SW. A company sail for New Port in the Pilot Boat *Benjamin Dewolf* to spend the 4th there.

4th. Wind SW. Very warm. Sloop *Susan* lately bought here goes to Falmouth on a sailing party. Got my hay into the barn from the meadow near the house.

5th. Wind SW. Schooner *Benjamin*

¹ Because of erosion, no doubt.

² Even considering Jeremiah's very large family he seems to have planted an awful lot of potatoes. There was always a good market for potatoes from outbound whalers.

³ So at one time there was another body of water on the Vineyard called a lagoon.

Dewolf arrives from New Port.

8th. Wind WSW. Very warm. Went to Pohogonut. Attended meetings at Br. Josiah Smith's A.M. P.M. at the Schoolhouse over the Plain. Br. Landers went with me.

13th. Wind SW. Variable. Rains a considerable. This is very acceptable it being remarkable dry. About $\frac{1}{4}$ of my potatoes which I planted rotted in the ground on account of the droughth.

14th. Wind SW. Br. Sherman visits us from Nantucket.

16th. Wind NE. Rains a little. Attended a meeting at Br. Josiah Smith's with Br. Sherman. Had a very pleasant season. Returned at night. Uncle Elijah Pease's wife dies.

17th. Wind ENE. Br. Sherman goes home to Nantucket. Funeral of Uncle E. Pease's wife. Service by Rev'ds Kent and Thomas.

19th. Wind NE. Light. Went to Nantucket in the steam boat on business of the United States for Light Houses & c.

21st. Wind N to NE. Returned from Nantucket with Mr. Francis Smith in a sail boat.

23rd. Wind SW. to W. and dry. Engaged at the Custom House. Deacon Benjamin Davis dies A. E. 85. A pious man for many years and died a happy death.

24th. Wind S. Attended the funeral of Deacon Davis at his late dwelling house. Service by Rev'd Mr. Hall. Returned at evening.

29th. Wind W. Light. The thermometer stood at 93 in the shade.

Went to East Side Holmes Hole. Attended meetings. At 5 P.M. attended meeting at the schoolhouse near Ichabod Norton Esq's.

31st. Wind NW to SW. Very warm. Got in my wheat. Br. Staple preached at East Side Holmes Hole.

August 1838.

1st. Wind SSW. Fresh breeze. Did not attend class meeting. Br. Kent preaches at East Side Holmes Hole. He goes at 9 A.M. with my chaise and horse.

2nd. Wind SW. My wife sick.

4th. Wind SW. Ship *Mary Francis* Foster master hauls off into the harbour.

6th. Wind S to N and SSW. Rains a considerable. The corn has suffered much with the droughth and feels it sensibly.

8th. Wind NE. Ship *Mary F. Fisher* master sails for the Pacific Ocean.

15th. Wind W. Light A.M. The Revenue Boat goes to Gayhead to carry carpenters to repair the Light House there.⁴

16th. Wind ESE. This day a convention is held at Tisbury relating to Education. The Honorable Horace Mann⁵ delivered an address to the

⁴ This was the original octagonal lighthouse built in 1799. There is a good drawing of it in John Barber's *The History and Antiquities of Every Town in Massachusetts* (1839 edition), p. 149.

⁵ Horace Mann, of course, was one of the great leaders in stimulating interest in public education and in the proper preparation of public school teachers.

assembly at the Baptist Meeting House. In the afternoon the officers of the Dukes County Association for the Promotion of Education were chosen, the business of that attended to and some remarks made by several gentlemen present. The meeting was adjourned until one o'clock P.M. at which time the people assembled. His excellence Edward Everett the Governor of the Commonwealth arrived with his suit and took his seat on the SW side of the pulpit after being introduced by Daniel Fellows, Esq. President of the Society and several gentlemen who were near him. Mr. Mann delivered the address referred to above which was excellent. The Governor addressed the people upon the same subject in a most admirable manner after which a few observations were made by several gentlemen. The meeting adjourned being 5 P.M. I had the satisfaction to be present with my daughter Isabella and my sister Emily. Returned at evening.

17th. Wind SW to W. Attended prayer meeting at Br. Josiah Smith's with Br. Sherman he having arrived yesterday. Rained a little during the evening and at night fast. But it is very dry and the grasshoppers make great destruction of almost every green thing. The Governor and his Suit visited this town, rides down to South Beach and visits the Light House on the pier. Then sets out for Holmes Hole and the Steam Boat for New Bedford after receiving company until $\frac{1}{2}$ past 1 o'clock P.M. Mr. Holmes Mayhew and Daniel Norton take down the chimney of the Light House on account of the foundation being rotten.

19th. Wind SW. Attended meeting with Br. Sherman at Pohogonut at Br. Josiah Smith's in the forenoon. At Br. Thomas Norton's at Quamachy in the afternoon, and at the school house near Ichabod Norton Esq's at 6 o'clock P.M. While at the six o'clock meeting I was called to set a boy's arm who had fallen from the steps of the house in which he lived at East Side Holmes Hole - Capt. O. Luce's son. I went as quick as possible and in returning was thrown from the wagon and hurt me very much.⁶ I made out to reach home through devine mercy. The back of my neck and my breast were much bruised and painful. The goodness and mercy of the Heavenly Father preserved my life at this time in a wonderful manner.

20th. Wind SW. Very unwell from the fall above mentioned.

26th. Wind WNW to S. Fresh breeze. Attended meetings with Br. Chadwick at the East Side Holmes Hole. Returned at evening. I was enabled through Devine mercy to speak considerable but with some pain and distress.

27th. Wind N to SW. With difficulty I am able to write today being lame.⁷

28th. Wind SW. Set out for Camp

⁶ This accident tells us a good deal about the condition of the roads on the Island in Jeremiah's day. Or perhaps Jeremiah had fallen asleep on the wagon seat. That day's schedule had been a tough one.

⁷ The writing for the above several entries and for a number which follow are not in Jeremiah's or Joseph's hand. These entries were probably made for Jeremiah by Isabella.

Meeting at the East Chop. Remained there until the 4th of September. Had a pleasant time.

September 1838.

4th. Wind NE. The U. S. Cutter *Hambleton*, Lieutenant Sturgis commanding arrived to visit the Light House. Visits Edgartown Light House and directs me to omit lighting the lamps towards the inner harbour which I did according to direction. Conversed with him about the pier and Light House and breakwater.

9th. Wind SSE to SW. Went to East Side Holmes Hole. Attended meeting A.M. P.M. attended funeral of Miss Norton at the house of J. Norton Esq. Service by the Rev'd Mr. Hall. It was a solemn time. The young lady was to have been married to Mr. Elisha Smith this day. Attended a meeting at East Side Holmes Hole at ½ past 5 P.M. Returned at night with Sister Sherman who had been visiting friends at that place.

19th. Wind W. Br. Sherman and wife leave for Nantucket. Went to East Side Holmes Hole. Did not attend class on account of a disappointment.

24th. Wind SW. Fresh breeze. Have been engaged at the Custom House ½ day.

30th. Wind E to S. Light. Went to Pohogonut. Attended meetings. Br. S. G. Vincent went with me. Returned at 5 P. M. U.S. Cutter *Hamilton*, Commander J. Styrgis arrives from New Bedford.

October 1838.

1st. Wind NW. Light. Warm. Cutter *Hamilton* sails for Boston. Cornel

Marchant, Esq. dies very suddenly.

2nd. Wind NE to S. Funeral of Esq. Marchant at the Congregational Meeting House.

3rd. Wind S to N. Thunders. The Collector goes to New Bedford.

5th. Wind SW. J.T.P., M. Baylies and William Vincent go to Woods Hole to attend a convention for the purpose of nominating a candidate for Representative to Congress from the 11th district. Crocker of Barnstable is selected for the office by the Democrats this day. Benjamin Luce was chosen but did not go. The above delegates return at evening. Set out to go to Pohogonut but stopped at O. Crosby's he being sick. I was detailed there until it was too late to proceed.

8th. Wind NE. Gale. Capt. Oliver Crosby dies about 6 o'clock A.M.

9th. Wind N to SW. Very light and calm. Funeral of Capt. Crosby. Service by Rev'ds Mr. Kent, Hall and Marchant.

10th. Wind NE. Gale and storm. Went to East Side Holmes Hole. Attended the funeral of Widow Rhoda Norton a pious woman who died day before yesterday in the triumphs of faith. Funeral by Rev'd Mr. Hall. Returned at P.M.

17th. Wind WNW. Ship *Thule* of Nantucket sails for the Pacific Ocean.

27th. Wind SE. U. S. Cutter *Vigilant* sails. Ship *Catharine* of Nantucket arrives from the Pacific Ocean.

November 1838.

10th. Wind NW to NNW. Cold. Ship *Columbus* arrives from the Pacific

Ocean.

12th. Wind S. Light. Town Meeting. Br. Chase Pease and Benjamin Davis are elected to the General Court.

13th. Wind S. Went to Nantucket on business relating to the Light House lately erected there.

23rd. Wind N to NNW. A schooner on shore at Capt Poge. Went to her.

24th. Wind NNE to NW. Very cold. Kept a fire in the lantern with difficulty that the oil well is kept thin enough to burn.

25th. Wind W. Cold. Makes ice in the harbour. Keep fire in the lantern the most part of the night. Went to East Side Holmes Hole at noon. Attended meeting. Return at night.

27th. Wind SW to WSW. Cloudy. Fresh breeze. Schooner on Cape Poge gets off.

28th. Wind WNW. Went to the Head of the Pond, so called, to survey land for George Dunham, Nathan Smith and others. Engaged all day. Was paid by G.D. Did not attend class meeting on account of surveying.

29th. Wind NW. Cold. This day is set apart by the Governor and Council as a day of Thanksgiving.

30th. Wind SW. Pleasant. Went to Pohogonut. Attended a meeting at Br. Josiah Smith's. Returned at night.

December 1838

9th. Wind NW. Cold. Went to East Side Holmes Hole with Br. Landers. Attended meetings. Returned at evening.

10th. Wind WNW. U. S. Cutter *McLane*, Commander Nemo arrives.

11th. Wind NW. Engaged surveying land for Chase Pease and Charles Smith. 1 day.

12th. Wind NW. Gale. Engaged surveying land for Charles Vincent. One day.

13th. Wind W. Engaged surveying land for Charles Smith, Charles Look and Benjamin Kidder. One day.

18th. Wind W. Engaged at the Custom House.

27th. Wind NW and calm. Ship *Richard Mitchell* arrives from the Pacific Ocean.

Edited by
GALE HUNTINGTON

Books

Vineyard Sampler, by Dorothy Cottle Poole. Dukes County Historical Society, Edgartown. 154 pp. \$10.

Vineyard Sampler is a beautiful book. And indeed it is a "sampler." Its 22 sections — almost chapters — some quite long and others very short are samples of various aspects of life on the Vineyard during the last hundred and fifty years. Whaling, of course, and fishing, lobstering and scalloping. There are glimpses of the farms, some large and others quite small that supported the families of the men who were away gaining the money crop that for almost all of those years came from the sea. The stories tell of the ruggedness of the way of life that the men followed. And actually the life of the women who were left behind in many ways was almost as rugged as that of their men.

Vineyard Sampler is a remarkable book for it tells so much and tells it so beautifully. It will be difficult for the reader to decide which chapter, which story, he or she likes best. It was so for this reviewer, but he finally decided that the Edgartown Schooner Fleet was his favorite of all for he can remember so many of the vessels that made up that fleet, and so many of the men who manned them. And other chapters bring back vivid memories, too, for he himself went lobstering and fishing and scalloping many years ago.

The choice of illustrations adds greatly to the attractiveness of the book. In all there are some 134

illustrations. The book is sponsored by the Dukes County Historical Society, and it should be, for Dorothy Cottle Poole is the Society's historian. All who love the Vineyard should own a copy of *Vineyard Sampler*. It can be purchased in the Society's library and also in any of the Island's book stores.

GALE HUNTINGTON

Tisbury

The Captain's Daughters of Martha's Vineyard, edited by Eliot Eldridge Macy. The Chatham Press, Old Greenwich. 163 pp. \$10.

Everyone with a Vineyard background knows about the Eldridge family: Captain George Eldridge, who ran the chandlery for sailors' supplies "down neck" in Vineyard Haven, and was known for the Eldridge Tide and Pilot Book; his wife Sydna from Ohio, who was active in every sort of project for the betterment of Vineyard Haven, inspiring her townswomen to cooperate with her; and the four daughters Nina, Mary, Ruth, and Gratia, each with a distinctive personality, but all with the energetic and philanthropic characteristics of their parents.

I had heard my grandfather, a sea-captain from West Tisbury, speak of George Eldridge with admiration; my three older sisters who attended high school in Edgartown had considered the Eldridge sisters their mortal enemies because they were so good on the opposing basketball team when Edgartown played against

Vineyard Haven. But my own experience dated from 1954 when Ruth Eldridge White said I ought to be a member of the Want-To-Know Club of which her mother had been one of the founders, and an early president.

At that time Ruth and her husband lived at Fourway, the former Owen carriage house which had been made into four apartments for the four sisters. The Whites gave wonderful parties in the main reception room, sometimes featuring artists and musicians, a collection of madonnas, or anniversaries of one sort and another. Nina was there, a gracious participator, Gratia made her home in another section a few years later, and Mary came home later still. All had made their presence felt in the outside world, but all kept their Vineyard ties through the years.

To know the intimate background of this family, told by family members, is a privilege. *The Captain's Daughters of Martha's Vineyard* is a book that gives one this knowledge in a clever and delightful way. All four sisters tell of experiences of their youngest days in their own words, and one of the captain's grandchildren, Eliot Eldridge Macy, has put their stories together to make a unified whole. The book becomes more than the story of the Eldridge family, it is the story of a small Island town in the last years of the 19th century. Perhaps more than that it represents the nostalgia of all small-town or country people born in the 1880s or '90s.

A foreword by Eliot Macy tells something of the plain facts of Eldridge's sea background, how he

brought his bride to the Vineyard, and why this present book was written.

Ruth, one of the middle sisters, had written stories of her childhood before she died in 1967. The book starts with her walking from the "head of the harbor" (present-day Vineyard Haven) toward West Chop to the chandlery where her father presided, near where the family first lived.

Gratia was born on a day in February 1885 when the harbor was frozen over and the doctor had to skate "down neck" for the delivery. From her own account she has caused problems ever since. Her words are the most graphic of any.

Mary starts her story by telling how Nina at two and a half years had started to walk to the chandlery and got lost in the woods. All the sailors in the harbor at the time joined in the search for her.

Nina's account of the chandlery, bought from the Holmes family in 1879, and "ancient even then", is written from an historical perspective, but the rattle of ships' anchor chains can be heard throughout her story. Her reaction to finding bodies of those lost at the wreck of the City of Columbus is interesting.

Does anyone remember Aunt Abby? According to Gratia she was "a difficult woman, very spoiled, and she had moods." Rather than have her continue to live with them, "Father had a house built for her on William Street, and after she died the family moved there." Ruth mentions the move casually; Gratia tells about their

furniture being moved by a horse-drawn dray. "I thought it was a very exciting performance."

School played an important part in the lives of the sisters. There was no high school then, not until the Eldridge parents started protestations to the town fathers. Ruth was near tears at her admittance to primary school, but Gratia was heard to mutter under her breath, at some order, "I won't if I don't want to." But all four girls enjoyed books and learning and soon got adjusted.

The sisters found plenty to do after school. Gratia describes some of the games they played, of coasting near Causeway Road and Cat Hollow. One boy called Shug (later Colonel Roth) had a double-runner that steered with a wheel. Or they would walk several miles to go where the skating was best. Gratia and Ruth take turns describing their playmates.

Duties were portioned out firmly, rules were sticktly adhered to. Father, as Gratia says, though creative and full of ideas, had his dark side too. He was very strict. He had a fearful temper.

Mary tells of her father's great interest in music. He encouraged her to play the violin, even sent her to Boston for lessons, where she was very successful. She hated to tell her father that she didn't want to make music her career.

While Captain Eldridge ran his Tide Book business in Boston, Mrs. Eldridge took the girls out occasionally. Aunt Sally's was rather far away. "Once Mother hired a liveryman to take us a dollar-and-a-half's worth toward Edgartown. He took us up the road a

distance and then let us off. I don't know how far it was, but it was several miles short of Aunt Sally's." Gratia recalls "Mother striding resolutely ahead, we girls trudging behind, hot and hungry and bitterly complaining." They also went to Aunt Lottie Beetle's, but "the only trouble was that she was a most particular woman; everything had to be just so."

Ruth describes an evening at Cottage City with the trolley ride, the Flying Horses, popcorn and taffy, and especially the enchantment of Illumination Night.

When Ruthie came down with scarlet fever it was the time for neighbors to show their "Christian charity". "Poor Aunt Lottie," Gratia says, "opened her back door and found us standing there. She went to consult her husband who was Henry Beetle Hough's grandfather. He was a retired whaling captain, a genial and delightful gentleman. He said of course we could stay."

Each chapter has something of interest as told by one girl or another; the Church, Christmas, Menemsha, Politics, the Seamen's Bethel, and Ruth's crush on her Sunday School teacher with an odd denouement.

Gratia gives an account of the storm of 1898. Their mother didn't want them to go out Sunday morning with the storm still raging, but they insisted there would be Sunday School, they'd have to go and see. "We went to the church to make everything legal and aboveboard, and then we made a beeline for the beach." A great sea was running. The sun came out for a brief moment and showed what frightful

devastation the northeast storm had caused. An account of this storm taken from files of the Vineyard Gazette is also included in the appendix.

The book is illustrated with good photographs of historical subjects as well as family portraits. A particularly charming picture of the four sisters is used as part of the book's jacket design.

DIONIS COFFIN RIGGS

West Tisbury

News

Cuttyhunk now has its own historical society, organized under the aegis of the Cuttyhunk Union Methodist Church.

Mrs. Lloyd H. Bosworth, curator, writes that the first display will be built around a chart of the Cuttyhunk cemetery, with photographs and short biographies of the persons buried there. This display — and future ones — will be set up in the Gladys Gage Memorial Room at the Cuttyhunk Library.

The society is also planning to publish a reminiscence by a Brockton schoolteacher of her first visit to Cuttyhunk in 1906, illustrated by photographs she took at the time.

The society hopes to collect artifacts, photographs and documents as a first step toward providing comprehensive historical resources for

Cuttyhunk residents and others interested in the Island's history.

A common interest in historical matters and the family ties between the two Islands should bring the Cuttyhunk Historical Society close to our own. Mrs. Bosworth has made several trips here this fall to use our library.

The Martha's Vineyard Camp Meeting Association is planning a grand celebration of the 100th birthday of its iron tabernacle, which was dedicated on August 6, 1879.

The plans are still in the making, but the association hopes to take advantage of the occasion to celebrate the history of the Oak Bluffs camp meeting, as well as the tabernacle itself. A series of events which will occur throughout the summer will include several pageants.

Marshall Cook is preparing for publication a selection of his remarkable collection of photographs of the Island taken between 1870 and 1890, most of them in what was then Cottage City.

The photographs were taken by E. L. Woodward and sons, whose studio was at 7 Montgomery Square in the campground. Mr. Cook has been selling prints from the original delicate glass plate negatives at his shop (Vineyard Vignettes) for several years.

The book will include explanatory captions and some text to guide the reader through what is primarily a pictorial history. Alfred A. Knopf will publish it in hardcover and paperback editions, both to be released late next

summer.

This will be the first reproduction of the photographs in book form.

Whaling logs are scattered as broadly as the great mammals themselves, Stuart C. Sherman reports as an early conclusion from his efforts to compile a bibliography of manuscript whaling logs and journals for the U.S. Marine Mammal Commission.

As an example of the dispersion, on a recent trip to Nantucket he turned up 51 new locations including the Society of the Preservation of Long Island Antiquities, the Hawaiian Mission Children's Society, and the Tennessee State Library and Archives.

There is a recent tendency for private owners to turn such logs and journals over to institutions, but Mr. Sherman estimates that as much as 10 per cent of them remain in private hands.

"We need to encourage people to consider giving them or placing them on deposit in appropriate locations," Mr. Sherman says. By doing so the owner may get a tax deduction, and will be better assured of the log's security. Privately owned logs are very difficult for scholars to use: they are apt to pass from hand to hand within a family, and are easily lost.

The Martha's Vineyard Historical Preservation Society received a \$12,600 grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, this fall, to plan an architectural resources center for the Island. If all goes well the center would be established in the

group's Vincent House in Edgartown.

Paul R. Anderson, president, says the hope is to have a central collection of information about Island architecture which would be useful to historians, builders, and others interested in Island buildings.

The plan is expected to be completed by the beginning of next summer.

Mil and Gale Huntington recently put on a program of folksongs they had learned on the Vineyard for the Old Dartmouth Historical Society in the beautiful new auditorium that has been added to the whaling museum on Johnny Cake Hill in New Bedford. The auditorium was filled. Perhaps both Mil and Gale were a little nervous in facing such an enormous — to them — audience. But the program went very well, they report.

The program was advertised as Sea Chanties by Gale and Mil Huntington. Gale's opening statement was that he and Mil didn't know any chanties and so he hoped they weren't there under false pretenses. They said they knew a lot of songs that the whalers and coasters had sung that they had learned from Mil's grandfather. Welcome Tilton, who had been a whaler and coaster and fisherman, and from Zeb Tilton who was always a coaster, and who is still remembered in New Bedford for his schooner the *Alice S. Wentworth* and from Bill Tilton, another of Welcome's brothers.

Bill went whaling two or three voyages and then became a chanteyman on deep water merchant vessels, both British and American.

Once in Bill's house on the South Road, now the home of the Henry Scotts, Gale asked Bill to sing him a chantey. "I will not," Bill said.

"Why not?" Gale asked him.

"I'll tell you why not," Bill said. "In the first place they ain't songs. They're a part of the work and you don't never sing 'em apart from the work. And what's more you don't never sing 'em on shore."

So that was that, and Gale never did learn any chanties. He learned a lot of Bill's broadside ballads, though, and he and Mil sang them to that New Bedford audience. And they sang some of Welcome's songs and some of Zeb's.

George Fred, another of Welcome's brothers and so another of Mil's great uncles, was a famous whaler and is still remembered in New Bedford as curator of the whaleship *Charles W. Morgan* when she was enshrined at Round Hill. George Fred knew a lot of songs, too, but because he couldn't carry a tune it was a little hard to learn any of them. George Fred was the only one of Welcome's six brothers who couldn't really sing. The other brothers besides Bill and Zeb were Willard, a whaler, Edward, who was famous for his gospel singing, and John R. They all sang almost beautifully and always unaccompanied. Not one of them

knew a note of music.

After the program in New Bedford Mil and Gale were supposed to sing at Celebration Northeast at Dartmouth College and at the Wesleyan Folk Song Festival at Wesleyan University. Both were three-day festivals which meant a lot of singing. Unfortunately Mil was recovering from an operation and so couldn't go to either of them. Gale had to do them alone, and he says that without Mil it was not half as much fun and a lot more work.

At one of the workshops at Wesleyan Gale announced that he was going to sing a song that he had learned from Welcome Tilton. Someone asked, "What did you say his name was?"

"Welcome Tilton," Gale said, and then had to explain how Welcome got that name. It seems that when Welcome was born in 1856 the Tilton family was going through a bad time. The barn had blown down in a near hurricane and as a result the cow was living in the parlor. There was very little down cellar except a bin of turnips and a crock of salt hake.

When George Oliver Tilton looked at his newborn he said: "Son, its hard times but you're welcome." And when the baby was christened in the Methodist Church on the Middle Road, Welcome was his name.

Director's Report

Vanishing Towers," a lecture and slide presentation by Mrs. Edith Blake, was the high point of our annual meeting held at the Federated Church on August 17. In the last few years, Mrs. Blake has done research on the architecture of Oak Bluffs, and this presentation is one of the results. Through her slides, the audience could see how she has rediscovered many of the older homes that have disappeared under modern renovations. During the business part of the meeting, the members re-elected Mrs. Kenneth Stoddard president, Stanley Murphy vice president and John Osborn treasurer, and Mrs. Helen Tyra was elected as the Society's new secretary. Council members returned to office were Nelson Coon and Miss Rachael Williams, and Walter Slocum became a new member of the Council. Mr. Slocum will serve in the place of Miss Dorris Hough, who has retired after many years of service to the Society. We would like to take this opportunity to express our appreciation to Miss Hough and to note that we will miss her sound advice and good humor.

During the recently concluded summer season, 3,362 visitors passed through our gatehouse to take tours of the Thomas Cooke House and to view our other attractions. As usual we had guests from many interesting places including Australia, Brazil, Canada, Denmark, England, France, Germany, Guatemala, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Korea, Nevis, West Indies, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Puerto Rico, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, and Wales.

Visitors from previous summers were surprised and delighted to discover the Francis Foster Museum, where everyone has been particularly interested in our first temporary exhibit — a photographic collection of the Martha's Vineyard Railway Company, and Stanton Lair's model of a trolley car that ran on this line. There is also an interesting piece of photographic work done by Mr. Lair from a glass plate showing the locomotive and the crew of the Martha's Vineyard Railroad.

Concerning the Francis Foster Museum, we are pleased to

announce that the American Association for State and Local History will provide us with a grant to pay the fees of a consultant, who will make recommendations for the establishment of permanent exhibits in the new museum.

One of our most interesting success stories this year was the one-woman membership drive undertaken by Mrs. Edith Bliss, who wrote to approximately 125 people and as a result added 106 new members to the Society. Her batting average of over .800 is phenomenally high for this sort of mailing, and we now have around 900 members, which means that out of the approximately 170 historical societies in the state we are about the twelfth largest. Now if only we ranked number twelve in terms of financial assets!

Although our operating funds have serious limitations, we are fortunate that Society members have continued to make contributions over the last year to the Preservation Fund. Thus, we can keep up with necessary repairs and maintenance. Before next summer, we hope to deal with at least some of the following problems: exterior painting of the library, the lighthouse and the Thomas Cooke House; shingling a side of the Cooke House and the roof of the library; painting the customs office and the parlor of the Cooke House; and building a cradle for the Nomansland Boat.

As in the past, the library during the winter will be open from 1-4 on Thursday and Friday afternoons and from 10-12, 1-4 on Saturdays. This year we will have the added attraction of the Francis Foster Museum, which will be open during these hours free of charge. We hope that many of you will drop by to visit or to do research.

THOMAS E. NORTON
Director

DUKES COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

OFFICERS OF THE SOCIETY

Doris C. Stoddard, *President*
Stanley Murphy, *Vice President*
Helen G. Tyra, *Secretary*
John Worth Osborn, *Treasurer*

COUNCIL

Nelson Coon, Walter Slocum, Rachael Williams, 1981; Edith Bliss, Gale Huntington, Melville G. MacKay, 1980; Henry Beetle Hough, John H. Montgomery, Dorothy Cottle Poole, 1979; Alfred Hall, *president emeritus*.

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

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.

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.

A Vineyard Sampler by Dorothy Cottle Poole. Illustrated, paper. \$10.00, \$1.00 postage.