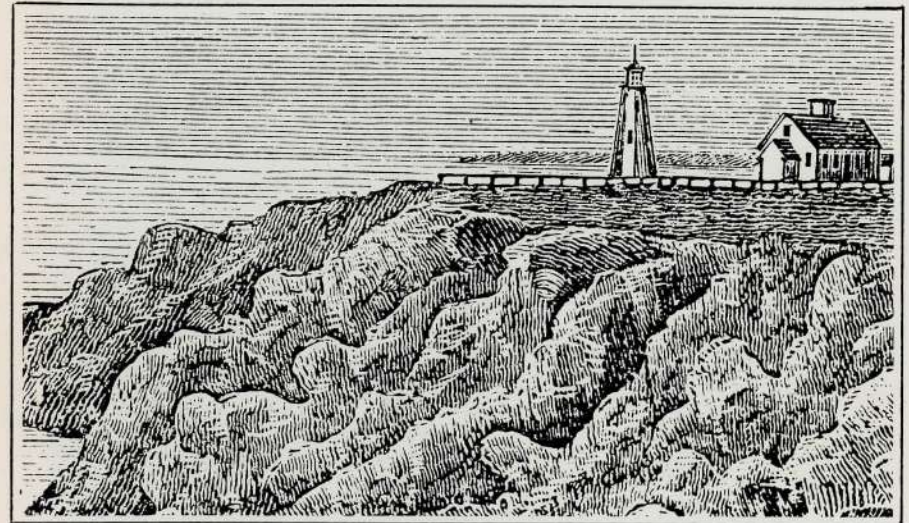




# THE DUKES COUNTY INTELLIGENCER

VOL. 23, NO. 3

FEBRUARY 1982



Gay Head Light as depicted by J. W. Barber in 1838

## Gay Head Light; The Island's First

by ARTHUR R. RAILTON

## Take Care of the Sheep, "Then a Figg for Great Brittan"

by WILLIAM JERNIGAN, Esqr.

## How Oak Bluffs Got Its Library

by EDITH MORRIS

## Up-Island Tales: Dry and Wry

by CYRIL D. NORTON

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

Acquired by the Society in 1935, the Thomas Cooke House was built in about 1765. It has been established as a museum and its twelve rooms are devoted to historical displays that reflect past eras of Vineyard life. It is open to the public during the summer with a nominal fee being charged to non-members.

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The public is invited.



## Gay Head Light; The Island's First

by ARTHUR R. RAILTON

*This is the first of a two-part article on the history of the Island's first lighthouse, Gay Head Light, which is of special interest to members of the Society because we are custodians of the famous Fresnel lens from that lighthouse. Future articles are planned on the history of the other lighthouses in Dukes County. If any members have pertinent information on any of the lighthouses, the Editor would be grateful to receive it.*

IT WAS A Nantucket politician, Peleg Coffin, Esq., who in 1796 wrote to his Congressman in Washington suggesting that "the convenience and interest of Nantucket" would be promoted if the Federal Government would build a lighthouse at Gay Head. Nobody on the Vineyard seemed interested.

What prompted State Senator Coffin<sup>1</sup> to request a light on Martha's Vineyard is not known. Nantucket already had two beacons: Great Point, built by Massachusetts colony in 1784; and Brant Point, built in 1746 with funds raised from residents (operation, however, was financed by a tax on vessels of 15 tons or more using the harbor). The Vineyard had no light house in 1796. The entire east coast of the country had only 15.

Whatever it was that motivated Coffin, the Congressman, "not being versed in nautical matters,"

<sup>1</sup>Coffin held a variety of political offices including that of State Treasurer and U. S. Representative. He was the State Senator from Nantucket when he wrote to Congressman Freeman about Gay Head.

ARTHUR R. RAILTON is Editor of *The Intelligencer*.

passed along the request to the Department of the Treasury, headed by Alexander Hamilton. Tench Coxe, Hamilton's assistant, sought out a couple of opinions (one from Joseph Anthony, whose "position in Trade," Coxe informed Hamilton, required that his comments be kept "confidential").

The outside opinions must have been favorable because Coxe recommended to Hamilton that a light "of inferior class" be built on Gay Head, if the "difficulty of providing a sufficiently marked distinction" from other lights (Nantucket and Montauk) and "financial considerations which apply to the current year. . . can be got over."

In the next Lighthouse Appropriations Bill submitted to Congress, the Gay Head project (\$5750) was included. Thus, in July 1798, Martha's Vineyard was on its way to getting its first lighthouse.

Edward Pope, then Collector of Customs<sup>2</sup> at New Bedford, learned of the appropriation and wrote to President John Adams:<sup>3</sup> "I'd like to be named supervisor. . ." His pay was based on the amount of money his office handled, so it would mean more income. The Treasury Department, October 31, 1798, approved his request and instructed him to have the Gay Head site surveyed and cost estimates made. Pope got right to work, had the site surveyed by John Howland of New Bedford and on December 29th recommended to the Department that a 50-foot tower be built. In February, the Governor of Massachusetts, after a word from Alexander Hamilton, deeded two acres and four rods on Gay Head to the United States stipulating that "if the said United States shall neglect for the term of Four Years from the date of this Grant to erect a Light House. . . and after the same shall be erected, shall neglect to keep the same in good

<sup>2</sup>Collectors' positions were among the most sought after in the government. At chief ports like Boston and New York, their income was higher than that of any Federal employee except the President.

<sup>3</sup>In those days Presidents decided such minor details. George Washington on April 27, 1793, when he approved the purchase of a new chain for a buoy wrote: "Approved so far as it respects the new chain; but is there an entire loss of the old one?" Life was simpler then.

repair and a state useful to Navigation then this Grant shall be void."

Six weeks later, William Miller, Commissioner of Revenue, Department of the Treasury, informed Pope that all was in order and he should solicit bids for a 50-foot lighthouse, plus a small house for the keeper and a well to be dug if there was no spring (little did he know about the water problems at Gay Head).

At about the same time, General Benjamin Lincoln,<sup>4</sup> Collector of Customs at Boston, wrote to Treasury stating that he had visited the Gay Head site and that, in his opinion, the light should be only 40 feet high, so that it could not be seen from Buzzard's Bay, to prevent mariners from being confused. Lincoln, doubtless, wanted the new light to fall under his jurisdiction.

His suggestion about height was apparently ignored because on June 7, 1799, the *New Bedford Medley* published an advertisement inviting bids for building a wooden tower "in the form of an octagonal. . . diameter 24 feet [at the base] . . . height 47 feet." The tower was to support a lantern, six feet in diameter and seven feet high, inside which "a good circular lamp of two feet in diameter is to be placed."

Also to be built was a keeper's dwelling, 17 feet by 26 feet, having a parlor, kitchen and bedroom, also a barn, 15 feet square, an underground oil vault and a well, 20 to 30 feet deep. Bids were to be in by June 10, 1799.

On June 7, just three days before the bids closed, Martin Lincoln, son of the above-mentioned General Lincoln, wrote to Edward Pope seeking the contract: "Having considered the subject I now pledge myself to you that I will find all the materials, etc., and perform all the work free from any after bills whatever, for the sum of two thousand eight hundred and seventy-five dollars." He was, as William Miller informed Secretary Hamilton on June

<sup>4</sup>Lincoln, who had accepted Cornwallis' sword at the Yorktown surrender on behalf of General Washington, was a close friend and adviser to the first president as well as a political appointee. He was head of the Massachusetts Militia and was in command when it put down Shay's Rebellion in 1787. He was clearly a powerful political figure in Massachusetts under the Federalists.

19, the low bidder: "Martin Lincoln, son of General Lincoln, is several hundred dollars lower than any of the rest."

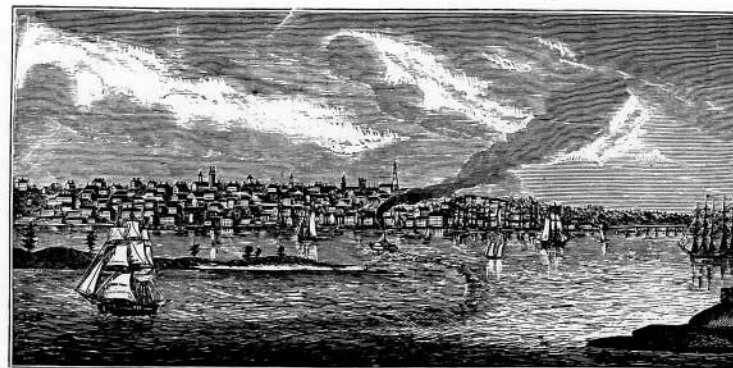
Young Lincoln's letter to Pope has a notation in the lower left-hand corner: "Quincy, June 28, 1799. Approved. John Adams." For those who can't keep historical dates in mind, John Adams was President of the United States at the time.

The contract ordered Lincoln to "erect, build and finish in a workmanlike manner on or before the twentieth day of November next, a light house with its appurtenances. . . at Gay Head." He wasted no time and on July 26th, his father, the General, wrote to Miller at Treasury that "the business is in great forwardness. The buildings are framed and the lantern nearly finished. In two days, it [the lantern<sup>5</sup>] will be on the spot."

By September the work was nearly finished and Pope wrote to the Treasury Department that "Mr. Lincoln, contractor, says he will be through in three weeks and wants to know who to turn it over to." In his response, which didn't answer Pope's question, Miller stated his concern about the possible confusion by mariners of the Gay Head Light with Montauk Light. Maybe, he suggested, the problem could be solved by adding a second light: "I presume that a lamp of double the size of the common street lamp and capable of holding sufficient oil to burn through the night might be raised from the trap door of the dwelling. . . it should be well oiled to prevent it from rusting."

A most naive proposal from the man responsible for the nation's lighthouse establishment! Pope was confused and decided to go to Gay Head before responding. Upon his return, he wrote Miller: "Just returned from Gay Head. All is well with the building. We must now place the lantern in it and it must be distinct from Montauk." To make it distinctive, he proposed that the lamp be "an ellipse," estimated cost \$300, a price he felt might be too

<sup>5</sup>The lantern is the windowed enclosure at the top of the tower that protects the lamp or light from the weather.



*Drawing of New Bedford made in 1838 when Keeper Skiff got his orders from Collector Edward Pope of that city with its rich whaling industry high.<sup>6</sup>*

A supplier of oil and materials to lighthouses under government contract, William Rotch of New Bedford, on September 28, 1799, wrote to Miller proposing that Capt. Owen Hillman of Martha's Vineyard be appointed keeper at Gay Head. Most of his letter, though, was on another subject: "As this light house is in a neighborhood of peaceful natives who are industrious and temperate, it is the fear of some of the most considerate that the Superintendent may injure them by selling them liquor and, feeling much concern for that people, we hope it will meet thy views to have him put under positive restrictions thereupon."

Rotch was late with his recommendation for keeper, but his second request was honored. Miller notified Pope, on September 27, that the President "has appointed Ebenezer Skiff keeper of the Gay Head Light." However, it was General Lincoln in Boston who had the pleasure of telling Skiff of his good fortune. He wrote to Skiff on October 3, 1799: "I am informed by the President of the United States that he has appointed you keeper of the Light House on Gay Head; am requested to inform you that if you accept the appointment, you must live in the house built for the keeper of the Light, and not deputise any person to keep it under you, and also that you must not become a retailer of

<sup>6</sup>Although he wrote "ellipse" Pope must have meant eclipse, an interrupted light.



ardent spirits, for many people have informed him that a measure of this kind would destroy the Indians. Whether they are supplied or not by you, if supplied they must be ruined, if not supplied, it would produce such discontent as to destroy their present quiet and happiness. These are conditions which will always be annexed to the appointment. I am your obedient servant, B. Lincoln."<sup>7</sup>

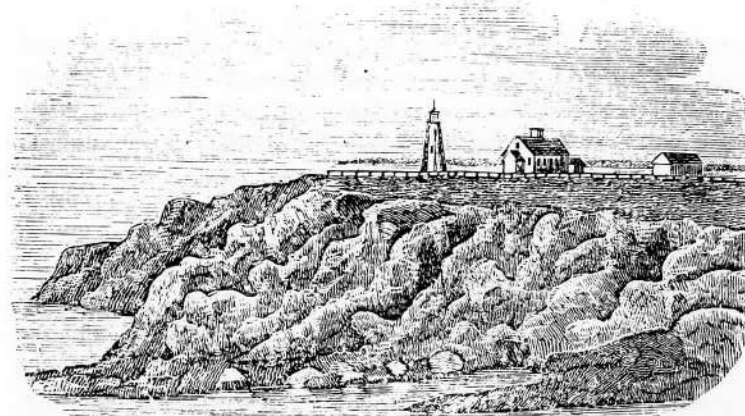
General Lincoln's letter raises a question. Did he recommend Skiff to the President for the Gay Head post? If so, why? Ebenezer Skiff, a Chilmark resident, was a sometime teacher and lawyer, 49 years old at the time. His family was from Sandwich and he married a girl from Plymouth. The fact that Lincoln notified Skiff of his appointment makes it seem most likely that he was his sponsor.

Pope, who apparently did not write to Skiff, informed Miller that same week that the buildings were finished and the contractor should be paid. Much was written about the tower and the dwelling and "appurtenances," but nothing about the lamp which would provide the illumination. Nor was there any word about how it would be kept distinct from Montauk and Nantucket.

Very little information seems to have survived about early illuminants used in lighthouses. There is speculation that the first light in the New World, Boston Bay Light built in 1716, originally burned candles, but soon changed to oil. At the time Gay Head was built there were fewer than 20 light houses operating and they probably all used rather crude oil lamps, known as spider lamps, "a shallow container of whale oil with a number of wicks in it."<sup>8</sup> There was a large circular wick in the center and around the center wick was a series of flat wicks. No chimneys were used and the whole thing created considerable

<sup>7</sup>This restriction became one of the eight "Commandments" of the lighthouse service. Why it was assumed that keepers would sell "ardent spirits" is not clear. Perhaps because it was U. S. territory, not local.

<sup>8</sup>"Winslow Lewis and the Lighthouses," by Richard W. Updike, *The American Neptune*, Jan. 1968, p. 34.



Only known picture of first Gay Head Light is by J.W. Barber, done in 1838. The porch and fence that Skiff wanted are clearly visible in its smoke. All early lights were simple fixed beacons until 1798 when "a Cape Cod lighthouse was equipped with a screen revolving around the oil lamps so that their light would be obscured at intervals."<sup>9</sup> This may have been what Pope meant by "an ellipse." If the Gay Head Light did have such an interrupting device on it, there is nothing about it in the records. It seems likely, however, that with the Treasury Department showing such concern about confusion with Montauk that some distinction must have been provided.

Although Collector Pope in New Bedford seemed to be doing all the work, General Lincoln in Boston continued to act as though Gay Head was his responsibility. In his regular report to William Miller, Commissioner of the Revenue, on October 18, 1799, Lincoln listed Gay Head Light: "By whom kept: Ebenezer Skiff; State of Light House: New."

The lighthouse was new and the keeper was Skiff, but the light was not operating on October 18, 1799, although General Lincoln probably was not aware of that. The first report of the light being in operation seems to be in a letter from Edward Pope to Miller, January 28, 1800, in which he

<sup>9</sup>*The Lighthouse*, by Dudley Witney. N.Y. Graphic Society, Boston, 1975, p.26.

enclosed the final bills for "building the Light House and appendages at Gay Head. . . the keeper of the Light House has not been informed what the amount of his salary is to be nor whether his firewood is to be found him or not. It is his wish that it may, at least a limited quantity. The access to the place is such that makes it come high and difficult to be procured. . . The keeper considers himself entered on his service the 7th day of November last -- the lamps<sup>10</sup> were not lighted until the 18th of the same month. . . The light is said to be well tended.

"The keeper wishes to be supplied with posts and nails or any other material that may serve for enclosing the land set off to the Light House. . . . There can be no doubt of the necessity of fencing. . . ."

It was not until March 4, 1800, four months after he started work, that Skiff learned how much he would be paid: \$200 a year, but, Pope was told, "we cannot pay for his wood." The same salary was paid to keepers at Cape Cod Light and Newport.

We don't know what Skiff thought of his salary, but we do know he was not happy with the house Martin Lincoln had built. In April 1800, he wrote Pope a letter of complaint which the New Bedford Collector relayed to Miller: "The keeper of the Light House on Gay Head finds his dwelling house very inconvenient for want of a porch, has no where to put his Iron ware, water vessels, etc., his cellar proving very wet, being half full of water for most of the winter and spring." A few months later, Skiff repeated his complaint about the need for a porch.

Pope must have inquired of Skiff why he was using more oil because in October 1800 the keeper reported back that "the lamp was first lighted on the 18 November 1799. Being unexperienced at first I made the wicks too small which consumed less oil."<sup>11</sup>

By this time General Lincoln finally realized that Gay Head Light was not under him. He wrote to Miller: "As I

<sup>10</sup>Whether this means that there was more than one spider lamp in use is unclear. He may have felt that each of the many wicks in the spider lamp constituted a lamp.

<sup>11</sup>Skiff seems to be saying that there was only one lamp with several wicks.

have not heard anything from the keeper since his appointment, I conclude that he is under the direction of the Collector of New Bedford."

Clearly, the lighthouse organization of the period was a loose, disorganized one, with keepers being left to their own devices most of the time. Lincoln and Pope were Collectors of Customs, an important well-paid job, and knew nothing and probably cared little about lighthouses. The Treasury Department, recently moved to Washington from Philadelphia, also seemed to have little interest in lighthouses at the time. The reason may have been political. The summer and fall of 1800 was the time of the nation's first election campaign, its first taste of "politics." President Adams, Federalist, was being challenged by the party of Jefferson, Republican. The non-establishment Republicans (later called Democrats) won, upsetting, no doubt, people like General Lincoln, Pope and the Vineyard Mayhews. On the Island, the Federalists remained in power, of course, as they did in Massachusetts, which strongly supported its native son, Adams.

General Lincoln, an aging Federalist who might have been wondering what would happen to him under the new Administration (he later resigned and was replaced by Henry Dearborn), hastened on December 2, the day before the electoral college voted the Federalist Adams out, to write to Miller at the Treasury Department: "It would be a pleasing circumstance to my son to have the account closed as soon as may be and to know that his bond given for the faithful performance of his contract for building a Light House on Gay Head is cancelled." The Government was apparently slow in paying.

Skiff continued on as keeper despite the change in parties in Washington<sup>12</sup> and he continued to complain.

<sup>12</sup>While we are not sure about Gay Head, in many places keepers were political appointees, changing with the elections. Capt. Jonathan Howland stated in 1851 that "if a poor keeper once gets appointed, it is hard work to get him out until a change in the administration, and then perhaps his friends will interfere, or he will change his politics so as to keep himself in." *Report of the Light-House Board, 1852, p.297.*

Pope, who also survived the Republican victory, wrote to Miller in Washington that "the keeper [at Gay Head] complains very much of his house -- has wrote me several times on the subject. . . I believe he does not complain without a cause. A House in so bleak a situation ought to be built in the tightest manner possible. . ." And he repeated Skiff's request for a porch.<sup>13</sup>

In November 1802, Skiff must have gotten his porch. Pope reported: "Expense of building the addition to the Dwelling House on Gay Head will be about 130 dollars. This addition is nearly finished."

But Ebenezer Skiff was not one to be satisfied by a mere porch. He thought he should be getting more than \$200 a year and he stated his case in a letter to Pope August 20, 1803:

"... the land is very poor and is only two acres. . . but so much of it as I have manured fully answered the purposes you expected. I cannot do without the use of a horse which I am obliged to keep in a common pasture which is a considerable distance from me . . . my firewood is costly . . . the spring of water does not affect a sufficiency in the summer. I depend chiefly upon my salary for the support of my family. I have enclosed . . . a certificate from the Selectmen stating my situation."

Supporting their constituent, the Chilmark selectmen, Matthew Mayhew, Jr., Ephraim Mayhew and Stephen Tilton, wrote:

"We, the subscribers, Selectmen of Chilmark, hereby certify that Ebenezer Skiffe, keeper of the light house on Gayhead in said Town, dwells about four miles from the nearest family of white people, six miles from a district school, nine miles from the meetinghouse and nearly the same distance from a gristmill -- the way is hilly and bad and in the common way of passing there are creeks which are scarcely fordable at all seasons. The spring in the Clift where he dwells yields poor water at best and will not afford a sufficiency for a family. In dry seasons he has to

<sup>13</sup>Keeper's houses were generally "comfortless and ill adapted to the purpose for which they were designed." *Ibid.*, p. 54.

cart water from a brook nearly one mile distant -- his firewood must be brought by water and is not so easily obtained there as in seaport towns -- he has strictly conformed to the restrictions respecting the retailing of ardent spirits, which restrictions were annexed to his appointment and which were occasioned by a request from persons of considerations who consulted the interest of the Indians -- his situation is uncommonly boisterous and the pasturage which he is obliged to hire of the natives is generally very inconvenient. Said Skiffe we esteem a reputable man faithful to the publick and deserving of encouragement."

Skiff waited patiently for two years, but no increase in salary was forthcoming so on October 25, 1805, he wrote again, this time directly to Albert Gallatin, Secretary of the Treasury:

"Sir: Clay and Oker of different colours from which this place derived its name ascend in a Sheet of wind pened by the high Clifts and catch on the Light House Glass, which often requires cleaning on the outside -- tedious service in cold weather, and additional to what is necessary in any other part of the Massachusetts.

"The Spring of water in the edge of the Clift is not sufficient. I have carted almost the whole of the water used in my family during the last Summer and until this Month commenced, from nearly one mile distant.

"These Impediments were neither known nor under Consideration at the time of fixing my Salary.

"I humbly pray you to think of me and (if it shall be consistent with your wisdom) increase my Salary.

"And in duty bound I am your's to command,

EBENEZER SKIFF

Keeper of Gayhead Light House"<sup>14</sup>

Despite the "Jeffersonian passion for economy"<sup>15</sup> Skiff got his request granted and his salary was increased to \$250, up \$50 a year.

<sup>14</sup>Quoted in *Lighthouses and Lightships of the United States*, by George R. Putnam, Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston, 1917, p. 241.

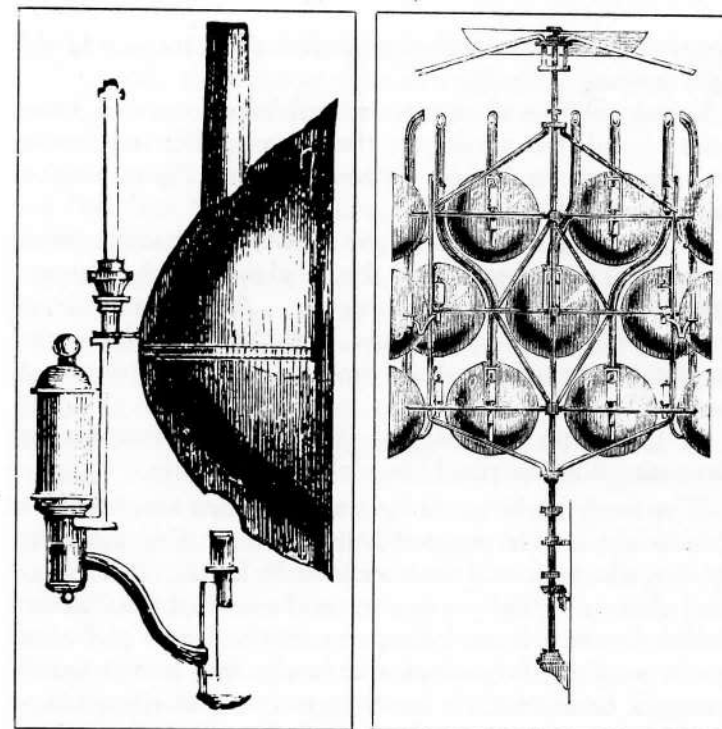
<sup>15</sup>Updike, *op. cit.*, p. 34.



New England was strongly anti-Jefferson, not only because of its Federalist majorities but because of the Embargo Act and later the Non-intercourse Act which shut down most of the shipping industry, a major one for Yankees. Despite this conflict, or perhaps because of it, Secretary Gallatin authorized a new lantern for Gay Head Light and the rebuilding of the upper section of the tower in 1809. Apparently, Lincoln's "workmanlike manner" had had some serious deficiencies.

The Jefferson administration had been rather indifferent to the Light House establishment, being preoccupied with such major issues as the Louisiana Purchase, the war with Tripoli, the Burr-Hamilton duel, the Lewis and Clark Expedition, the Yazoo Frauds and the adoption of the 12th Amendment. Complaints about the inadequacy of our lights were increasingly being voiced by mariners. One such complainer was an unemployed sea captain from Cape Cod, Winslow Lewis, who claimed he could provide better lights at lower cost. Out of work because of the Embargo Act, he developed a new light system which he patented in 1810 and demonstrated on lighthouses in the Boston area. There was no doubt that his lights were better than the existing lights, but there was some question whether they were up to the state of the art at the time.

"... Lewis, who confessed that he knew nothing about lighthouse optics, patented what he called a 'magnifying and reflecting lantern' for lighthouse work, which he claimed was a lamp, a reflector and a magnifier, all in one. It was as crude a device as has ever emanated from an inventive brain, but the designer succeeded in impressing the Government so effectively that they gave him \$20,000 for his invention. The reflector was wrought of thin copper with a silvered surface, while the magnifier, the essence of the invention, was what he called a 'lens,' but which in reality comprised only a circular transparent mass... made of bottle-green glass... one of the Government inspectors reported cynically that its only



Left, French Argand lamp and reflector that Lewis "reinvented." Right, revolving chandelier with many lamps, perhaps like Skiff's at Gay Head merit was that it made 'a bad light worse.'"<sup>16</sup>

Congress hired Lewis to fit the 49 lighthouses then in service with his new apparatus. The War of 1812 slowed down his work considerably, but by the end of 1815 he had completed the task.<sup>17</sup>

One of the first lights to be refitted with the Lewis apparatus was Gay Head. The old spider lamps were discarded and a revolving light source consisting of 10 of the new Lewis lamps with 14-inch reflectors was installed. It is not known whether the "bottle glass" lenses were used at Gay Head. In any case, within a few years all the lenses that had been installed were removed when it was

<sup>16</sup>*Lightships and Lighthouses*, Frederick A. Talbot, J. B. Lippincourt Co., Philadelphia, 1913, pp.34-5.

<sup>17</sup>Updike, op. cit., p.37.

apparent they were reducing rather than increasing the light output.

Keeper Skiff was not enamored of the new lighting system and he wrote to the government requesting another increase in pay because the new lights were so much more difficult to tend:

"... tending the former light might be deemed a simple business if compared with the tendance of the present complicated works and machinery . . . Almost any man or lad under my wife's care could light the former lamp and do the business in a short time, but the case is not so now. . ."

In the letter to Samuel Smith, Commissioner of Revenue, Skiff described his workload this way:

"The lately constructed light with a stone revolves by a clock which is to be stopped every time anything is done to the fire, which in cold weather must be kindled [when] the sun [is] an hour high, or sooner, and recruited until eleven o'clock or after, when I have to trim the lamps and wind up the weights of the clock and can go into bed at nearly midnight until which a fire is kept in the dwelling-house consuming more wood than when I tended the former light.

"The business respecting the light is, mostly, done by me in person, yet I occasionally leave home to procure wood and many other necessities; previous to which I have to agree with and instruct some trustly white person to tend the light in my absence. If my salary would admit I would hire some person to live constantly with me lest I should be sick -- I have no neighbors here but Indians or people of colour.

"When I hire an Indian to work I usually give him a dollar per day when the days are long and seventy-five cents a day when the days are short and give him three meals. Now supposing the meals worth 25 cents each, they amount to 75 cents, which is seven cents more than the wages for my service both a day and night (while I board myself) only 68 cents, computing my Salary (as it now is) at

250 Dollars a year and the year to consist of 365 days . . .

"I humbly pray you to take this Matter into your wise Consideration and afford me relief by granting an increase to my Salary."<sup>18</sup>

Again his "humble" pleading worked and this time it was President Madison who authorized an increase of \$50, making his salary \$300 a year.

By this time, 1815, there were two other lighthouses in the area: Cape Poge (1802) and Tarpaulin Cove (1807). These, too, were refitted with the Lewis system, but not the complex revolving machinery that Skiff complained about. Being fixed lights they simply had the new lamps and reflectors installed without the clockwork mechanism.

With Congress appropriating money for new lighthouses at each session, the number along the seacoast had increased to 70 by 1820 and President Monroe decided it was time to assign the responsibility to one office. The Fifth Auditor of the Department of the Treasury was named as administrator of the system. He was Stephen Pleasonton, a man who knew nothing about lighthouses or shipping, he was an auditor. He turned to Captain Lewis for advice and a close relationship was formed which continued for thirty years. Lewis was given regular contracts to service the nation's lighthouses, to inspect them each year and to recommend changes. As a result, some historians say, any improvement in the Lighthouse Establishment was held back by Pleasonton's reliance on Lewis, who continued to insist that his lamps were equal to any in the world.

In increasing numbers, however, mariners who sailed to Europe came back with unfavorable comparisons between our lights and those overseas. By the 1830's, Blunt's *Coast Pilot*, a publication which listed navigation aids for mariners, began a campaign to change over to the European system, using the Fresnel lens and a single lamp, rather than the multi-lamp reflector system of Lewis.

Keeper Skiff on Gay Head was, doubtless, unaware of this struggle. He was still trying to solve his personal

<sup>18</sup>Putnam, op. cit., pp. 242-4.

problems by writing to Washington. He told Pleasonton that he needed a pair of wheels and some large casks so that he could cart the water to his dwelling from the spring some distance away. His request was granted, provided it cost no more than \$50. Two years later, in 1823, Skiff again wrote to Pleasonton to ask that a room be added to the house because he had no room "suitable for a chamber in case of sickness." By this time, Skiff was in his 70s and apparently beginning to fail physically. Pleasonton approved the request, but not to exceed \$500.

Perhaps Ebenezer had wanted a room, not for sickness, but for his retirement because in January 1828, having celebrated his 78th birthday and completed 29 years of service, he wrote to Pleasonton requesting that his son Ellis be named to replace him as keeper. His letter was passed along to President John Quincy Adams by the Fifth Auditor: "Enclosed petition of Ebenezer Skiff, keeper of Gay Head Light, and Ellis Skiff, his son, praying that the latter may be appointed Keeper in the place of the former, who is disqualified by age; the appointment of Ellis Skiff is respectfully submitted. S. P. Pleasonton, Fifth Auditor."

President Adams approved and Pleasonton wrote to Russell Freeman, Representative for the Island in Congress, informing him of Ellis' appointment, an indication of how political such appointments were. Ebenezer lived six years after retirement, dying in 1834 at age 83.

National politics were becoming increasingly tumultuous. After four years with President John Quincy Adams, the Country in 1828 elected Andrew Jackson to the presidency, returning the Democrats to power. In his battle to end the Bank of the United States, Jackson went through five Secretaries of the Treasury in his first five years in office. The Light House Service, still headed by Pleasonton and still part of the Treasury Department, must have received little attention during the massive struggle between populist Jackson and the banking interests. But opposition to Pleasonton continued. The Blunts wrote to the third of the Jackson Secretaries, W. J.

Duane, outlining their complaints. Duane wrote back: "I am inclined to think the light-house system, as it is called, requires a thorough reform, both as to the style of the lighting and the care of the keepers. I . . . shall feel thankful for any assistance that it may be in your power to give . . ."

That was all the blunt Blunts needed. Two days later, they sent him a list of major changes that should be made. They need not have rushed because within a few weeks, when he refused to take Federal funds out of the National Bank as ordered by President Jackson, Duane was fired. The Light House Service continued without change.

So did life at Gay Head, although Ellis was now paid \$350 a year, \$50 more than his father's top. Supervision of Gay Head and other nearby lighthouse was switched from New Bedford to Edgartown as the prospering whaling industry made it necessary to have a Collector of Customs on the Island. He was John P. Norton and in his quarterly report to Pleasonton in July 1834, he wrote that at the Gay Head tower "the timber. . . is defective in the upper part near the Lantern; it has settled and become out of level, but will not require a thorough repair at present. The Dwelling house will require about \$10 repairs."

New problems were developing for the keepers and Norton wrote to Pleasonton in 1835 that "there has been more complaints than usual. . . that their oil is bad. I will enquire if you will authorize me to purchase an Oleometre to try the test of the oil. I am informed by Merchants of Nantucket that you can readily find if it has been mixed."

There were growing suspicions, when the oil congealed more in the cold weather than it used to, that the contractors were mixing more of the cheaper whale oil in with the sperm oil than the specifications permitted. Pleasonton seemed unconcerned and wrote a note to his secretary on the bottom of Norton's letter: "Tell him to call upon the contractors to supply good oil and take away the bad. S.P." (One keeper, not on the Island, had reported that the oil was so bad he had to shovel it out of



the vault in cold weather and melt it in the house before he could burn it.)

Jonathan Howland, who hauled the oil to the lighthouses, had a different explanation: Good sperm oil, he told the Light House Board, was getting scarcer, "owing probably to the great length of time that it remains on shipboard after being taken. When it becomes old. . . its burning qualities are injured and cannot be reclaimed."<sup>19</sup>

Pleasanton sensed that he was losing the battle with the Blunts and that he would have to do something before he, like the Secretaries of the Treasury, felt the Jacksonian ax. On April 23, 1835, he sent out "Instructions to the keepers of light-houses within the United States." Unbelievable as it seems, apparently these were the first detailed written instructions the keepers had received. At that, there were only eight directives, most stating such obvious things as "You are to light the lamps every evening at sun-setting and keep them continually burning bright and clear till sun-rising." (As obvious as that seems, it was needed because keepers were often rather imprecise about lighting and extinguishing their lights. Also, unlike their European counterparts, they were not required to sit up all night watching the light. They would trim the wicks at 11 o'clock or so and then go to bed, hoping that the light burned all night. While it might not go out, it usually diminished in brilliance before morning, becoming less visible to mariners miles away.)

Keeper Skiff apparently did not complain, but Keeper Caleb Cushman at Nantucket was incensed at the Pleasanton directive and he told the Treasury Department why:

"The 3rd article requires the light be visited and wicks to be trimmed every 4 hours from sunset to sun-rise, thereby adding one half in the short nights, and one third in the long nights to this kind of duty . . . besides constituting the keeper a continual light-watchman . . ."

<sup>19</sup>Report of the Light-House Board, Committee on Commerce, House of Representatives, Washington, D.C., 1852.



Holmes Hole in 1838, by J.W. Barber, who wrote: "a village, consisting of about 100 dwelling-houses . . . a Methodist and a Baptist church."

He wrote that the 4th article required him to measure the amount of oil consumed each night, but that the government gave him no gauges to do it with and even with gauges it "would add greatly to the most difficult and disagreeable part of the duties of a keeper -- to say nothing about the inevitable waste" that would result from emptying the lamps every day. (That, of course, was not necessary. He only had to measure the amount of oil he had to add to bring the level up to the full mark, but he was given no such instructions.)

"The 5th article," he continued, "deserves a passing remark. I am happy to have it in my power to say with truth that I neither drink spirituous liquor, nor vend it, nor cause nor allow it to be done on the 'premises of the United States,' nor elsewhere, and I am equally sorry that the Department should be under the deplorable necessity of calling upon, even a light-house keeper, in a solemn Commandment, to practise the most common, easiest, and cheapest of all the social duties, civility, etc., to orderly behaved strangers whose visits are indeed few and far between."

But it was the article requiring a Keeper to get

permission before leaving the lighthouse that stirred him up the most:

"This article," he wrote, "chains the Keeper to the threshold of the Light House without he has leave of absence from the Superintendent, *with whom it is utterly impossible to communicate* without being *absent* and, in most cases, for twice as long as the leave would be required for, *and who pertinaciously refuses* to grant any leave whatsoever." (Emphasis Cushman's.)

"The only post office, market, or place of business to which access can be had at all from here is 14 miles distant by land, 5 of which (and to the nearest neighbors) is over worse than Arabian lands, and it is 9 miles by water across a dangerous outer Roadstead or bay and over the well-known and dreaded Nantucket bar; and the only facility for transportation furnished by the Government is a no-keeled row boat and nobody to row it, except the Keeper, who must in all cases wait for the 'wind and weather to permit' before he can go to the post office or any where else by water, or return after he has so gone."

Mr. Norton in Edgartown, although well aware of the problem of the isolated keeper, sent Cushman's letter to Washington with only this comment: "I have heard of no complaints from any other light keeper on the subject of your circular he alluded to."

There is no record of anything resulting from the protest. But it made no difference. The directives were not enforced because they were unenforcable -- after all, who knew what was happening at a lighthouse which was "inspected" only once a year?

The keeper's complaint was justified. He and the others were provided almost no equipment, except the lighthouse itself. At Gay Head, Skiff, in August 1836, wrote that his boat needed replacing. Norton went up there to see for himself and approved an expenditure of \$70 for a new one. Pleasonton apparently objected because in October Norton wrote to him defending his decision stating that he had found "the boat unfit to repair and unfit to use."

With Levi Woodbury, the fifth Secretary of the Treasury under Jackson, a Navy man, the Blunts continued their attack on Pleasonton. Others joined in, including Joseph Grinnell of New Bedford, former Representative in Congress. He had taken a trip to Europe and brought back data about the lighthouses there which he tried to interest Pleasonton in, but "the officers of Government appeared to have other occupation than listening to improvements of this character," he wrote.

Such criticism must have had its effect on Pleasonton. In any case, more attention was being paid to the light at Gay Head. Inspection visits became more frequent.

Peter Daggett, keeper of the Nobsque (Nobska) Point Light, was sent there by Norton to inspect it and report back what he found. On July 2, 1837, he wrote that he had been to Gay Head and "carefully examined the Light House and find the tower, which was built in 1799, the upper part very rotten and the lantern and outside railing and standards and conductors in very decaede (sic) state. So much rusted off in several places that it is very dangerous in anything of a blow to go up in the lantern to light the light and it is my opinion as well as a Master Blacksmith which I took with me that it is absolutely necessary to have a new lantern and outside frame and conductors and for the tower to be taken down about two feet to the sound wood and built up a new."

It was a full year later before Norton reported the problem to Pleasonton. In his regular report on July 3, 1838, he wrote: "Light House . . . sound, with the exception of the deck. This must be made over *immediately*. . . The Iron railing that supports the dome has nearly rusted off in a number of places, consequently new must be substituted, and I am very suspicious that the iron work of the dome is so corroded that a new one will have to be provided. . . These repairs will cause the light to be extinguished."

Pleasonton moved fast and on August 1, Norton signed a contract with Lemuel Gammon, blacksmith of New

Bedford, for a lantern of the same height and circumference as the old one. It must have been completed and installed quickly because on October 3, 1838, Lt. Josiah Sturgis, Revenue Cutter *Hamilton*, wrote to Norton:

"On our recent cruise we visited Gay Head and I was pleased to see there was a new top lantern and frame . . . As far as I am capable of judging, I should say the work is well done. Gay Head Light is considered a very important light by Mariners. I perceive the Bank near the light house is settling away and I suppose in a few years the light will have to be removed."

Pleasanton, in character, complained about the cost of the repairs. Norton explained that the lantern had had to be completely replaced.

"I sent a Smith from Falmouth to place a new Iron railing and braces that support the lantern outside . . . he informed me that nothing could be done. . . the Lantern had completely rusted out by age. As this is one of the most important light houses in the United States, I lost no time in having a new one made in New Bedford."

Norton, who wrote the above a week after Lt. Sturgis's letter, had the authority of the Revenue Service to back his statement about the importance of Gay Head.

In 1837, with criticism mounting from Congress, which had created a board of Naval Officers to report on the Service, Pleasanton began work on his organization. He offered to import, and test the Fresnel lens system and he divided the sea coast into Light House Districts, with regular reports being made to the temporary Light House Board that Congress had created. One such report, made in November 1838, provides the first complete statement on the light at Gay Head. It was written by Lt. Edward W. Carpenter:

"Gay Head: Revolving -- 160 feet above sea level -- four minute revolution, seen upwards of 20 miles. Lantern is seven feet high, seven feet wide, larger than is necessary and has inferior glass in it. The tower, which is of wood,

has lately undergone extensive repairs, during which the light was suspended . . . The interest of commerce would justify the erection of a temporary building in such cases . . . Premises in good order . . . All draught comes through the scuttle which leads into the lantern and the Keeper, instead of passing through a door in the lantern to the gallery, ascends thereto through a separate scuttle in the top of the tower, exterior to the lantern."

The lamps, he stated, were the same as those at Race Point, Provincetown, so there was no need for him to describe them (they had been described earlier). That light had a revolving fixture containing 10 lamps on its two faces, five on each side. The lamps at Race Point had 13-inch reflectors (at Gay Head they were 14 inches). These were reflectors produced by Winslow Lewis and were among those criticized as being no more parabolic than "a barber's basin."

That, as far as we know, is the first published report on the lighthouse at Gay Head -- it was in 1838, nearly forty years after it was built.

Ever since 1799, the light had been kept by the Skiff family, father and son. Nearly 40 years had passed but one complaint was unchanged: Keeper Skiff was still having trouble with the water. The cistern in which he caught rain water was leaking so he asked Norton for a new one. Careful, as always, about money, he asked for a wooden cistern that would cost \$50. Norton recommended brick or stone, "either of the two latter will be the cheapest in the end . . . stone can be obtained locally. My estimate . . . about \$200," he wrote to Pleasanton.

The stone cistern was built, but in January 1840 when explaining to Pleasanton why he had not yet paid the bill, Norton wrote that it had been built "not in a manner to induce me to pay -- it leaks some."

But the cistern only provided part of the water supply, drinking water had to come in by cart. As Norton explained to Pleasanton in March 1840: "the cistern water is not fit for culinary purposes, owing to the red Ochre



blowing on the roof of the house which cause the water to be red and thick, although very useful for other purposes." What other purposes the "red and thick" water was good for, Norton did not state.

Water, always a problem, was the cause of another difficulty, as Skiff wrote to Norton in 1840:

"I think it necessary that the Government provide a Road from this establishment to the spring where my predecessor and myself have obtained our supply of water for about thirty years for the following reasons:

"The distance is about half a mile across fields belonging to the Indians and people of Colour, one of which has fenced in the spring and has commenced ploughing the land all round the spring . . . . another has dug a cellar and is about building a dwelling house in the road that I have cleared out and used for several years . . . The spring was fitted with a stone reservoir so that the water is led into the cask while they are on the truck. The reservoir was made by my predecessor and a Coloured man who is dead . . . I have no doubt but the Indians are still willing that I should obtain my water as usual if it could be done without injuring them. I feel quite reluctant in making any more requests respecting water, but under the existing circumstances I deem it my duty . . . ples make this communication known to the Hon. Stephen Plesonton, Esq."

Norton forwarded it to Washington immediately, stating that he felt the keeper had the legal right to the road, but that the deed from Massachusetts did not so state. Therefore, he wrote, because of "the glorious uncertainty of the Law, especially with the Indians, I give it as my opinion that we had better buy a way if can be done at a reasonable price, say \$40 dollars. They say that is all they want, what should be thought reasonable."

Thus the matter seems to have been resolved.

The Blunts and others who were urging the Congress to switch over to the Fresnel single-lamp system were claiming that the present system was burning too much

oil. (Because it used many small lamps instead of large one, the Lewis system did use more oil, although it used less than the old spider lamps.) Pleasonton was anxious to hold down oil consumption to overcome this criticism. In 1841, he sent out a circular telling Collectors that he suspected the keepers were using some of the oil for their own purposes and that they must stop this practice.

Collector Norton in Edgartown was upset by such a charge and for the first time he took a stand against his supervisor: "I do extremely regret that you should think of supposing that any portion of this [oil] was designed for the private use of the light-house keepers when it was only intended to be used in the Lanterns. I do not think they have used it for their private purposes as the quantity they have is small and for all they have had vouchers have been rendered."

Norton called Pleasonton's attention to the oil problem in another letter two months later: "Please note that the yearly report states that the winter oil is not so good as it ought to be."

It was this same year, 1841, that the first two Fresnel lenses in Pleasonton's test program came to the United States: one a 1st order fixed light, the other a 2nd order revolving light. Congress had them installed in the twin lighthouses at Navesink, outside New York. The lights proved to be so superior that in 1842 Congress named a civil engineer, Isaiah William Penn Lewis, as its agent to visit all lighthouses in Maine, New Hampshire and Massachusetts and report on their condition. Lewis was the nephew of Winslow Lewis, but certainly not his supporter.

Lewis completed his inspections and reported to Congress in 1843. As for Gay Head, he wrote that the light was very deficient in power and that "at the distance of 12 miles it is obscured about three-quarters of the time." He recommended that the existing light (installed by his uncle in about 1813) be scrapped and one of the First Order be installed.

Convinced by the Lewis Report that something must be done, the Congress appointed a board of Army and Navy officers plus one civilian to make recommendations. The board produced a 760-page report that was an indictment of the 30 years of the Pleasonton-Lewis control of the nation's lighthouses. Published in 1852, it led to the replacement of Pleasonton by an official Light House Board and very quickly to the adoption of the Fresnel system of illumination in most major lighthouses.

Winslow Lewis, whose lamps, reflectors and lenses were pulled out and discarded, was spared any humiliation by fate. He died two years before the report came out. Stephen Pleasonton, who had developed a passable system of lighthouses but as an auditor and not an engineer, lived to see his life's work discredited -- perhaps more than justified by the facts.

In listing the most important seacoast lights in the United States, the Report ranked Gay Head 9th, the highest rank of any light north of New York. It stated that "this light is not second to any on the eastern coast, and should be fitted, without delay, with a first order illuminating apparatus. A glance at a chart will suffice, to see its great importance."<sup>20</sup>

Thus, Gay Head took its place among the top navigational aids in America and the wheels of government began turning, shortly to bring to the Island the First Order Fresnel lens, the one now displayed on the Society's grounds.

(First of two parts)

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 134.



## Take Care of the Sheep, "Then a Figg for Great Brittan"

by WILLIAM JERNIGAN, Esqr.

*William Jernigan (1728-1817) was born in Edgartown and lived there all his life. He was a carpenter, a mariner, a farmer, a politician and a judge.*

*While in his 80s, he wrote a rambling story of his life which contained considerable advice as well as some history. Because his life covered nearly a century in the early years of the Vineyard settlement, it is of interest. In the November 1981 Intelligencer we published excerpts from his life story, as told by him. The following is another excerpt from his writings, which are in the Society's archives.*

IN THE first Creation of the World it Pleased God to create the Beests of the field, the fish of the Sea and Fouls of the air, all for the use of the Sussistance of the Human Race, as we see and expeareance from the first Creation of the world to this day, and among others, the harmless Sheep.

I have often viewed them with their lambs and Comtemplated on the wonderfull form and make of them and the use and benefit this harmless Creature is to the Human Rase, and when we consider that the allwise governor of the Universe has caused the Sheep to be so exactly porportioned, with the wooll for our Clothing, with the best of meat for our Sussestance and Tallow to give us light and other uses to man kind in general through the world: aught we not be thankfull to God for this great favour and Blessing and how aught we to use the

Sheep & their lambs for our owne Interest and for the good of the Publicke.

I would just Submit to the People of our United States a few observations that has fell within my knowledge for Sixty years last Past:

The Conduct of Some People with their Sheep is to get the fleece once a year and then to take but little or no care of them at any other time through the year and for want of some care, Provender in the winter Season, thay die by hundreds and I may truly say by Thousands in one Sevear winter in our united States and why will we not take some care of our Sheep when we See & feel the want of their wool every day in the year? It is my opinion that if the People in our States would follow the best method for the increasing of Sheep we Should soon find the great advantage we should receive thereby: Thousands of our Poor inhabitants would have employment in manafacting the woole for our owne use, etc. And every yard of Cloth & Pear of Stocking made amoung our Selves would Save the Value thereof in money in our owne Country. I should wish to be informed how many Millions of Dollars we Pay to england & elsewhere for Woolen Cloths & Stocking annually; I would aske why the United States is so good & kind to great Brittan? Is it done to keap their People at work and ours in idilness, beging, Stealing & Starving? Fellow Citizens, cannot the wisdom and knowledge of our great & wise Legislators in our United States Point out some way or means to Prevent this great and growing eviel? Or must we be hawers of wood and Drawers of Water to imploy and Support the Pride of Great Brittan, etc., this being the case in our States.

I beg leve to aske the Question that is if the People in our States would join heart & hand for the Increase of Sheep throughout our land, it would be but a few years before we might have wool enough for our owne Comsumtion, then a figg for great Brittan!

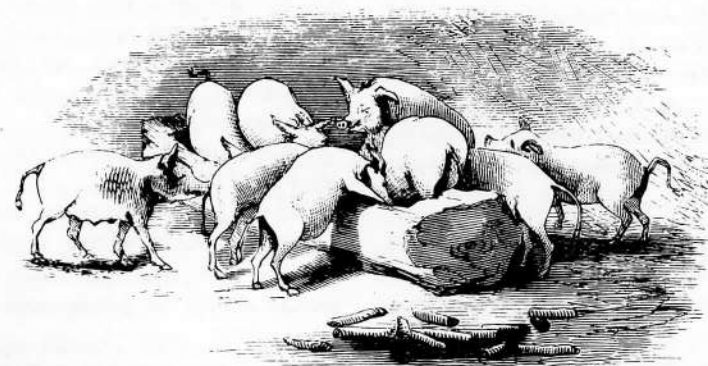
Sheep aught to be used gently & carefully in handling of them. We should take them in our arms wen we are

Putting them over a fence. Some People is so Cruel or ungarded that they will ketch them by the wool on the Sheeps back & heave them over a fence which is the cause of many of them to die, because lifting them by the wool oftentimes separates the Skin from the flesh from their Shoulders to their hippe, etc.

Also great numbers of Sheep & lambs are toren to Peases & Deveoured by Doggs & Swine. The dog and Swine never aught to be amoung Sheep.

And why People are so fond of Keeping dogs is more than I can account for and in general the Poorer Sort of People keep the most Dogs.

There has been men amoung us that keep one Swine and at the same time 5 dogs, one man in perticular entended to keep one Swine through the winter and he kept the same winter 5 dogs. The dogs eat up all that he could provoid for his Swine. The Swine Died with hunger & in the Spring following he had no Living Creature but his 5 dogs. At the same time, the man had land sufficant to keep 30 or 40 Sheep. But he had rather have one dog than a 100 sheep.



Harper's ran this sketch with 1860 story on the Island. These are not the "swine" Jernigan disliked, but they're Island pigs nonetheless



## Up-Island Tales: Dry and Wry

*As collected by Cyril D. Norton*

MISS CORDELIA Tilton told me how her house came to Happy Hollow. Happy Hollow was at the foot of Crooked Hill on the Middle Road near the Fulling Mill Brook.

The house was probably built about 1740 near Abel's Hill. It was moved to the North Road nearly across from the present Charak place. The original builder finished all the beams with beading.

Josiah Tilton moved the house in about 1814 from the North Road to its present location on Middle Road. Polly Norton's father had owned it while it stood on North Road. It was moved to Middle Road by two yoke of oxen. Capt. Horatio Tilton added the kitchen ell about 1830, when the big iron kitchen stoves were coming into use.

MY UNCLE, Capt. Frank Cottle, was a rangy, powerfully built man about six-foot one-

inch tall, who feared neither man nor the devil. He was an indefatigable worker, never sparing himself at any task. Most men willingly took any orders that he gave -- he was a man's man every day of his life. His brother whalemens liked him for his fair treatment of all under his command. Children especially liked his rough and ready humor and he was always gentle with them.

One never knew what Uncle Frank was going to say next. After supper one night he said to me, "Come on, boy, let's go over to Ellie Tilton's and listen to his farting pony," which was Uncle Frank's name for Ellie's phonograph. We went and Ellie played several records.

Finally, Uncle Frank said, "Play the one I like, Ellie."

Ellie obliged and soon the part of the record that Uncle Frank liked best sounded forth from the singer: "He goes to church on Sunday and they

say he's an honest man, but you meet him on a Monday and he's tricky as a fox."

At that, Uncle Frank would whack his knee with his big gnarled hand and shout approval. "Ha, that's the part I like."

He hated hypocrites.

WILBUR FLANDERS went on his first whaling voyage with his uncle, Capt. Richard Flanders. Also with him was Herman Mayhew on his first whaling voyage and, as it turned out, his last. Mr. Malloy of New Bedford was First Mate.

One day, Captain Flanders was expecting a goose dinner, but when the steward went to fetch the goose, it had disappeared. The captain at once accused his nephew Wilbur and Herman Mayhew of swiping the bird, but both stoutly denied it.

It is conceivable that the captain was right about Wilbur, but Herman was known to tell nothing but the truth. However, Captain Richard was unconvinced and ordered Mr. Malloy to string them both in the rigger by their thumbs. Mr. Malloy refused, saying he had to have evidence of wrongdoing first. Finally, Captain Richard compromised by having both Wilbur and Herman put over the side to scrape paint in the broiling sun. Both swore they would kill Richard when they got home.

The voyage over, Wilbur and Herman went home with their pay. No sooner was he in the house than Herman got his gun and loaded it. His mother asked him what he was going

to do and Herman, always truthful, said he was going to kill Captain Richard.

She tried to stop him, but couldn't. Fortunately, Ephraim Mayhew, his father, arrived soon after Herman left and was able to intercept his son at the entrance to Captain Richard's place. Herman gave in when his father said if he even tried to do such a thing, it would kill his mother. That ended the matter, as far as Herman was concerned.

Wilbur took a different course.

Captain Richard had a childish habit of hiding behind a bush when he saw someone he knew coming up behind him and, when the unsuspecting person was opposite his hiding place, he would jump out with a yell to scare the wits out of his victim. Wilbur was well aware of this.

One day, as the captain started from home, Wilbur waited a bit and then started out behind him. Sure enough, the captain became aware of Wilbur following him and ducked down behind a bush. When Wilbur reached the bush, Captain Richard leaped out with a yell.

Wilbur, acting surprised, jumped on his uncle, knocking him down, and proceeded to give him a savage beating. Then, suddenly pretending to recognize his screaming uncle, who was begging for mercy, Wilbur said, innocently, "Why I didn't know it was you, Uncle Richard." But he spoiled it all by adding, as an afterthought, "But damn you, if you had strung me up in the rigger I'd have killed you."

*(Six and last of a series.)*

CYRIL D. NORTON, a native of Chilmark, was a Harvard graduate with a master's degree in education from Boston University. He taught school in New Hampshire and western Massachusetts, but spent most of his life in Chilmark, where he served as Town Clerk. He was a recognized expert on old up-island houses and folklore. These tales are included in a manuscript made available by his wife, Evie Norton. Mr. Norton died in 1977.



## How Oak Bluffs Got Its Library

by EDITH MORRIS

A SMALL, eager group of Cottage City residents got together in the Selectmen's office 101 years ago to organize a "Rural Improvement Society" and adopted a statement of purpose that would have challenged a group ten times as large:

"The Object of this Association shall be to cultivate public spirit, quicken the social and intellectual life of the people, promote good fellowship, and by our efforts secure public health, improve and adorn the streets, roads, and public grounds and walks of the town, cause the lighting of the streets, the clearing of paths through the snow, the removal of nuisances, the arrest of cattle at large; in general to build up and beautify and render attractive our whole town, thereby enhancing the value of its property and rendering Cottage City a still more inviting permanent and summer residence."

Nowhere in that ambitious statement written in 1881 is there a word about a book or a Library (although "to quicken the social and intellectual life of the people" comes close), but, as it turned out, a Public Library did become its biggest accomplishment.

Membership cost \$3, payable all at once or spread over

EDITH MORRIS was born in Wellesley Hills, but in 1926 came to Oak Bluffs as a teacher and has been there ever since. After ending her teaching career, she was County Agent for the 4-H Club for 25 years. For the past 12 years she has operated her own museum, the Hansel and Gretel Doll and Toy Museum in Oak Bluffs. Co-author of the book *Fascinating Tin Toys for Girls*, she is a former Trustee of the Oak Bluffs Library and presently serves on the Council of our Society.

three years. For those under 16, it was 25 cents a year.

The group worked fast and within two weeks, by March 30, 1881, it had elected a set of officers headed by President A. S. Barnes. In addition, an Executive Committee of 30 members was formed. It included names often found in other historical records of the early days of Cottage City: Green, Rice, Chapman, Ellinwood, Wesley, Davis, Chadwick, Howland, Linton, Corbin, Tucker, Norton, Luce and others. Although predominantly male, the Committee included Mrs. F. P. Vincent, Mrs. L. A. Pierce, Mrs. Henry Rice, Mrs. S. C. Rand, Mrs. Horace Wilcox and Miss Flora Lawsen. Its members were listed as residents or non-residents. Most of its meetings were held in August when the Camp Meetings were in session.

In its first summer the Society voted \$50 for the "purifying and beautifying of Lake Anthony and Meadow Lake" in cooperation with the Camp Meeting Association and Vineyard Highlands Company. In addition, it was recorded that "in consideration of the offer of Joe Dias to pay for one thousand Larch trees, the thanks of the committee were tendered him" and "that the committee appointed to superintend the work on the lakes . . . supervise the planting of one thousand Larch trees."

The following year, it continued to plant trees: "the committee in charge of the appropriation of \$50 be directed to set out 20 Elm trees along Lake Avenue." Furthermore, "that the sum of \$25 be appropriated for the clearing up of waste places, parks, and such places as are unsightly." (You could do a lot with \$25 in those days.)

That same year, 1882, it was voted that the committee act in harmony with the owners of the land along the eastern side of Lake Anthony and endeavor to beautify that locality, that a sum of \$10 be spent on the Highlands, and that a committee be appointed to endeavor to create public sentiment against unsightly back buildings and

other offensive sights."

Back yards continued to receive attention in 1883: "Resolved: that the Executive Committee urgently call the attention of owners of cottages to the necessity of improvement in the appearance of back yards, by removing rubbish, enclosing outbuildings in some manner, and, in general, by removing or screening from the public gaze things unsightly and offensive."

The Society in June 1883 moved to broaden its interest when "it was voted to authorize the sub-committee on Improvements to purchase a watering vase and fit and equip a well and pump at the intersection of Lake and Circuit Avenues." That major project must have exhausted the treasury because at the Committee Meeting in August 1883, held at Union Chapel, it was agreed to appoint "a committee to collect funds, the members of which would be paid ten percent of all money collected." Thus, its fund raising became professional!

There was also selective ear-marking of the money: "the ten dollars raised in the vicinity of Prospect Park be expended on the same."

But that August meeting in 1883 did more than authorize a "watering vase" and a professional fund drive. It did something that is paying handsome dividends today: "it was voted that a committee be appointed to investigate the subject of a Public Library and report at the next meeting."

The next meeting was in October 1883 and at it "the plan to incorporate the Library with the Rural Improvement Association was deemed to be practicable and a vote was unanimously passed to the effect we incorporate the Library Association with the Rural Improvement Association and that it be called the Rural Improvement and Library Association." Miss Lillie Chapman was appointed Librarian. (The record seems to suggest that there was a Library Association extant at the

time, but it gives no details. There may have been another group interested in forming a Library, but the impetus came when the Rural Improvement Society took an interest.)

By November 1883, Library By-Laws were presented and accepted and requests for books were made. The Library was located at the home of the Chapmans on Lake Avenue.

In April 1884, it became clear that the Library needed a place of its own and a room upstairs in the Arcade Building was rented for \$40 a year. It was also agreed that a sum not to exceed \$45 be spent for books and a sum not to exceed \$50 be spent for furniture. (Incidentally, the 1981-82 budget for the Oak Bluffs Library records an appropriation of \$5000 for the purchase of books.)

However, the Library was still not the principal activity of the Rural Improvement Society or Association, as it was now being called. At least, it was not the subject of much speech-making at the annual meeting, August 14, 1884, which was opened by Mrs. Alice Osborne singing "If I Had a Voice."

The Secretary's Report of the meeting makes it clear that most of the talking was by the many Reverends in attendance and their rhetorical talents were evident:

"There is a bull to take by the horns: We have followed the other extremity long enough. I have been an observer of Lake Anthony for 15 years. Once it was a sweet body of clean water, afterwards it became a receptacle for all sorts of refuse. Decaying vegetation became extremely offensive. The breakway closed. Now it has broken open again. The incoming of the salt water this season has caused an accumulation of a bilge water and filth that would have been intolerable had it not been for the efforts of one of our citizens, Mr. Wesley. The nitrogenous matter from the stable and fish market feeds the grass, the grass ever grows and rots, and the decay is unwholesome. The tide of the Lake ebbs and flows not over six inches. For the health of the public and the looks of the place, somebody should



take the matter in hand and it will not be long before the lake will be one of the most beautiful sheets of water in the country." So urged Rev. J. D. King.

Then the Rev. L. B. Bates took the platform of the Methodist Tabernacle, where the meeting was held:

"Mr. King, in his kingly way, has left us in the mud. I want to see a good concrete road along the beach between Lake Anthony and the sea. I move that it be the sense of all present in this meeting and all the rest of Cottage City, that steps be taken at once for a concrete driveway around Lake Anthony. I am glad of the watering vase specified in the President's Report. I wish we had a dozen of them . . . but I say improve Lake Anthony."

When the applause subsided, the Rev. Dr. Shackelford took over the podium, stating that while his thunder had been stolen by the President's Report and by the eloquence of Mr. King and Mr. Bates, "there are some things, perhaps, that may be said on rural improvement without dabbling in science, and without dabbling in the dirty water of Lake Anthony. The atmosphere of this Island, as visitors testify, is something unusually delicious, the bathing is unsurpassed in the cleanness of the water and the salubrity of the bathing, the skies and the ocean are all inexpressively attractive. I remember when the first cottages were built here how multitudes wanted to see them because they were beautiful. I want Lake Anthony to be more beautiful. I want to thank the Camp Meeting Association for what they have done; but I want also to thank those cottagers living here for the money they have paid and which the Camp Meeting Association has so wisely spent."

The Reverend Shackelford then turned to the new project:

"I say 'God Speed' to the Library! It is destined, I trust, to do a great good. Let it be generously supported. Let it be supplied with clean newspapers for the Reading Room."

Rev. Professor Upham asked, "whence come the mosquitoes? From Lake Anthony?" And he urged greater

cooperation among the several groups: "Let us have no more jealousy between corporations. Let us hear more of Cottage City, and less of Oak Bluffs and less of the Highlands. This Association tends to unify the people here. Let us sustain it."

By 1887, the financial burden of supporting the Library was so heavy that the Society voted to ask the town for an appropriation of \$200 to assist, a request that must have been approved because it was recorded later that F. P. Vincent was authorized to build bookcases with the "judgement of himself and the Librarian" and pay them from the town's appropriation.

As the Library grew, so did the problems. One such problem involved censorship and in 1888 the report states that it was "voted that the removal of the book *Quo Vadis* be left with the Librarian." It was clear that the subject matter of books was a sensitive matter: "Voted that the Library Committee be instructed to examine the books in the Library and destroy such books (if any be found) that are objectional." No definition of "objectional" was recorded.

Quickly, the Library became the principal interest of the Society and beginning in the early 1890's, the Secretary's Reports all begin by stating "The Library Association met . . .," rather than the "Rural Improvement and Library Association." Nor is there further reference to Lake Anthony and beautification.

By 1896, the Library contained 1422 books and had a remarkable rate of withdrawal. During the year, 3427 books were taken out (well over half in the three summer months).

The Library, though used by the public, was still maintained by the Association, but in November 1905 the members prepared a "proposition to be submitted to the town for their acceptance of the Library and all the Library property." It was time to share the burden.

At the Town Meeting, March 1906, the citizens of Oak Bluffs voted to accept the gift of the Library and its

property and to appropriate a sum not less than \$150 each year for its maintenance and to appoint a board of three Library trustees.

In 1907, the Library was moved to the Eldridge Building (now Nick's Lighthouse) where it remained until the 1930s when its present building was purchased by the town.

The first librarian was Miss Lillie Chapman, who served 18 years. Mrs. Ripley was Librarian from 1906 to 1908, then a Miss Prebble, for the summer. She was followed by Mrs. Gorham. When Mrs. Gorham took over, it was voted to increase her pay to \$75 a year and to pay a Mr. Chirgwin \$5 for a winter's rental of a stove and stovepipe. Library expenses were small. In 1907, for example, "an estimate of library expenses encouraged the trustees to vote to expend \$62 for new books."

And so it was that the seeds planted by the Rural Improvement Association back in 1881 in Cottage City grew into the Oak Bluffs Public Library.

### PRESERVATION FUND

It is that time of year again when we ask for contributions to our Preservation Fund. This Fund enables us to keep our buildings in good repair and to provide care for the thousands of historical items entrusted to the Society. Without this extra source of revenue, the task of keeping things shipshape would be financially overwhelming. Last year we were reluctant to ask for contributions due to the uncertainty of the tax situation. This year we hope that members will increase their contributions to this Fund to help us preserve our Island heritage.

## Documents

**N**OW IN his 50s, Jeremiah Pease (1792-1857) is enjoying a good life, as this diary makes clear. The Vineyard, too, is prospering as whaling continues to bring in much money. The Methodist Church, which Jeremiah helped to start on the Island, is now the leading church and Jeremiah is one of its most active laymen.

In this installment, Jeremiah's old friend, "Reformation" John Adams (who had converted Jeremiah to Methodism in 1822) returns to the Island for a brief visit, basking, no doubt, in the amazing growth of Methodism. When he was first preaching on the Island, it was thought to be a religion for "crazy" folk.

James K. Polk, a Democrat, is now President of the United States and that suits Jeremiah fine, he being one of the early anti-Federalists on the Island. As a result, he has his job back as keeper of Edgartown Light and his eldest son, Joseph, has been named Collector of Customs, probably the best paid job in Edgartown. As such, he is also Superintendent of Lighthouses for the Island, Nantucket, the Elizabeths and part of Cape Cod. That makes him his father's supervisor.

We publish this diary because it is the most complete account we have of daily life on the Island before publication of the Gazette.

Editor Emeritus Gale Huntington is the editor of this series, which we have been publishing since 1974.

August 1845

6th. Wind SW. Went to Holmes Hole to attend Temperance Meeting. It was adjourned on account of the funeral of Capt. Charles Smith's Wife.

11th. Wind S. Rainy. Camp Meeting commences Westport. Sloop Vineyard goes with passengers.

12th. Wind SW. Very warm. Went to Christiantown blackberrying.

16th. Wind ESE. Went to Camp Meeting in Sloop Vineyard. Arrived at Westport about 2 P.M. Stayed there until the meeting ended. Returned by Steam Boat Massachusetts via New Bedford. The weather was pleasant during the meeting. There were not so many people there as generally attended the Camp Meetings at the Vineyard, except Sunday there was a greater number attended than usually attend the Vineyard Camp Meeting on Sunday. It was a very good Meeting.<sup>1</sup> A number there professed religion & many were blessed. The Lord grant a blessed influence may go out from that meeting. Mother Worth died on the 18th. I had a very pleasant and interesting conversation with her on the 15th. Her faith in Jesus and hope of Eternal life gave all her friends great consolation. She was 69 years old.<sup>2</sup>

20th. Wind E. The funeral of Mother Worth was attended at Congregational Meeting House. Service by Rev'd Mr. Beeman & W. Harlow of the Methodist Church.

<sup>1</sup>This was the only year that there was no camp meeting at Wesleyan Grove after it started in 1835.

<sup>2</sup>Jeremiah's mother-in-law.

21st. Wind SSW. Set ancle for Constant Norton's Wife.<sup>3</sup>

24th. Wind W. Light. Attended Class Meeting at Eastville. Very warm. The thermometer 123 in the sun. Mr. Matthew Lumbert of Chilmark dies very suddenly at that place. His death supposed to be caused by the heat.

26th. Wind SW. Fresh breeze. Steam Boat *Naushon* Capt. H. S. Smith arrives from New York having been built there for this place, she being the first Steam Boat ever owned here. Quite a rejoicing with many on that account.<sup>4</sup>

27th. Wind SE. Steam Boat *Naushon* sails for New Bedford with 320 passengers principally from this Town. P.M. wind changes suddenly to the NE with gale and rain for a few hours. The Steam Boat proves satisfactory on account of her speed and moddle [?] in a heavy sea.

30th. Wind SE. Rainy A.M. Steam Boat *Naushon* goes to New Bedford and returns at 5 P.M.

#### September 1845

1st. Wind ESE Light. Steam Boat *Naushon* commences running regularly to New Bedford.

8th. Wind N to NE. Light. Pleasant. Joseph goes to Boston via New

<sup>3</sup>Jeremiah is beginning to use the possessive apostrophe on occasion. In spite of the "ancle" he is doing better with his spelling also.

<sup>4</sup>The *Naushon* did not do too well financially despite being fast and a fine boat in a sea. Her engine was unusual. Instead of a walking beam she had an overhead cylinder with the drive shaft connected directly to the crankshaft.

Bedford per Steamer *Naushon*.<sup>5</sup>

11th. Wind SW. Br. John Adams attends Class Meeting at Br. Thomas M. Coffin's, he having come to spend a few days with his friends at this place.<sup>6</sup>

13th. Wind SE. Attended Meeting at Br. Matthew Vincent's. Br. Adams preached. A pleasant season.

15th. Wind SW to N. Pleasant. Rode over the Plain with Br. E. Kilby, he being here on a visit. Attended Meeting at the Methodist Meeting House on the Plain.<sup>7</sup> Br. Adams preached to a large congregation. It was a very interesting time.

16th. Wind SW. Joseph receives his Commission as Collector of the Customs for the District of Edgartown per mail and enters upon the duties of the office at 1 o'clock p.m.<sup>8</sup> All the officers are continued in

<sup>5</sup>This is the first time Jeremiah uses "Steamer" rather than "Steam Boat." This editor (Gale Huntington) likes steam boat better than steamer for the paddle wheelers and hopes Jeremiah returns to that usage.

<sup>6</sup>That is the famed "Reformation" John Adams (see *Intelligencer*, Nov. 1980).

<sup>7</sup>An indication of how the Methodist movement had grown since its "crazy" days under "Reformation" Adams. There was the large meetinghouse in Edgartown, one in Eastville, and now this one on the Plain, plus another on Chappaquiddick. All this in just one town.

<sup>8</sup>Along with the Customs job came the position of Superintendent of Lighthouses. Jeremiah, being keeper of Edgartown Light, was now being supervised by his son, Joseph. The family must have had a strong political base at this time.

office. Attended Meeting at Sister R. Norton's, M.D. Br. Adams preached, had a good season. Br. Kilby leaves in Steam Boat *Naushon* for Chelsea (?) via New Bedford.

17th. Wind SW. Attended Meeting at West Side Holmes Hole at the Methodist Meeting House. Br. Adams preached in the Spirit and Power of the blessed Gospel. I carried the news of the reappointment of H.P. Worth Esq., to the office of Inspector and Deputy Collector. Glad tidings to him and many others.<sup>9</sup>

21st. Wind S. Rains a little. Attended Meeting at Eastville A.M. and at Constant Norton's at M.D. in the afternoon. Br. Lumbert from the Continent preached. Bark *Rhine* arrives from the Atlantic Ocean with 400 bbls. sperm oil. B. Downs, Master.

24th. Wind N to W and NE. Went to Holmes Hole to see a boat which I think of buying. Rains a little.

25th. Wind NNW. Clear. Br. House returns to New Bedford having exchanged with Br. Harlow.

29th. Wind SSW. William goes to Portland being ordered there to join the Cutter at that place.

30th. Wind SW. Br. John Adams goes to Boston in the Schooner *Susan*.

#### October 1845

7th. Wind NE. Sowed hayseed in the Ox Pond meadow.

<sup>9</sup>These must have been rewarding days for Jeremiah. Rev'd. Adams was back, his son was Collector of Customs, and he was Keeper of the light. A big change from his period of "travail." (*Intelligencer*, Nov. 1980)

13th. Wind SSE. Light. Pleasant. The Steam Ship *Great Britain* said to be the largest in the world passed up the Sound on her way to New York.<sup>10</sup>

15th. Wind Northeasterly. Went to Holmes Hole, bot a Sail Boat of Peter West.

16th. Wind N to NNW. Clear. Cold. Mr. S. Dunham brings my boat down.

#### November 1845

2nd. Wind ESE. Light rain. Attended Meeting at Eastville p.m. Jeremiah attended Meeting at Middle District School House.

4th. Wind SW & S. Foggy and clears. Bark *Rhine* sold and toed to New Bedford by Steamer *Naushon* Capt. H. W. Smith.

7th. Wind Northerly. Paid Br. Paul Luce the balance of money in my hands relating to Methodist Meetinghouse at Eastville.

9th. Wind W. Light. Attended meetings at Eastville during the day and at M.D. Schoolhouse at evening. Visited Br. John Smith a pleasant young man. Being sick, found him resigned to his situation as much as any young man I ever saw under similar circumstances.

10th. Wind NW. Gale. Rained much during last night. Town Meeting for choice of Governor, lieutenant Governor and Senator.

13th. Wind SW. The new Methodist Meeting House at Holmes Hole is

<sup>10</sup>The *Great Britain* was large, but not the largest in the world. She was 322 feet long. The *Persia*, said to be the largest at the time, was 390 feet long.



dedicated this day. Service commenced at 10 o'clock. Prayer by Rev'd Daniel Webb. Sermon by Rev'd Dr. Pitman from New York. Concluding prayer by Rev'd Hebron Vincent. The house was very full of people and quite a number could not get in. All the services were solemn and interesting. I think the most so of any dedication I ever attended.

18th. Wind SW. Pleasant. Br. Daniel Webb visited us from Nantucket.

20th. Wind SW. Pleasant. Went to Holmes Hole on business. This day Mr. Benjamin Dunham while digging a well in Tisbury the sand caves in upon him leaving him nearly 15 feet below the surface. Before he could be dug out he expires. Another man came near losing his life in endeavouring to save Mr. Dunham. The distressing news was conveyed to his family this evening.

21st. Wind W. Mr. Dunham's corps is brought from Tisbury.

22nd. Wind NW. Went to Woods Hole in steamer *Naushon*, Capt. H.W. Smith, to see a child's foot -- the little son of Br. Marshal Grew of that place. Found it in a bad condition. Did all I could and returned same day.<sup>11</sup>

25th. Wind SW. Mr. Daniel Godfrey dies of a painful disease Scorfla. His death was peaceful. I trust he died in the Lord.

26th. Wind SW. Funeral of Mr. Godfrey at the Meeting House. Service by Rev'ds W. Harlow, Richards and Beeman.

<sup>11</sup>It is interesting that Jeremiah's bone-setting skills were in demand on the mainland. Brother Grew must have been a fellow Methodist.

30th. Wind ESE. Rains a little. Attended Meetings at North Shore. News of the death of Capt. Malatiah Fish of Nantucket. Lost in a boat.

December 1845

16th. Wind NE. Severe snow storm. Several vessels go ashore on Chapaquidick.

19th. Wind NW. Light. Did not attend class meeting at M.D. on account of snow.

20th. Wind NE. Snow storm.

21st. Wind NW. Much snow on the ground & did not attend Meeting at Eastville.

22nd. Wind W. Moderate for winter. Bark *Milton* hauls up to the wharf. She arrived yesterday with about 80 bbls. Sperm and 300 whale oil. Unfortunate voyage.<sup>12</sup>

24th. Wind NNW. Light. Brig *Pavilion* Capt. David L. Adams sails on a whaling voyage. Funeral of Mrs. Grace Desusan who died Saturday last of consumption. Service by Rev'd Mr. Beeman, Harlow and Richards. She was considered a very pious woman.

25th. NE, Stormy fog & rain. Br. Otherman visits us being a Quarterly Meeting at Holmes Hole.

26th. Wind E. Thick weather, light wind. Did not attend Class meeting at M.D. on account of snow in roads.

27th. Wind NW cold. Capt. Epraim Marchant dies of mortification in his

<sup>12</sup>The *Milton* had been whaling in the Atlantic. She left May 11, 1844, returning a year and a half later with little oil. During her voyage, Starbuck writes, "Capt. Sprague left the ship and came home sick."

leg having been in feeble health for several years. His death was peaceful being a firm believer in our Blessed Lord and Saviour. He was a member of the Baptist Church.

31st. Wind NW. Cold. The snow remains in large banks and some roads impassible. Try this pen.<sup>13</sup>

January 1846

1st. Wind E to ESE. Moderate for winter.

4th. Wind SW. Pleasant. Attended Meetings at Eastville. Being much snow in the road I left my carriage at Mr. C. Norton's and walked to Meeting.

5th. Wind S. Light. Pleasant. Went to Eastville. Carried Sister Mary Morse whose brother John W. Smith is very sick with Consumption, but is in a happy frame of mind being strong in the Faith of his blessed Saviour.

12th. Wind SW. Funeral of Mrs. Lovey Pease, wife of Capt. Valentine Pease, who died yesterday, aged 83 years.<sup>14</sup>

17th. Wind NE. Snow at night. Very cold.

22nd. Wind N by E. Snows. Ice breaks up and comes into the narrows.

23rd. Wind NW. Moderates. Mrs. Maria Pease, Wife of Peter Pease 2nd., dies of lung fever as it is called. Did not attend Meeting at M.D. on account of snow. Br. John Smith

<sup>13</sup>Jeremiah has a new pen to start the New Year. It is of interest that he makes no mention either of Christmas or the New Year. Such celebrations were thought to be Popish.

<sup>14</sup>Lovey Pease was the mother of Capt. Valentine Pease of *Moby Dick* fame.

visits us today having lately arrived on a visit to this Island.

26th. Wind SSW. Light and thaws. Ice goes out of the harbour. Child of John and Adrianna Norton dies.

27th. Wind NE. Snows a little. Funeral of Mrs. Maria Pease. Service by Rev'ds W. Harlow, John Adams, Beeman and Richards. It was a Solemn time. A small schooner cast away at Cape Poge. Called the *Two Brothers* of Nantucket. Bound on a whaling voyage.

29th. Visited Mr. Samuel Vincent, he being very near to death. He died at about 10 p.m. Watched with Rev'd W. W. Hall, he being very sick.<sup>15</sup>

30th. Wind S. Cloudy. Thaws. Sold my store which I bot of J. Holley to W. H. Munro. Gave a bill of sale of the store to William H. Munro.

<sup>15</sup>Jeremiah seems to have taken upon himself the responsibility of visiting fellow Methodists during their terminal illnesses. It is difficult to see how he could have done all the things he did and still have tended Edgartown Light every night.

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# Director's Report

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As we look out past the lighthouse over the snow-covered grounds of the Historical Society, it seems appropriate to reflect upon the accomplishments of the past year. Indeed, we have not had time until this relatively quiet season to measure the full extent of our accomplishments in 1981.

From reading past *Intelligencers*, you know that the big story of the year involved the redesign of the exhibit in the Francis Foster Museum. Throughout the fall season many people have come by to see the new exhibition, and we are pleased to know that the Society will always have a first-class exhibit open throughout the winter when the Cooke house is closed. In addition, for our summer visitors we changed or improved a number of exhibits in the Thomas Cooke House.

In our efforts to disseminate information through the publication of historical books, we were particularly gratified in adding up our accounts to confirm that this was the Society's most successful sales year ever. We also found that 1981 was the Society's most successful year in the collection of membership dues with the total number of members now being very close to 1,000. Interestingly, out of the approximately 250 historical agencies in Massachusetts, we are now about the fifteenth largest when judged by the number of members.

In terms of accessions received by the Society, we can chalk up another success for 1981. The greatest number of items came from Joanne Coffin Clark, whose gifts ranged from an important photograph of Frederick Baylies to a tiny bottle filled with sandy-colored filaments-- grass from Napoleon's grave on St. Helena's Island, brought back to the Vineyard by the world traveler Caroline Mayhew in the mid-nineteenth century. Another important accession was a collection of Noah Pease's letters written in the 1790s and presented to us by Julien Vose Weston. We also

received several letters from A.M. Gifford to his wife, while he served aboard the whaleship *Gay Head*. The largest item this year was a prayer bench given by the congregation of the Edgartown United Methodist Church.

In looking over our accession records for the year, we seem to have found a significant trend in the accessioning of an increasing number of twentieth-century photographs. A very pleasant development, indeed, because while our library is rich in nineteenth-century photographs, we do not have an extensive collection relating to our own century. Therefore, we would encourage everyone to treat old photos with care, to put identifications on the back, and to consider depositing them in the Society's archives.

Along administrative lines the greatest accomplishment this year involved the work of our President, Mel MacKay, who skillfully worked to solve the problem that the Society had with its tax-exemption status. As you know, from his letter to the membership in December, the Dukes County Historical Society is an exempt organization under section 501 (c) (3) of the Internal Revenue Code, meaning, in brief, that donors can make tax deductible contributions to the Society and that bequests, legacies, devises, transfers or gifts are deductible for Federal estate and gift tax purposes if they meet the applicable provisions of sections 2055, 2106 and 2522 of the Internal Revenue Code. A special note of thanks must go to our attorney John Montgomery, Jr., who worked very hard to ensure a rapid resolution of this unexpected problem.

In looking forward to the coming year, the largest undertaking on our schedule is the reprinting of the three-volume *History of Martha's Vineyard* by Charles Edward Banks. Since the first reprinting in 1966, we have sold almost 2,400 sets. Sales increased dramatically in 1981. At \$30, this extraordinarily well-researched set of books is greatly underpriced, and so anyone wanting a set should get one soon before the inevitable jump in price.

THOMAS E. NORTON



## Bits & Pieces

HISTORICAL RESEARCH IS like panning for gold: you wash a lot of gravel before you find a nugget. Or maybe it's more like looking for pearls in oysters; or playing the lottery. Whatever it's like, it's a gamble.

After hours of fruitless reading of old, illegible handwritten documents, suddenly a historical nugget appears. It's fun and it's satisfying.

Take an incident that occurred a few days after the November *Intelligencer* came out. In that issue, we wrote about a new booklet, *The History of Wind Power on Martha's Vineyard* by William Marks and Charles A. Coleman, Jr., and said: "It describes the little-known use of wind power to pump ocean water in solar evaporation beds on the Cape. . . The authors were unable to document the use of wind power for that purpose on the Island, but suggest that it is likely that it was."

They were right. In a search for something unrelated to windpower, we were reading excerpts from an 1845 diary of an Edgartown school-teacher. Suddenly, out of nowhere, like a nugget, there it was:

"There are. . . two windmills for grinding grain, and one for pumping salt water into pans for the making of salt by evaporation."

Discoveries such as that, being unexpected, are joy-filled.

Another bit of serendipity:

Looking through some yellow-by-age *Vineyard Gazette*s, we came across this elegant public notice:

### NOTICE

Allowing, of course, parties of pleasure to come on to his premises, whenever they please, and have their pic-nics, clam bakes, and the like, to go into his grove, dig holes, burn up his wood, and leave large quantities of shell-fish to putrify and annoy his family and others who may wish to walk there;-- conceding the right to all this, the undersigned, with great diffidence, would barely suggest, whether gentlemen have the right, also, to leave down his bars, break down his fences, and drive over his planted grounds. "I speak as unto wise men, judge ye."

SAMUEL KENISTON

July 5, 1855

Now that was real class!

Again, unexpectedly, while looking up facts about lighthouses, we learned that in 1856 the Wareham *Transcript* announced that 12 tons of iron ore were brought to the Weeweantic Nail Co., in Wareham by Gay Head Indians. Four boats made the trip, a distance of about 60 miles, and it took six hours.

A final nugget:

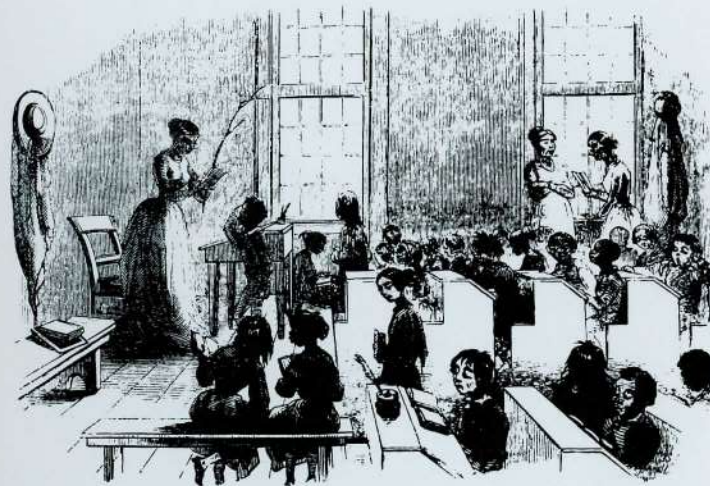
The steamer *Eagle's Wing*, during the week-long Camp Meeting in August 1859, transported 15,000 persons back and forth to the mainland.

That's about 2000 every day!

A.R.R.

## An Artist at Gay Head

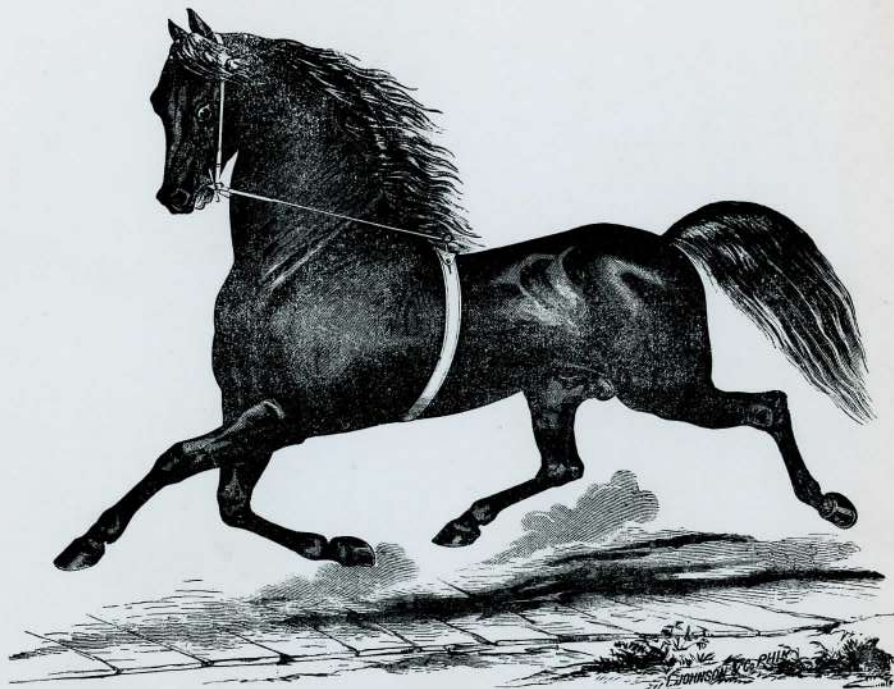
In 1860, an artist-author who used the pseudonym *Porte Crayon* wrote a three-part article entitled "A Summer in New England" for Harper's. The second part was devoted to his visit to Martha's Vineyard. He spent some time at Gay Head and one of his stops was at the village school.



GAY HEAD SCHOOL.

"We took leave, and wended our way to the Academy, where we found the school in session. Seated at the desks were some five-and-twenty younglings, of both sexes and of mixed blood, where negro, Indian, and white ancestry were jointly represented. Some few were pure African, and two or three only untainted aboriginals. The schoolmistress, a good-looking mulatto girl of twenty years old or thereabout, received us with quiet civility and at my request went on with the school exercises."





# At Martha's Vineyard Park, WEDNESDAY, JULY 15, 1874.

**TROTTING TO COMMENCE at 3 P. M.**

A purse of one-half of the Gate Money for all Horses that have never beaten 3 minutes, best 3 in 5 to Sulky. Entries to close  
TUESDAY, July 14th, at 6 P. M.

**There will also be a FOOT RACE.**  
**ADMISSION ONLY 25 CENTS.**

SEASON TICKETS, admitting two, with the privilege of handling and driving on the Track, \$5.00.

There will be Trotting once a week at the Park until the Park is closed.  
The Park will be closed August 22d.

**R. ELDRIDGE, Proprietor.**