



# THE DUKES COUNTY INTELLIGENCER

VOL. 24, NO. 3

FEBRUARY 1983



The Arcade in the 1890's.

## I Was a Circuit Avenue Street Kid

by

STUART MacMACKIN



## A Word About Porches

## Chilmark's Christian Indian Cemeteries

by PETER COLT JOSEPHS

## Tombstones Are Not Forever

Jeremiah Pease Dairy, Books, Letters, Director's Report,  
Bits & Pieces

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The Thomas Cooke House  
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#### THANKS AND A REMINDER

Our thanks to those members who have sent in their dues for this year and our added thanks to those who have upgraded their memberships to the sustaining category. We urge all who can to do so.

Even more thanks go to those who included a contribution to the much-needed Preservation Fund.

We remind any member who may have put the dues notice aside when it came and by now has forgotten about it that the Society and this journal depend upon your support.

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The Dukes County Historical Society was founded in 1922 to preserve the history of Dukes County for the public benefit. It is a nonprofit institution supported entirely by membership dues, contributions and bequests, which are tax deductible.

The Society maintains the Thomas Cooke House, the Francis Foster Museum and the Gale Huntington 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.

The Francis Foster Museum and the Huntington Library are in an adjacent building and are open to the public all year round. In the Museum is an exhibition of the Vineyard's maritime heritage with displays of fishing, coastal trade, whaling, navigation, plus a wide variety of scrimshaw. The Library contains collections of ship's logs, journals, genealogies and other Island documents.

The public is invited.

## I Was a Circuit Avenue Street Kid

by STUART MacMACKIN

I was a Circuit Avenue "street kid." I suppose that is how you would have referred in today's vernacular to my role in Oak Bluffs during the early 1920's.

My first visit to Oak Bluffs was in the summer of 1914, some months before I was born in October. Using a modern criteria of the anti-abortionists, I was already a person and thus entitled not only to the insults of life, but also to call myself a "native." My mother, a "native," was true to tradition and could not do anything on the expected date. As a result, I was born after we returned to New York State, thereby being sentenced to pronounce my "r's" with a growl and barred forever from being a true native of the Island.

My mother was the former Gladys Greene, daughter of Hamilton J. and Katherine Greene. The first seven summers of my life (eight if you include 1914) were spent with her and Grandfather Greene in the living quarters on the second floor of Greene's Block, which still stands on Circuit Avenue across from the Wigwam Paper Store. Grandfather constructed the Block on the site of the old Dunmere, a large three-story boarding house that had been moved some time around 1910 to Penacook Avenue.

Grandfather lived upstairs over the four stores in the Block in several large rooms that had been designed for offices, but had been converted to living quarters. In many ways it was primitive. There was a small washbasin in each room and a small toilet at either end of the long central

STUART MacMACKIN retired in 1980 after a career as corporation counsel with the General Electric Aircraft Equipment Division in Utica, N.Y. He and his wife, Alice, now live in Edgartown, but they spend their summers on East Chop. This is his second article in this journal, the first being about the Rice School and Playhouse.



hall. It was a cross between a shabby mansion and a shambles. One room, in fact, was called "The Chautauqua" because it contained so much attic-type stuff.

Dishes were washed in a basin on sort of a trestle. Water was heated by a kerosene heater and cooking was done on a three-burner "Perfection" kerosene stove. (Before my time, I believe, there had been gas in Oak Bluffs, but when the gas tank blew up, the owners never bothered to replace it.) For refrigeration, ice was carried up the long flight of stairs and put into a top-opening ice chest with slate shelves, the drain pan of which had to be emptied daily.

Mother and I would come and spend the summers with Grandfather Greene and his niece, Elizabeth Bodfish, who cared for him after Grandmother died. As a result, Circuit Avenue became my playground. Things were so quiet then and Circuit Avenue was so "nice" that I don't remember there ever being any trouble about my going out to play wherever my fancy took me. During my earliest days I played dolls with Ruth Dean, the doctor's daughter, and with Icho Miyana, whose parents ran the "Japanese Store" across the street. Lucky for my image and later orientation, I soon got over that!

It might be fun to recreate the environment that I remember during those first seven years. Admittedly, there will be inaccuracies due to the erosion of time and my less than precise memory, as well as the admitted nostalgia that I feel.

So, let's walk along Circuit Avenue, visiting some of the shops and people who made up the visible community of Oak Bluffs in the early 1920's.

Going out the center front door of Greene's Block, we turn right, or northeast, and walk on the east side of the street heading toward the Flying Horses where we will cross over and return on the west side of the Avenue.

On the ground floor of Greene's Block were four stores



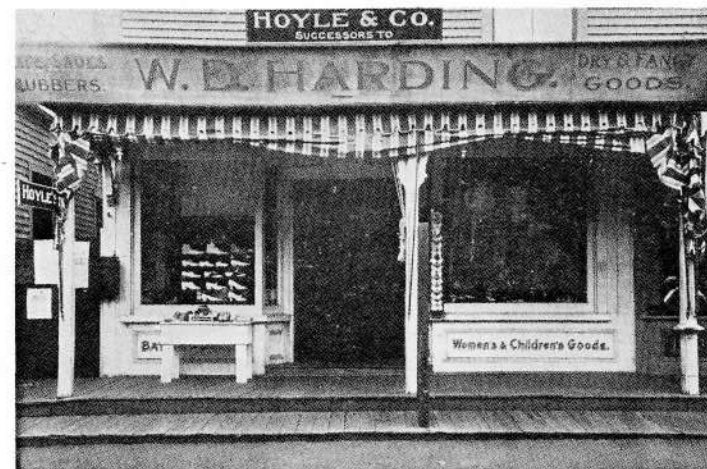
Wigwam, "the most important store on the Avenue," had the best model boats, some of which can be seen in the photograph.

and the first one to the right as you left the center door was Miss Dean's Yarn Shop (I do not believe she was related to Dr. Dean). I had no use for yarn then or now and all I remember is that Miss Dean was nice to me. Next to her store was a specialty shop which I liked because, when I got old enough to have an allowance of a quarter a week, I would blow the whole thing in that store on a shiny green-handled jackknife.

Next door was the office of Dr. Dean. I never went in, didn't have to. He made house calls. A beloved and respected man, small of stature and with a grey mustache, he was the Dr. Rappaport of those days, a confidant as well as a physician.

A little farther north was the most important store on the Avenue as far as I was concerned. It was the Wigwam (not to be confused with the present Wigwam). The original Wigwam was on the east side of the street and had some newspapers, books and gifts, but that wasn't what interested me. In the back there was a whole section devoted to model boats: sailboats of varying sizes from 10 inches to 4 feet, all working models; also a variety of mechanical "motorboats," some spring wound by a key that fitted into the smokestack. There was even a working submarine that would actually submerge and surface again, if you set the controls properly. All these spring-wound models tended to wear out quickly. A little water down the keyhole and rust would set in. Longer-lived were the "destroyer" types, powered with a rubber band that you wound up. I spent a lot of time in the Wigwam, fondling the boats and comparing their merits. It was a source of supply for my sailing endeavors in Ocean Park, but more on that later.

Next came the Herald Drug Store, which, though big and well-stocked, played a negligible role in my life. More impressive to me was the fact that out in front usually were parked two large sightseeing buses. These were open-air Reo "Speedwagons." Car buffs will remember that they had a concave top to the radiator shell and that their principal controls were on a coffee-can-sized drum mounted on the steering column. The buses were painted a shiny dark maroon with a gold stripe and had, I believe, about ten rows of seats that went all the way across so that you entered by climbing on to the running board and sliding across. There were no doors although there were roll-down side curtains for rainy days. Usually, the owners, the Scovil brothers, would stand alongside, dressed in plus fours and white golf caps and quietly tell the passers-by about the beauties of the Island (no yelling or barking) until the bus was filled and then take off. With



Hoyle's, "great for the grandmother trade," was originally the W.D. Harding Store located in the old Herald Building. parallel parking on both sides of the street, there was no problem.

The next store I remember was Hoyle's, a dry-goods store filled with sheets, pillowcases and baby sets, great for the grandmother trade. It was run by Clayton Hoyle and his wife, the former May Harding, who had been a classmate of my mother's at Northfield. As I remember it, Clayton was not too happy selling sheets to old ladies; his heart was out on the water. Years later, after his wife died, he got to selling fishing tackle and seemed much happier.

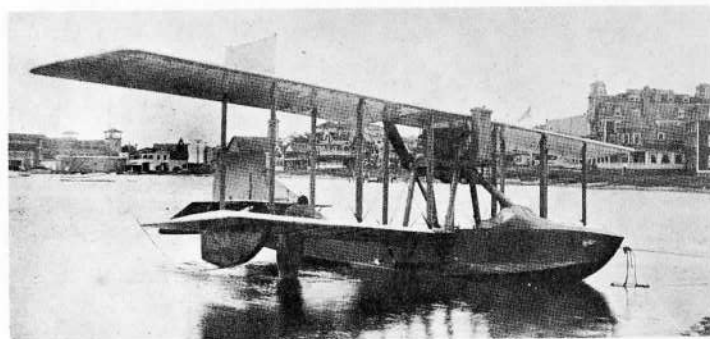
On the corner of what is now the Mall and Circuit Avenue, there stood the huge Metropolitan Hotel. It was impressive, not only because of its black-and-gold decor, but because it housed Rausch's Ice Cream Parlor. Now that was elegant: a big marble soda fountain with three-foot-high soda faucets, marble-topped tables rimmed by those classic curved-back chairs, the backs and legs of which were intricately bent to give an air of elegance and simplicity, all at the same time. Rausch's had the best ice cream in town.

I didn't go in there much; it was too nice for me, a street

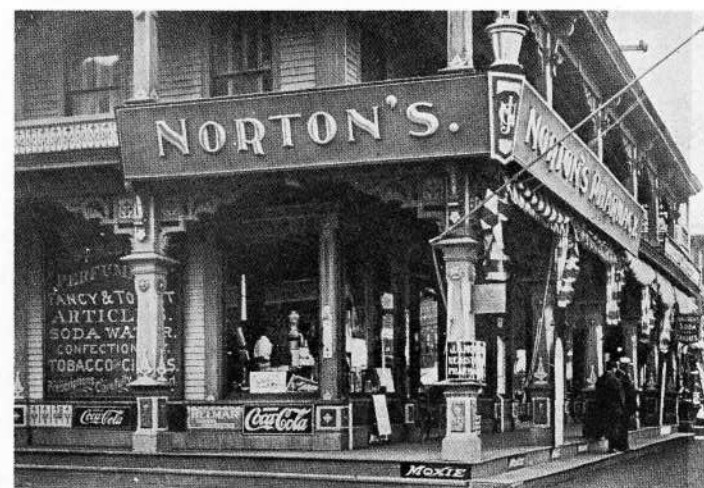
kid. But I do remember it was managed by George Norton, a balding, smiling little man who would let me walk with him and who once paid me a singular honor by letting me go with him down to the beach in front of the Wesley House (no bulkhead then) so that I could watch him take off in the flying boat which operated out of the harbor.

Also in the hotel building, on the corner, was a drug store, but I had little interest in that. I'd usually turn right toward Ocean Park, which had two large and connected boat-sailing ponds. Viewed from the air (and I only did this once -- from an overhanging oak tree), they looked like a couple of long leaves. I used to go there and sail my boats for hours at a time. With some doing, you could set the rudder and the sails so that the boat would go straight across the pond, giving you just enough time to run around and meet it so you could sail it back. The ambiance of the town was such that my mother never seemed to have any fear of letting me go off and do this on my own. Once or twice I came home soaking wet from having fallen in, but this did not interfere with my freedom.

Let's go a bit farther, over to the Oak Bluffs Bathing Beach. It was a most impressive structure with hundreds of bathhouses on stilts along the beach. In addition to the changing rooms, the buildings proudly housed "Hot Salt



Mr. Norton of Rausch's "honored" the author by letting him walk with him to the harbor before taking off in this hydroplane.



The drug store held little interest for the author. It was just the corner where he turned towards Ocean Park to sail his boats.

Water Baths." These were in individual rooms, each with a gigantic white tub, on the end of which was what seemed like a forest of faucets. There were separate hot and cold faucets for fresh water and for salt water. Each tub was supplied with a long bar of soap, white with mottled pink



Oak Bluffs Bathing Beach had hundreds of changing cubicles, plus a large building with "Hot Salt Water Baths."



striations, specially made to work in salt water.

Grandfather Greene was an officer in the Vineyard Grove Company that owned the beach and he took his responsibilities very seriously. I can remember his telling about how he had sent a young lady home because she had the temerity to show up in a white bathing suit! That kind of "morality" apparently rubbed off on me for I still recall the shock I had when my mother first appeared on the beach without her long black stockings.

Let's get back to Circuit Avenue.

On the corner opposite the Metropolitan was the Pawnee House, a big, several-storied wooden structure with a porch on the front (the porch still remains) and a balcony over the porch. More often than not, the rocking chairs all along that porch would be filled with people sitting and rocking and talking -- or just watching other people walking past in the street (there were no curbsings on Circuit Avenue so it was either all sidewalk or all street, depending on your point of view).

On Sunday afternoons, the Oak Bluffs Band would play from the balcony above the porch of the Pawnee House as the people sat on the porch below and rocked to the time of the music while others just stood around in the street and listened. It was a real community event and folks looked forward to it.

There was another important attribute to the Pawnee House: a porter named Jerry. I am not sure that Jerry was too bright, but he was hardworking, conscientious and cheerful. He would take his large green two-wheeled cart down to the wharf to meet each boat, shouting at the top of his lungs: "Porter for the Pawnee! Porter for the Pawnee!" After the bags had been unloaded across the heavy wooden gangplanks from the *Gay Head* or the *Uncatena* or the *Sankaty*, he would load them on his cart and push the heavy thing up the hill to the Pawnee while the patrons walked behind. Jerry was a complete extrovert and knew no difference in rank. He was rude and friendly



Two large hotels were Metropolitan, right, and Pawnee, with the flag, on whose upper porch the Band gave Sunday concerts.

at the same time to everybody. His exuberance knew no bounds. On Sunday afternoons he would join the Band on the hotel balcony and help them play, using his harmonica or castanets, the latter he called "ebony bones." It's too bad that there is no longer any call for Jerries these days; we'd have a happier world if there were.

Next past the Pawnee, you came to Frey's Shoe Repair. Located on the site of the present "pass through," it was a family enterprise, doing good work in spite of crowded conditions. Mr. Frey was white-haired, smiling and nice to me -- he was nice to everyone. There were young Freys (you will note that I specifically did not say "small Freys") about my age, but I never got to play with them; they were always working.

Next was a store that held great fascination for me: a gift shop run by a Mr. and Mrs. Thorne, who lived on New York Avenue and had two stone lighthouses in front of their house (still there). Their store, a pure tourist trap, was as tacky as you can get, filled with "Souvenirs of Oak Bluffs" -- felt pennants, birch-bark canoes, highly polished pine lighthouses, glass lighthouses packed with Gay Head clay, opalescent paintings and black bamboo walking canes. It also sold model sailboats, but to an expert like

me, they were an inferior line that would not sail well. I used to enjoy staring at them, but I never bought any. My father did, however -- he was no sailor and never did know about boats. He bought my sister a sailboat and Mr. Thorne painted her name on it. It wouldn't sail.

There was a restaurant at the foot of Circuit Avenue called the Magnolia. I can't tell you anything about it. My family did not eat out; that was for rich people.

Across from the Magnolia were the Flying Horses. These meant a lot to me as they have to kids of many generations and were run by a Mr. Turnell, a kindly gentleman who had helped my mother on to the horses when she was a child with the same care and friendliness with which he helped me. He ran the carousel with the aid of his wife, who sold tickets. He seemed to do everything else, pushing the horses to get them started, turning on the mechanical piano, taking tickets, feeding rings into the hinged arm and helping kids to get sorted out with the right mothers after the ride ended.

Somewhat to the west of the Flying Horses was the Civil War Monument, almost at the foot of Circuit Avenue. It has since been moved out near the steamboat dock.

Let's cross over and head back up Circuit Avenue on the other side. On the corner was the Eagle Theatre, now the Island. When I first started going to the movies, it, of course, had silent films. There was a piano player who provided "sound" during the feature. She played an important part in my development that I was not aware of at the time. It wasn't until years later than I realized she had been playing mostly Chopin! No matter if Tom Mix was galloping across the plains, or if Nils Aster was pining for the unreachable Billie Dove, imprisoned in the secret room of the castle, the music was always Chopin and it was perfectly appropriate. This may be the principal reason I find Chopin so enjoyable today.

Up the hill from the Eagle was LaBell's Bakery. I may be a bit confused about the time here -- it may have come a



Sign on monument reads: "Westbound cars go to the right, blow your horn." Monument is now near Ocean Park.

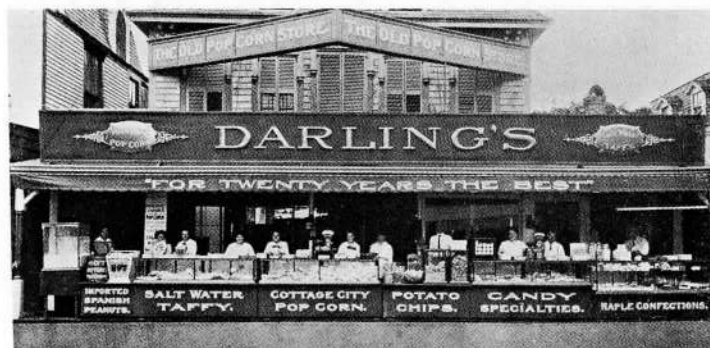
few years later. But it was so attractive that it must be mentioned even if I am off a little. Its main attraction was a gigantic iron kettle near the front of the store where a white-hatted baker fried doughnuts in sizzling fat. The kettle was big enough, or so it seemed to me, to have been used by cannibals. The doughnuts were wonderful; well worth getting up early for, as so many did. While they were cooked a dozen or so at a time, being lowered on a heavy wire rack, each one got individual attention and was turned over at the right time before the whole batch was lifted out and placed in the display case, if waiting customers didn't buy them all up right out of the kettle.

Up the hill farther, we pass the Island House, with more rocking chairs on its porch, and stop at the "auction house," Sam Mattar's store, where all sorts of gifts, embroidered cloths, wraps, jewelry and knickknacks were sold. Each evening scores of items would be sold by auction with Sam providing great entertainment as he encouraged the bidding. People would come, not just from around the area, but from the other Island towns, to enjoy Sam's humor and take part in the fun of the auction -- even, in some cases, to buy. Sam managed to convey the atmosphere of a family gathering rather than a tourist trap or gyp joint.



Close by was "Darling's -- for Twenty Years the Best." This famed open-air candy store was run by John Darling with its sales counter and display cases right on the sidewalk and they seemed, in my memory, to have extended for 40 or 50 feet. Shiny glass display cases were filled principally with varieties of salt-water taffy, individually wrapped in wax paper, and with many flavors of popcorn bars. Made of finely ground popcorn pressed into a bar about six inches long, these bars were variously flavored with molasses (brown), wintergreen (pink) and other flavors with less distinctive colors.

The salt-water taffy was pulled by an impressive machine right behind the counter. This machine had inter-relating arms which pulled and kneaded the taffy for an hour at a time. It was usually loaded by Harris Carr, who would give the big lump of taffy a preliminary workout farther back in the store before hoisting a horse-collar-size lump on to the arms of the pulling machine. I suppose the whole open-air operation would be illegal today because of our modern worry about dust or germs from the street. If you wanted to, you could buy a bag of hot buttered popcorn or hot roasted peanuts, but the specialty was the taffy, which (to use a New York State expression) was "aknown far and wide up country and down city."



On a summer night, you had to line up for service at Darling's, despite its many clerks. The sweet aroma made waiting a pleasure.



At Ocean Park, many a future yachtsman sailed his first boat. The author's aerial view of the ponds was from a branch of this tree.

Almost a permanent fixture on the Avenue in the afternoon and evening was the sparkling white Franklin automobile of Alec West. A paint manufacturer from Providence who made a well-known paint called "Barreled Sunlight," Alec used it on his air-cooled Franklin touring car. The body would always be pearly white, but the fenders alternated between green one year and red the next. At that time Massachusetts alternated these colors on the license plates and it may be that Alec wanted to keep in phase. His colors, however, were much more attractive, the reds softer and the greens bluer.

His car just exuded class and I'm sure that was just what he intended. Alec was flamboyant. Small physically, I suspect that he wore high heels. Most impressive was his manner of dress. I remember a light beige suit with a Norfolk jacket which he had coordinated with a perfectly matching beige shirt, beige tie and beige shoes. He topped the ensemble off with a beige straw hat, trimmed with a slightly darker beige ribbon (you must have some contrast). He wore the hat turned up in front like Adolph Menjou.

The picture that I remember (and it may be somewhat

unfair) is of Alec sitting in the front seat of that Franklin, barely able to see over the steering wheel, while his wife and her sister filled the back seat. The two ladies who towered over him from the afterdeck were bigger and heavier (the word, I think, is fleshy) and they strained every inch of that back seat. When the folding top was down, they seemed to ooze over the sides of the car. Invariably dressed in a soft printed silk chiffon that was both tasteful and a little too much, they were always color coordinated with the current colors of the fenders. After all, Alec West, manufacturer of "Barreled Sunlight," knew his colors!

The next important landmark on the Avenue was the Arcade, a unique building with a remarkable architectural style. It had (and still has) a pass-through in its center that led to the Campground. On each side of the Arcade were stores. On the north side was Pearson's Drug Store, which had a good soda fountain presided over by a somewhat grumpy man called "Brownie." He could be counted of for a full scoop of ice cream, but not much chatter.

Walking through the Arcade you entered a small semi-circular court that was between the Avenue and the Campground. On the right was the Beatrice House with its long front porch. Slightly to the left was Alley's Market, run by George and Tony Alley, a typical grocery store of those years, with fresh vegetables on a rack out front and lots of personal attention from George and Tony. The groceries were shelved along the inside walls and often had to be pulled down for you by an obliging clerk with a squeeze clamp on a long pole.

Returning to Circuit Avenue and turning right, you came upon Penny's Barber Shop. Penny was an important man in town. I think he was a Selectman. Later, he turned his shop into a restaurant, but before he did he passed on a legacy to the town in the person of his assistant, Albert Soares, who bought the shop and ran it for many years on



*This poor quality 1950 snapshot shows the Arcade's design. The building has lost the roof from its top porch. Just through the Arcade was the Beatrice House, below, a large and popular hostelry.*



the Avenue. He still has a devoted following who go to see him at his shop on New York Avenue. Albert, in addition to being friendly and reasonably opinionated (as a good barber should be), charmed the populace by turning out in some remarkably "loud" clothes. No matter how loud, they were always well coordinated in color right down to the shoes. Albert was a handsome man, his pencil-thin mustache giving him the appearance of a movie actor, a la Brian Donlevy.

To me, the most attractive store on the Avenue, and the "classiest," was "The Japanese Store" run by the Miyanaga family. Dignified and hard-working, they filled their store with charming merchandise, including Japanese lacquer work, trays and pictures, silks, as well as other tasteful gifts. From my child's viewpoint, the most attractive part of the store was the section devoted to puzzle boxes. These were covered with inlaid woods, making either a geometric design or portraying a Japanese scene. One was made with different woods to look like a small set of books. If you slid one of the "books" and then a panel on the bottom, you would uncover a secret space where the metal key was hidden. Then by sliding down another "book," you uncovered the keyhole and were able to unlock the top. Another had a small secret movable panel hidden in its complex geometric design. If you slid that panel and touched a lever behind it, a drawer would spring open. I still have one of these -- somewhat battered, but still operational. The Japanese Store continued until about World War II when the Miyanagas moved away.

Next to the Miyanaga store was an alley into the Campground and on the other side of the alley was Mrs. Dow's Bakeshop. Mrs. Dow was a widow who did most of the work herself. I remember her as a pleasant middle-aged lady who was always dressed in immaculate white. The inside of the store was equally immaculate, painted a sparkling white. Her bakeshop was responsible for some of



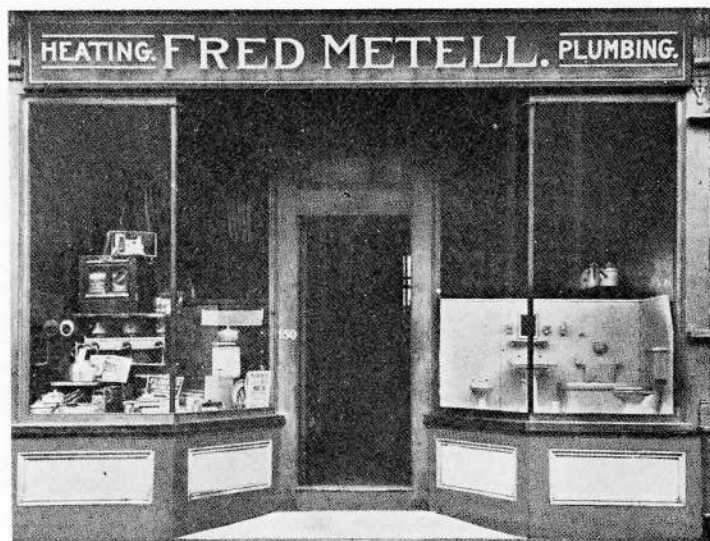
*Alley's Store was also through the Arcade. Its well-stocked, open interior was typical of grocery stores of the period.*

the most enticing smells on the Island. The Wigwam Paper Store is now located on this site. It no longer sells model boats.

The plumbing shop of Fred Metell was next to Mrs. Dow's and directly across from Greene's Block. This building originally had been a mirror image of the Dunmere, which as I mentioned, had stood on the site of Greene's Block. I believe that two brothers had built the two buildings at about the same time. Metell's had been slightly changed to accommodate plumbing fixtures, but it still had a friendly front porch and was still used, in part, as a rooming house.

Then came an alley, across which was the Postoffice. I mention the alley because (lest the reader think my childhood was all sweetness and light) it was there that some clouds darkened my horizon. In that alley, a young man named Pachico beat me up. I don't know what I did to merit this drubbing; it may have been simply that I was "summer people," who, after all, deserve to be beaten up





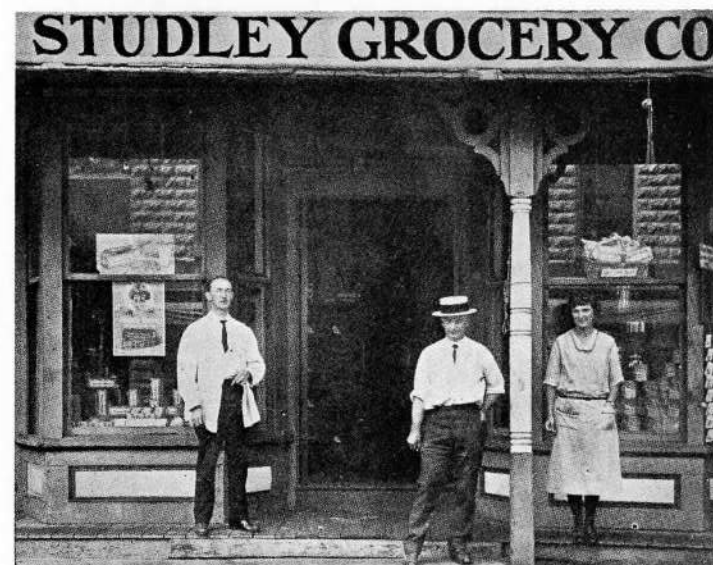
*Plumbing shop of Fred Metell was directly across from Greene Block.*

occasionally. In any case, it helped my character, because this beating, along with several that I got when I started grade school, taught me that I was no good with my fists and that I had better learn to talk my way out of trouble. Thus, young Mr. Pachico unknowingly contributed to that acknowledged present-day social problem, "lawyer pollution."

I must mention two important semi-permanent fixtures who added to the color and culture of the era. One was the "Monkey Man." He had a street organ about two feet on each side and partially suspended from his shoulder by a wide black strap. Additional support for the organ came from a single wooden leg. He would crank the organ, which had a haunting whistle-like character, until a crowd assembled and then the monkey, which had been perched on his shoulder, would jump down and circulate among the crowd, extending his little red hat for pennies. The monkey's wistful expression and serious demeanor added, I am sure, to whatever monetary success they had. He was

a delight to the children and, I suspect, to the adults as well. The music, while loud and penetrating, was not nearly as raucous as the present-day street music which is forcibly applied to us by some teen-agers with their powerful stereos. The Monkey Man would "work" the Avenue for a while and then disappear, only to re-appear several more times during the summer.

The other street music was supplied by the "Hurdy Gurdy." This was a street piano, about five feet long, mounted on two large wooden wheels. Handles protruded from one end and one man would pull with the handles like a horse between shafts while his partner would get behind and push. The pair would station their instrument in front of a hotel and play their entire repertoire, one man cranking and the other walking around with his felt hat extended for contributions. The music was more metallic than that of the Monkey Man, similar to that of the Flying Horses. Both the Monkey Man and the Hurdy Gurdy pair had dark Italianate features and always wore



*The owner of Studley's called the author "James," for unknown reasons.*

heavy dark clothes, including vests (which were never buttoned). They always wore winter felt hats, in sharp contrast with the clothes of the "dudes" and "dandies" in white flannels and blazers of white with broad vertical stripes of red or blue.

After the Postoffice was the general store of Clement Studley, a grave, dignified man who invariably addressed me as "James," which, of course, was not my name. Not "Jimmy" or even "Kid," but a courteous "Good morning, James." Studley had a daughter named Barbara, bright and smiling and greatly admired by all. She made the same mistake my wife did: she married a lawyer and went to live in a small town north of Syracuse, N.Y., not too far from where we lived. Our paths never crossed and I am sorry.

A little farther down the street was the A. & P., and next to it, alongside another alley to the Campground, was a Ginter store which later was taken into the First National chain. Years before, it had been the old Eagle Market, owned by Grandfather Greene before I was born. Today, it is a pizza restaurant. Across the alley, a four-store building, also owned by my grandfather, housed Eldridge and White's Insurance, Amaral's Plumbing Shop and the Oak Bluffs Library.

Some distance away, down the Avenue, was a building I liked just for its name: "The Broken China Tea Room." It was on the corner of Trinity Avenue, where Western Auto now is. Its name came, not from the type of crockery used, but because the cement corner posts of the building were inlaid with thousands of pieces of vari-colored china.

Crossing over Circuit Avenue, we head back toward Greene's Block.

On the right on a hillock is Union Chapel, built in 1870. It played an important part in my life, not to mention the lives of thousands of summer people. It is unfair not to do a thorough job on its history, so I will skip that which you can learn from more scholarly works and mention only something you won't find in them.

I can remember going on Sunday mornings and sitting



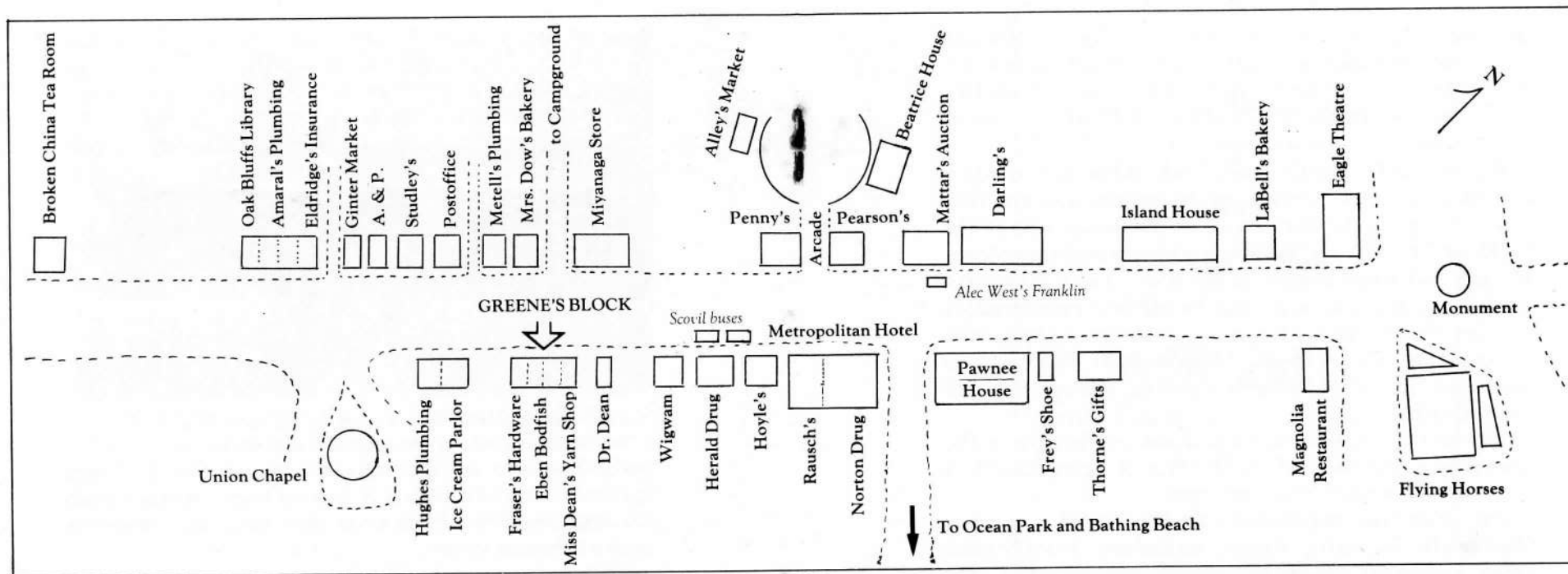
*Much-loved was Jack Hughes Ice Cream Parlor. It and the plumbing shop were in the building now occupied by daRosa's Printing.*

up in the balcony, staring across at my friend Horace Elmer. Horace's father was S. Lewis Elmer, for many years the organist. When I first went, the organ was pumped by a man behind a screen.

This story about the Elmers came a bit later, but it is worth telling. They had a Model T. Ford that was always driven by Mrs. Elmer, an unusual occurrence in those days. I once asked Horace why this was. He told me that his father was a bit absent-minded and one day, while driving the three-pedaled Ford, he forgot that he wasn't playing the organ and tried to play B flat, ending up in the ditch. After that, Mrs. Elmer drove.

That's what Horace told me.

Walking up Circuit Avenue, you came to Jack Hughes Ice Cream Parlor. Jack was also a plumber and half the building was devoted to that business, with fixtures displayed in the front window. On the uphill half of the building was the Ice Cream Parlor, much more important to many people, especially me. You could get ice cream in cones, but they also served it in little gill-sized boxes, along with a wooden spoon. That was how my Grandfather liked it and, naturally enough, so did I. In the back of the



Circuit Avenue in the early 1920's. Many buildings are not shown, having faded from the author's memory, or, at least, have become less memorable through the years. Shown are the memorable ones.

Rausch's Ice Cream Parlor was "too nice a place" for street kids.

The Postoffice, as visitors await the mail on a rainy day.

Hughes Plumbing, not to be confused with the Ice Cream Parlor.





store was a regular parlor with tables and chairs, a pleasant place that came to be of interest to me in later years when it was the after-theatre hangout of the Rice Players (see *Intelligencer*, August 1982). Today, the entire building is now occupied by daRosa's print shop.

We are now back at Greene's Block. When we started on this walk, we turned right from the middle door and thus did not stop at the two stores on the south side of the building. The first was Ed Fraser's Hardware Store. Alert, friendly and accommodating, Mr. Fraser had a reasonable stock for such a small space, but he will be remembered for another reason: he had a young man for a clerk, who became everybody's friend. He was John Phillips, who went on to run his own hardware store, the one that still bears his name.

Next to the hardware store and just to the right of the center door was the real estate office of Eben Bodfish. I invite you to spend a little time here.

The office itself was interesting because of a window filled with fascinating things: scrimshaw, ivory-headed canes, swords for dueling and swords from swordfish, old ship's compasses, giant horseshoe crabs, Turk's heads, and even ship models, some of them inside bottles. In the front office sat Bill (William A.) Colby, at that time a surveyor and later the owner of the Martha's Vineyard Shipyard. Eben Bodfish sat in a back office behind a mottled-glass partition.

Eben made the office memorable. He was tall and angular, with a large reddish face and aquiline nose. His light-blue eyes were both hidden and magnified by the dark-rimmed "Harold Lloyd" glasses he wore. A former school teacher, his interest at this time was real estate. He was, in every sense, a character and he traded on his reputation as such. He had fun deliberately doing things that were fun for him and would provoke comment. His real-estate signs did not say "For Sale"; they merely said "Ask Eben." And they were all over Oak Bluffs, in fact,

## Eben Davis Bodfish

was his Pedagog name

*Now*

in Real Estate

*it's*

**"ASK EBEN"**

and found on every grain of  
sand

*His slogan*

**"LOTS FOR LITTLE"**

is said to have applied also when  
dealing out punishment to of-  
fending pupils in bygone days.

---

Real Estate all over  
the Vineyard

---

P. O. BOX

**OAK BLUFFS, MASS.**

over the entire Island.

The term "rough diamond" does not fit Eben, although he was both rough and hard. I can't begin to do him justice, but consider these facets. He insisted on a daily reading of the Bible at breakfast, plus passages from a book of "Daily Gems." He defied the convention of the period by selling one of the first properties in the Baptist Temple area on East Chop to Blacks, not because he was a crusader for justice, but because he didn't care, either way. He was a "slick" operator in the popular sense of the term and also in the opinion of many whose dealings with him had been unhappy. Many learned to their sorrow that his standard explanation was "You didn't listen to me; I didn't say precisely that."

When things got too rough for him, he would disappear. On those occasions, he would retreat to his one-room shack (8 feet by 10 feet) on the shore of Menemsha Pond. It was said that on such "holidays" he would take a revolver, a Bible and a bottle of whisky with him and would revive his spirits by running around in solitary splendor, clad only in long underwear.

He was faithful, after his fashion, to his wife, Elizabeth, but he enjoyed being charming to other ladies. This charm was shown one time in my presence when a lady expressed a desire for one of those covered dishes known as a "hen on a nest." Eben, at a great deal of trouble to himself, rummaged around in his barn and came back with a fine example. The lady offered to pay. Eben replied: "I have so few pleasures in my life that I hope you won't deprive me of the pleasure of making this gift to you." A gracious charmer!

He loved to drive, but was not good at it. He particularly loved to drive around the fields and hills of Gay Head whether there was a road or not (the fields hadn't yet become overgrown with brush). Often he would get stuck and would have to go to Jim Cooper, who had a team of

oxen, to get pulled out. So common was it that at times the *Gazette* covered the story in full simply by reporting: "Eben was stuck again."

A great story teller, he had his favorites written in two leather-covered notebooks that he carried in the two top pockets of his black woolen vest. Sometimes, when in mixed company, he would start to tell a story, reaching for one of the notebooks. His wife would say sharply, "Not that book, Eben!" and without changing his expression he would switch hands and pull the book from the opposite pocket and go on telling a now expurgated version.

On one occasion he was set upon by a woman who felt that she had been wronged (in a business deal, that is). Eben did not reply, but listened in silence for a time. When he could take no more, he pulled from his pocket a small rubber ball which was tethered to a long rubber band. He bounced the ball quietly until the exasperated woman went away.

We could spend a lot more time with Eben to our mutual advantage, but already this walk is too long. So I will leave you here.

It's getting along toward dusk and I will, in memory, go up the long flight of stairs inside the center door of Greene's Block and walk down the hall to the corner room where Grandfather is sitting at the window, watching the people in the street below as they slowly circulate up and down.

As darkness settles and the lights come on, Grandfather pulls a few coins from his pocket and says, "Why don't you go down to Jack Hughes and get us some boxes of ice cream?"

## A Word About Porches

Let me say a few words about porches, particularly front porches. All the Island hotels had big porches and there was a reason.

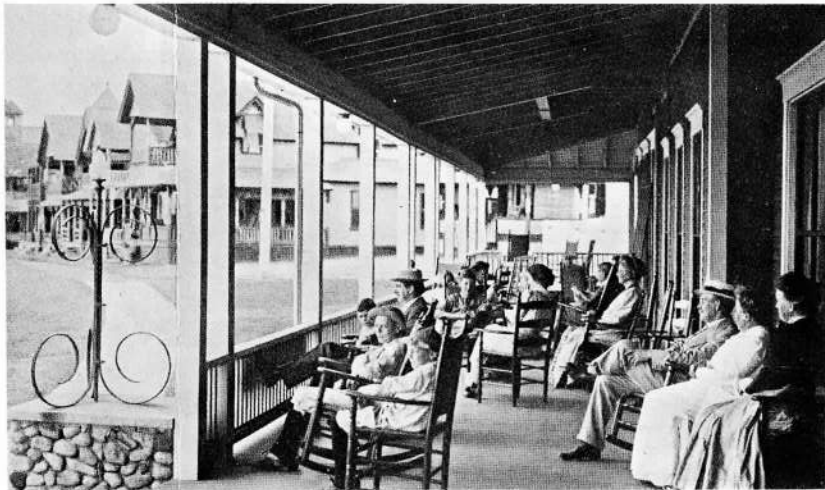
A porch is more than an architect's device or a place to store the broom. It is a social device. A person sitting on a front porch, be it at home or at a hotel, is inviting your friendship. He's not just sitting and rocking; he's saying, "I'm open to your greeting. I won't take it amiss if you tell me that it is a nice day; if you ask me how to get somewhere; or even if you lean on the rail and tell me your troubles." By the same token, he's saying, "I won't be mad if you pass me by."

A porch is an open drawbridge. It permits one to invite a stranger up to "set a spell" without being so intimate or forward as to ask him to come into

the house. For social facilitation and easy camaraderie, the porch beats the cocktail party all hollow because it encourages interchange between strangers in a quiet atmosphere that permits closer understanding and, if it turns out to be a mismatch, it lets them close off the visit without embarrassment. One merely has to be "moving along" or "going inside."

It's too bad that houses and hotels don't have front porches anymore.

Island hotel porches worked because they facilitated those new friendships that people sought on vacations. They inspired a certain expectation or even adventure. If you had nothing better to do, you could go sit on the porch and wait for someone to come along who might add to your enjoyment.



*Idyllic porch scene on a summer afternoon in Oak Bluffs.*



*The Pawnee House had porches that were real porches.*

Porches worked. And they worked for free. Now, hotels have substituted cocktail lounges and you have to buy a drink to meet a passerby.

I don't know whether people got less friendly and therefore hotels took down the porches, or whether hotels

took down the porches and then people got less friendly. In any event, the porches on Circuit Avenue greatly added to the ambiance and friendliness that obtained in those days.

**S.MacM.**



*Island House porch had a friendly intimacy to the sidewalk.*



## Chilmark's Christian Indian Cemeteries

by PETER COLT JOSEPHS

We all know about the Indian burial ground and chapel at Christiantown in West Tisbury (see *Intelligencer*, August 1959). It is prominently marked on maps and by highway signs. But how many of us know where the three Christian Indian cemeteries in Chilmark are, one having more than 100 gravestones?

In the Society Archives there is a lovely line drawing by an unknown artist showing the largest of the Chilmark Indian cemeteries. With the drawing is this description:

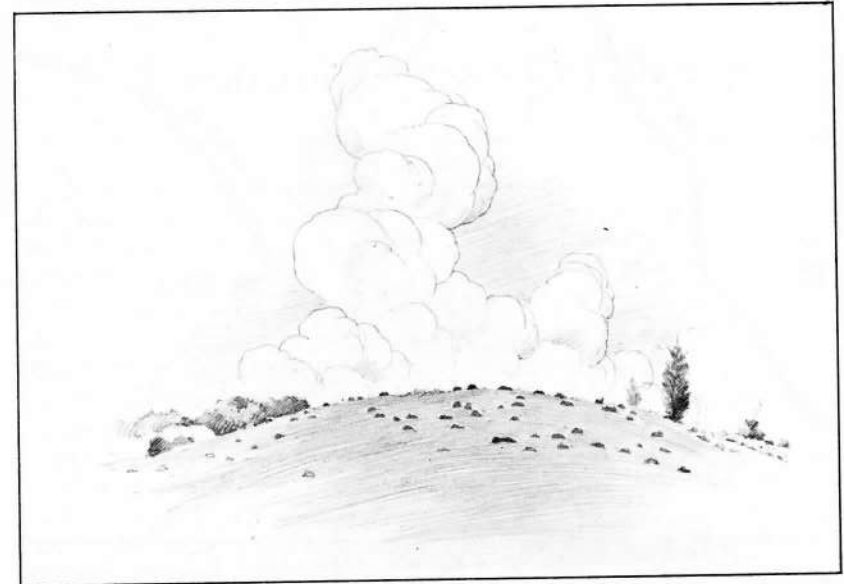
"Indian Burial Ground in Chilmark, near site of Old Congregational Church, on land known as the Church Pasture. This is perhaps the oldest and best preserved Indian burial ground in New England. Here are undoubtedly buried Sachem Pamchannit and his more noted son, Rev. Japheth Hannit, who was born about 1638 in Chilmark and died in 1712. In his early life he was made Captain and magistrate over the Indians; during King Philip's War his influence among the Vineyard Indians was sufficient to maintain their loyalty to the whites. He succeeded John Tackanash as pastor of the Indian church, a

position he held for 28 years until his death in 1712."

The drawing, reproduced here, provides an excellent view of the cemetery, looking north. There are at least 125 gravestones in the burial ground, making it the second largest Indian cemetery on the Island (the largest is at Christiantown). An enormous rectilinear "altar" stone stands nearby and the graves swirl around a central ellipse of prime low-bush blueberries. A stunning view of the ocean can be seen to the south from the cemetery which is in the Sheriff's Meadow Sanctuary off Middle Road.

The second Christian Indian burial ground, much smaller, is in a hidden valley meadow west of a dam across the Tisaquam River on Howard Hillman's land. There are five grave markers within the small fenced area in a vale of breathtaking beauty.

The third cemetery has fewer than 10 headstones and lies on the south face of a high hill and meadow on James Cagney's land, west of Roaring Brook. The last of the Chilmark Indians lived near here, as well as near Tabor House Road.



*Sketch of the Chilmark Christian Indian burial place by an unknown artist, who may have been historian Banks.*

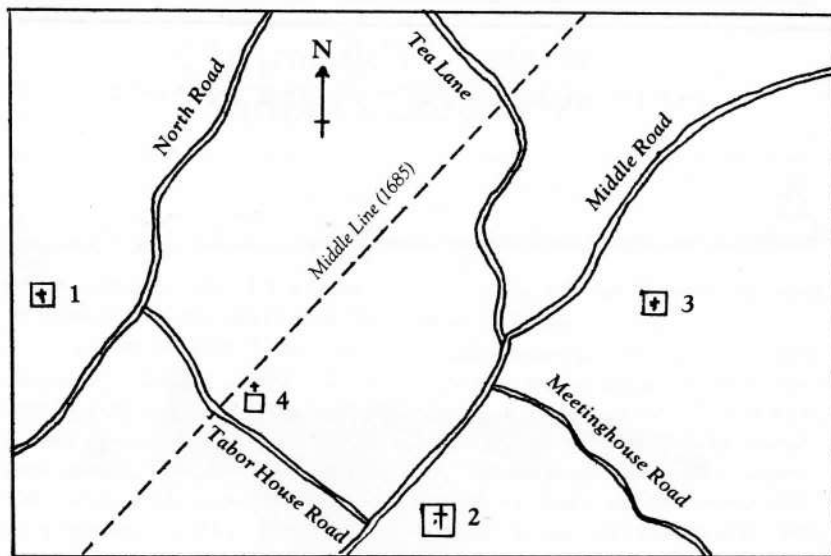
All markers are simple fieldstones and it would seem that the dead were interred in a sitting position, facing east. It also seems likely that the marker stones were placed just above the head.

The late Joseph E. Howes of West Tisbury once told me that he believed a number of "poor whites" were also buried in the large Chilmark Indian cemetery. According to Historian Gale Huntington, there were many Indians buried without stone markers

in the cemeteries.

The Indian Chapel was located in the same area of Chilmark, about where the Middle Line crosses Tabor House Road today. The Middle Line ran diagonally through what is now the Chilmark dump. Just behind the present recycling area there is a holly tree. The Indian Chapel was located just north of where the tree now stands, according to Sydney P. Harris who lives nearby.

PETER COLT JOSEPHS lives in Chilmark and has a deep interest in its history. He put in many hours clearing the Abel's Hill Indian Cemetery of brush and scrub oak, plus a thick layer of leaf mold this past spring in order to expose the stones and establish the line of sight of the accompanying line drawing.



Chilmark's three Indian cemeteries: 1. Five stones on hillside; 2. Large site (shown in sketch) has 125 stones; 3. Two stones in a fenced lot. 4. Site of the Indian Chapel.



Sketch of the third West Tisbury meetinghouse is by the same artist as the cemetery sketch. A similar drawing is in Banks' History.



## Tombstones Are Not Forever

A gravestone seems permanent -- it looks like forever. But it isn't. As with most things, there are deteriorating forces at work.

That is especially true for the delicately carved, slate grave markers from Colonial days (*Intelligencer*, Feb. 1979). Water seeps between the layers of the slate and when it freezes, the expansion starts the destruction.

There are other hazards. On certain nights it is apparently pleasurable to knock over the stones, often breaking

them.

Even more despicable, perhaps, is the use of these graceful carvings as targets for BB rifles. The eyes of the cherubs make, for an insensitive vandal, excellent bull's eyes.

Gravestones are historical, not only for the information they contain, but also for their artistry. Stones can be repaired and sealed against rain damage. This should be done. But what can be done to protect them from senseless vandalizing?



Thomas Cook (sic) stone was broken by vandals. He owned the Society's Cooke House. Ebenezer Norton stone is being destroyed by the elements, as the slate splits.





Eye of the cherub was damaged by BB-shot at Tower Hill. Below, another stone damaged by target practice. The eye again was the target.



## Documents

Jeremiah Pease, whose diary this is, was born in Edgartown in 1792 and died there in 1857. During his adult life he was very active in community affairs and his diary, which he kept faithfully except during an upsetting period of religious awakening, provides us with excellent details about the people and the events of the time. We have been publishing it regularly since 1974 and will continue to do so until his death.

He and his wife, Elizabeth Worth, had 10 children. One, William Cooke Pease, became a Captain in the United States Revenue Service (see Books, this issue).

Jeremiah had a major voice in the selection of the site of the Campground at Oak Bluffs; he was a stalwart in the Methodist Church, to which he was converted during the "awakening" of the 1820's.

He was Town Surveyor, County Commissioner, Light House Keeper, bonesetter, shoemaker and politician. He was clearly a man of talent and energy, with an unshakeable faith.

During 1847, the year of this installment, the Island continues to prosper with its whaling industry. The war with Mexico, which much of New England opposed, continues, although it has little affect on the Island. The Camp Meetings grow in attendance and the Island is on the verge of becoming a summer resort.

• • •

### May 1847

11th. NE. went to N. Bedford and Little Compton to purchase a horse.

12th. NE. cold, stormy. Remained at Br. Sisson's until 13th.

13th. NE. cold. Returned to N. Bedford via Fall River.

14th. NE. cold. Steam Boat could not pass the Sound on Acct. of the wind and sea.

15th. NE. cold. Returned in Steamer Naushon.

17th. NE. strong breeze. Went to N. Bedford after a horse which I bot. of Mr. Leml. Scisson on Saturday, but could not bring him with safety in the Steam Boat on acc't of wind and sea, returned with the horse.

20th. NE. Having been chosen one of the County Commissioners, I was this day called to act in that capacity and held a Court at the Court House of this Town with Allen Tilton and Wm. A. Mayhew of Chilmark, they being also chosen for that purpose.

22nd. SEly. Ship Vineyard, Capt. Edwin Coffin arrives from Pacific. 2400 Bbls. oil.

25th. SW. A very great number of vessels pass down the Sound, probably 200 sail during the day and night, it having been a very long Ely. wind.<sup>1</sup>

28th. SW. Jeremiah & Velina arrive from Bristol, R.I., having been there on a visit.

### June 1847

2nd. N to SW. light, pleasant. Weighed Bone for Ship Vineyard, 18,985 pounds.

14th. SW. foggy. Cutter Jackson,

<sup>1</sup>The wind direction, always the first entry in the diary, played an important role in the life of the Island, especially at Holmes Hole where vessels would anchor awaiting a favorable wind.



Capt. Waldron arrives. William comes in her.

15th. WSW to WNW. very heavy gale. I think the most severe I ever saw at this season of the year from that quarter. The sand from the plowed ground was driven in clouds before the wind so thick that the hills at the swimming place could not be seen at times. Joseph sails in the Cutter *Jackson* to visit the Light Houses.<sup>2</sup>

28th. SW. warm. Rec'd a letter from Lieut. C. H. Davis of the Coast Survey requesting me to set up and attend the Tide Gage.

29th. SW to NNE. little rain. Ichabod Norton, Esq., dies aged 85 years 6 months & 12 days.<sup>3</sup>

### July 1847

1st. N.E. little rain, fresh breeze. Attended the Funeral of Esqr. Norton. Service by Revd. Jesse Pease at his late dwelling house, his corps was bro<sup>t</sup> to the Graveyard and deposited under his monument which he had caused to be erected a number of years ago.<sup>4</sup>

Commenced taking Tide and Barometer observations for Lieut. Davis.

5th. W to SW, warm light. Steamer *Naushon* comes from Nantucket this

2Joseph, being Collector of Customs for the District, was also responsible for the light-houses. It created some friction between him and his father, Jeremiah, who served under his son as keeper of Edgartown Light.

<sup>3</sup>The Island's wealthiest man, it was said. He was known as "Old Twelve and a Half Percent," which in his day, unlike today, was thought to be a usurious rate of mortgage interest.

<sup>4</sup>See photos of monument, page 121.

morning with about 270 passengers at 7 a.m. Leaves for N. Bedford taking passengers from here, H. Hole & Woods Hole.<sup>5</sup>

12th. W. light. Went to E'Ville on business relating to the intended Camp Meeting.

14th. N.E. fresh breeze. The New Bedford Guards come here today in Steamer *Naushon*. They march through the Town with musick, a large number of the Inhabitants of the Island are here to witness their movements.

19th. SW. fresh. William moves his furniture and commences keeping house at Capt. Edwin Coffin's house.<sup>6</sup>

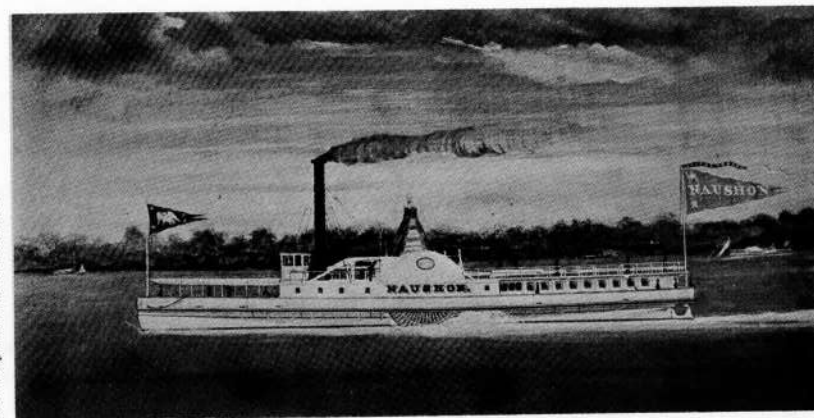
26th. S. fresh wind. Sister Mary Coffin, Daut. of John & Harriett Coffin, dies about 12 o'clock at night of consumption. She left this world with a good hope of finding a far better. She embraced Religion about 2 years ago.

29th. S. to SSW. light. Ship *Almira* George Collins master sails for the Pacific Ocean AM. PM. Funeral of Sister Mary Coffin, service by Rev. Thos. Ely at her father's house. There were a great many present. She was a pleasant child

<sup>5</sup>This was the *Naushon's* second year of operation. She was the Vineyard's boat, but was trying to cut into the Nantucket business, however, her 8 a.m. departure from Edgartown was too early for up-Islanders. After two years of losses, she was withdrawn in 1848. Could this well-patronized trip have been for a celebration of Independence Day in New Bedford? It was July 5th.

<sup>6</sup>William, Jeremiah's son, was a 2nd Lieutenant aboard the Revenue Cutter *Jackson*, stationed at Newport.

Courtesy The Island Steamers



*Steamer Naushon, built in 1845, served the Island for only two years, the enterprise being unprofitable. Jeremiah went to New Bedford in her.*

### August 1847

5th. ESE. cloudy AM. PM ENE. gale with rain, heavy storm, blows the corn down very much. Schn. *Teaser* of Ipswitch (sic) castaway on Cape Poge Beach loaded with lumber from Bangor. Schr. *Gallatin* Lieut. Maffitt commd. arrives from Hyannis.<sup>7</sup>

8th. SE. light rainy. Attended meeting at E'Ville. Br. Solomon Athearn attended and preached in PM. Sist. Celia Johnson, wife of William Johnson (he being the last of the Indian Sachem descendants of Chappaquiddick Tribe of Indians), died about 12 o'clock this day, rejoicing in hope of a happy immortality.

9th. SW. light foggy. Attended the funeral of Sister Celia Johnson by request of Br. James N. Luce and others. Br. George Weeks was there and took part in the services, it was a

<sup>7</sup>Could this have been the Revenue Cutter *Gallatin*?

solemn time. A great number attended her Funeral. She was esteemed a pious Godly woman for several years past. It was affecting to behold her aged Mother taking her last look of her departed child, she being the only colored person now living in all the region of what is called Farm Neck, at which place a very large number of Indians and coloured people formerly resided. There were a great number of Graves in Burying Ground where our Sister's remains were deposited, among the number was that of Harry, the coloured man who formerly lived with Ichabod Norton, Esqr., commonly called Old Harry. Steamer *Bibb* Lieut. Davis arrives on Survey Cruise.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup>Obviously from the long entry, Jeremiah was moved by the funeral of Sister Johnson, which probably was on Chappaquiddick. He wrote in the margin next to it: "It is better to go to the house of mourning than to the house of feasting."

11th. SSW. foggy, light breeze. Lieut. Davis takes his Barometer & Thermometer on board of the Steamer Bibb.

22nd. WSW. Attended meeting at E'Ville. PM. attended meeting in the Baptist Meeting House with Br. Solomon Athearn, first invitation for that purpose for 13 years past.<sup>9</sup>

24th. NW. Camp Meeting commenced and continued until Saturday the 28th. The weather was pleasant and the meeting remarkably interesting. No meeting ever held there was more so. There were 36 tents, no disturbance occurred during the meeting.

28th. Wind S. to SSW. pleasant breeze. Returned home with my Daut. Eliza, whom I trust the Lord has blessed with lasting impressions of good.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup>Must be the dawn of ecumenicalism.

<sup>10</sup>Apparently his daughter had spent the week at the Camp Meeting with him. He never mentions his wife in any religious context.

### September 1847

14th. SW. fresh clear. Mrs. Almira Wimpenny, Wife of Capt. Elihu Wimpenny, dies about 9 AM. of consumption aged \_\_\_\_.

16th. SW. light clear. Schr. Gazelle Capt. Howland arrives to supply the Light House with oil, etc.

### October 1847

7th. NE. cloudy. Bo<sup>t</sup> a piece of Land & meado of Jethro and Polly Norton called Ox Pond Meadow.

16th. Ely. light. Went to N. Bedford in Steamer Naushon. Returned same day.<sup>11</sup>

30th. Ely. light pleasant. Ship Vineyard Capt. Coone sails for the Pacific Ocean on a whaling voyage.

### November 1847

1st. Sly. light. PM E light very warm. Wi<sup>d</sup>. of Derris Norton dies.

<sup>11</sup>This was progress! It was unlikely that a day trip could be made in a sailing packet.

2nd. Sly. Ely PM. light very warm. Went to the neighborhood of West Luce to survey land by request of Geo. Luce of H.H. Returned, he not attending.

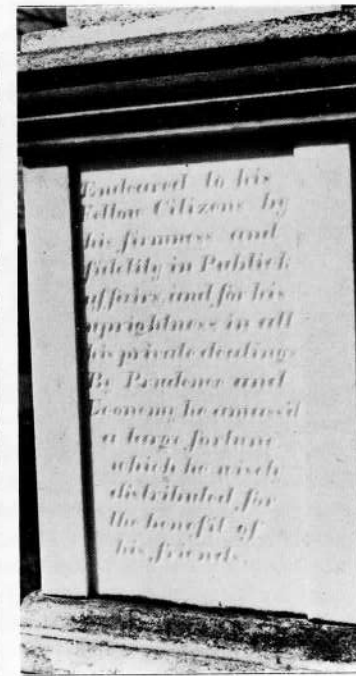
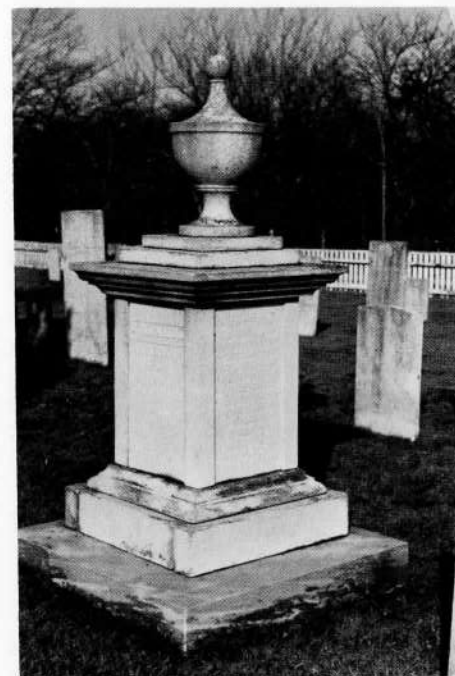
3rd. SEly light and warm. Attended the Funeral of Wi<sup>d</sup>. Norton at M.D. Service by Revd. Mr. Hedding and Deac. S. Athearn of H. Hole.

6th. NNW. gale. Cleared Ship *Spartan* of Nantucket. Arrives last night

having been wrecked at sea, lost fore top and fore top mast, fore and main top galantmasts and two boats. She sailed from Nantucket on the 6th of Oct. last.

8th. SSW. light cloudy. Town Meeting. Sirson P. Coffin is chosen the Representative to the Genl. Court at Boston.

25th. SW. cloudy light wind, little rain. Thanks Giving Day.



Monument of Ichabod Norton, which Jeremiah tells us, Ichabod himself had erected "a number of years" before his death. The inscription, presumably written by Ichabod, reads: "Endeared to his Fellow Citizens by his firmness and fidelity in Publick affairs and for his uprightness in all his private dealings. By Prudence and Economy he amass'd a large fortune which he wisely distributed for the benefit of his friends."

*Expenditure July 31. 1844*  
*\$70.00*  
*Rec'd of Wm. C. Pease for \$70 Paid previous*  
*to the date hereof twenty Dollars on account*  
*Jeremiah Pease.*

Jeremiah signed this receipt for \$70 in 1844. Apparently, his son, William, owed him some money and this was toward repayment.

# Books

## Capt. William Cooke Pease: U.S. Coast Guard Pioneer

By Florence Kern. Published by Alised, 7808 Maryknoll Avenue, Bethesda, Maryland 20817. 125 pp. Illus. \$6.95.

Here's a book that provides hard evidence, if any be needed, of the worth of the Dukes County Historical Society. It is a book that had its conception in the Gale Huntington Library of History and drew much of its material from our Archives. It is a book about a little-known national hero who had his roots on the island.

The man is William Cooke Pease, son of Jeremiah Pease whose diary has been published in this journal since 1974. His middle name honors his father's mentor in the Customs House, Thomas Cooke, Jr., whose home is now the Society's.

Our Archives have a wealth of material by and about the Pease family and the William C. Pease section is among the largest. Mrs. Kern, a member of the Society and author of many works on the early days of the U.S. Revenue Service, has made excellent use of that material, plus much more from the National Archives and the Coast Guard Archives.

Captain Pease, as Mrs. Kern lets us know in fascinating detail, was a feisty man, rather quick of temper, independent of judgment and, when

the need arose, as smooth a politician as *never* ran for office. He wasn't the son of Jeremiah Pease and the brother of Joseph Thaxter Pease for nothing!

His father-in-law was another feisty one: Capt. Valentine Pease, prototype of the whaling master in Melville's *Moby Dick*. His Vineyard "connexions," as they were then called, were the best.

His career in the Revenue Service, which began in 1839\*, covered its transition from sail to steam and, as the book's subtitle states, from East to West. He played a major role in the spread of Federal authority to the West Coast during the years of the Gold Rush. He and his Revenue Cutters represented what went for "law and order" in those days in the Northwest Territory, later the state of Washington.

A highly skilled mariner (he helped design cutters for the Great Lakes), he brought his vessels, some of which were old and tired, through many major storms and his journals, amply quoted by Mrs. Kern, give vivid accounts of some, including his trips around the Horn en route to the West Coast.

He died at age 46, much too young, of typhoid fever in Charleston, S.C., aboard *Kewanee*, his command. Many townspeople turned out to mourn him.

With this book, Mrs. Kern has given the Island a fact-filled, exciting sea story of a native hero who has been all but forgotten in his own home town. Captain Pease lived on Main Street, Edgartown, was buried in the West Side Cemetery, and was a man who brought honor to the Island

in the service of his country. He is a man in whom Vineyarders can take great pride.

\*For another fascinating story of Captain Pease by Mrs. Kern see *Intelligencer*, November 1982. Most of the material in the article is not included in her book.

## Martha's Vineyard: An Elegy

By Everett S. Allen. Published by Little, Brown and Company, Boston. 308 pp. Illustrated. \$15.95

This book, a highly personal memoir, captures accurately the very special character of the Island during the 1920's and '30's, according to many who knew it then. Filled with anecdotes, some embroidered more than others, it may romanticize the past too much, but who among us isn't guilty of just that?

So while it may not be a historian's history of those years, it is a very pleasant tale of the past. And as someone once said about those who write epitaphs, memoir writers are not under oath.

The book's title (while we're on the subject of tombstones) calls it an elegy, which the dictionary defines as a mournful poem lamenting someone who is dead. There is nothing mournful about Allen's book; it is a joyful, lyrical work in praise of yesterday. The author, who lived on the Island in his youth (the son of the late beloved Vineyard writer, Joseph Chase Allen), does not lament an Island that is dead -- his lament (shared by many) is that it is too alive,

too vigorous, growing too fast. He laments not an Island that is dead, but a way of life that is gone.

He tries hard (in a losing battle) to be open-minded about those changes. "I do not propose," he writes, "to suggest to you whether [the old days] were better or worse -- they were some of both. . . . life was different, being in every way close to the bare bones."

But a changing life style is not unique to the Island, it takes place everywhere and in every era. The difference seems to be that this island, *our* Island, is not supposed to change. Somehow, we expect it to be immutable to the laws that govern the rest of the planet.

A deliciously nostalgic account, the book makes the two decades before World War II seem like Paradise. Yet, the 30's were depressed years, even in Paradise. Little of that comes through in the pages of this work.

There are several references to our Society and some of our Council members are quoted extensively, their comments adding much to the book.

Allen's style is eloquent; his imagery vivid. He writes plaintively, "Where are the story tellers of 50 years ago?" He need not grieve, few of yesterday's (or today's) raconteurs could match his talents.

Evoking warm, pleasant yesterdays, Allen has written a book Island lovers will enjoy.

Unfortunately, so will thousands of off-Islanders who will immediately pack their bags and head to Wood's Hole to catch the next ferry.

A.R.R.



# Letters

Editor:

As you know, I have written a biography of Capt. William C. Pease so I follow the Jeremiah Pease Diary with great interest.

Regarding footnote 6 in the November 1982 issue: William was back home because Morris, the cutter he was assigned to, had been wiped out in the devastating Key West hurricane of October 1846. He was reassigned to Jackson, hence came back north. He had hoped to do some fighting in the Mexican War.

FLORENCE KERN

Washington, D.C.

*Florence Kern's book, Captain Pease: U. S. Coast Guard Pioneer, is now available in Island bookstores. It is reviewed in this issue of the Intelligencer.*

Editor:

The present organ in the West Tisbury church is definitely not the one Richard L. Pease admired in 1839 as you wrote in "Bits & Pieces," November 1982. It is much younger than that. Called a Tracker-type pipe organ, the present organ was custom designed and built for the church by Fritz Noack in the early 1960s. This was made possible by a generous gift from Miss Jane Newhall of San Francisco, who summers here.

The organ before that was an Estey reed organ with an electric blower, bought about 1940 with funds raised by benefits and donations. It cost about \$1000. It is now at the Chilmark Methodist Church.

The one before that was a rather

large pedal-powered reed organ made by the Aeolian Co. I believe my parents could remember when it was new (they were born in the 1880s), and I had the impression that it had replaced an earlier one, of which I know nothing.

I don't remember what became of the Aeolian organ. It was quite decrepit, so may have been thrown out, but I think it was given to someone.

Sydna White couldn't find any reference to organs in the old church record books and I can't think of anywhere else that it would pay to look to go back to Pease's time.

Wish I could help further.

MIKE ATHEARN

West Tisbury

*Mr. Atheam, a member of the Council of the Society, has helped very much indeed. He makes it clear to the Editor that one should never assume anything when writing in a historical journal. Our thanks to him for correcting the error in "Bits & Pieces," November 1982.*

*Can anyone track the organs back any further?*

Editor:

I enjoyed reading the history of Gay Head Lighthouse in the *Intelligencer*.

I would like to point out, however, that my father, Joseph Hindley, came to Gay Head as keeper in March 1950, not 1948, as stated in the article. The keeper after Frank Greider was a man by the name of Bettencourt. I don't remember his first name, but I believe he and his family moved to Edgartown after leaving Gay Head.

My brother and I have fond memories of our years at Gay Head. We moved from a home with all of the so-called modern convenience to Gay Head, which didn't have electricity, running water or indoor plumbing. My father drew the line at

the use of outdoor privies, since the one at Gay Head blew over every time the wind blew, which was almost daily. He complained to the District Commander and the Coast Guard installed a chemical toilet.

We waited a little longer for electricity and running water. Gay Head was the last town in Massachusetts to become electrified. This took place in February 1952. The whole town celebrated with a party at the Town Hall on Valentine's Day. However, the power lines stopped where town land ends and government property begins at the lighthouse driveway. We had to wait until late 1953 or early 1954 before the lighthouse was electrified. This came about when the Coast Guard decided to erect a watch tower on the lighthouse grounds (it has since been torn down).

The builder ran an electrical line from the pole down the driveway so workers could use their power tools. When they went home for the day they would run the line into our house. Needless to say, we had a field day.

My mother would do the laundry with the washer that had been unused for two years, out came the electric iron, radio, toaster, electric lamps, etc. My parents bought our first television.

Come morning, though, it was back to business as usual.

The house and tower were wired for electricity after the watch tower was completed and soon the beautiful old Fresnel lens was replaced by the present beacon. One of my chores as a teenager was to help my father clean and polish the cut-glass prisms of the

Fresnel and polish all the brass work.

If the Historical Society hadn't intervened the Fresnel lens was destined to be destroyed by the Government.

Before we were transferred, the house had been completely modernized, with all conveniences including running water which you couldn't drink. Until the day we left, we had to get our drinking water from one of the two fresh water springs in Gay Head.

We bid a sad farewell to Gay Head in September 1956, on our way to Nobska Point Light, Woods Hole. From Nobska, we could look across on a clear night and watch 3 whites and 1 red flash by. My father retired from Nobska in November 1972, after 44 years of service. He was the last civilian keeper on the eastern seaboard.

My brother Bob was on the Island and visited Gay Head some time after the house was torn down. Walking around the foundation, he picked up a brick and brought it home. When my parents built their retirement home, that brick was used in their fireplace, where it is today.

BETTY HATZIKON

Falmouth, Mass.

In January we mailed out to all members our annual dues notice and request for contributions to the 1983 Preservation Fund. We hope that by now you have mailed yours back to us, but, if not, please do it as quickly as possible. It saves money when we don't have to mail another reminder.

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## Director's Report

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Although the cold winds of winter have slowed down the pace of activities at the Historical Society, we are still busy, particularly in the Library where several researchers can be found each day either using our history and genealogy books or tapping the resources of the Society's Archives. In 1982 more than ninety different researchers used our facilities, most of them many times, and we assisted at least twice that many who wrote or phoned us with historical or genealogical questions. Fortunately, Doris Stoddard continues to go beyond the call of duty to answer in detail the letters that we receive with questions about genealogy.

Our efforts to help researchers have been tremendously aided by the purchase of a new copying machine. In addition to Mrs. Stoddard, other volunteers helping out in the Library so far this winter are Shirley Erickson, Maimo Meisner, and Frances Sawyer. Much to our regret, we have not had the assistance of Dan Sullivan in recent weeks as it has been necessary for him to be off-Island, but we are looking forward to having him back in the spring. On two occasions, Mrs. Erickson and Muriel Crossman, our Librarian, have traveled to Cape Cod to learn more about the operation of other historical society libraries.

An outstanding volunteer project this winter has been undertaken by Mrs. Walter Hitesman, who is working with great energy to clean and to reorganize the exhibits in our Carriage Shed. Over the years this shed had become so cluttered that it was not a satisfactory exhibit area even though we had made some significant structural changes. Now, thanks to Mrs. Hitesman, the Carriage Shed is well on the way toward becoming an attractive location for added historical exhibits. In planning this project, she has received much advice and assistance from her friends,

including Mr. and Mrs. E. Jared Bliss, Jr. and Mr. Joseph Mello.

As part of the Carriage Shed work this winter, we will be repairing our historic whaleboat and building a cradle for it so as to provide additional hull support as well as to give an improved viewing angle. The story of this whaleboat is an interesting one. Built in the late Nineteenth century by Isaac and Cyrus Norton of Tisbury, it never went after whales, but instead became a famous participant in the then very popular sport of whaleboat racing. Rowing against crews from such places as New Bedford, Fairhaven, and Mattapoisett, this Vineyard boat never lost a race except on one occasion in a race from the Island to Falmouth. All the other boats left from Oak Bluffs, while this one left from Vineyard Haven. Even so it was a very close race. The funds necessary for the preservation work on the boat are being provided by the family of Alexander O. Vietor in his memory.

In the Thomas Cooke House this fall and winter we finished some very necessary painting, and we are also pleased to note the completion of a project by Candace Hogan, a museum intern from Wheaton College, who has catalogued all the furniture in the house.

Throughout the fall and even into the winter, we have given tours to several groups of Island school children, who greatly enjoyed their visits. Several of them have been coming back to the Society to do research in the Library. We were also pleased on three occasions to provide our Library for meetings of teachers who are studying ways to improve the teaching of history in Vineyard schools.

As you can see, we have been busy, and we anticipate being busier, because each year our organization continues to increase its membership. At the end of 1982 we had 970 members--the largest number in our sixty-year history. We should note that out of the approximately 270 historical organizations in the state, the Dukes County Historical Society ranks about 17th in terms of membership.

THOMAS E. NORTON



## Bits & Pieces

Reading Stuart MacMackin's fine story of Circuit Avenue in the 1920's and Everett Allen's tender tale of his youth on the Island might give you the notion that life was more carefree then.

Not so. Life has always had its worries, we just tend to forget them in retrospect. The human memory's retrieval system seems to have an automatic filter that fosters "the good old days" mythology.

There were worries even in the prosperous years of whaling when the money was pouring into the Island and each whaling master was eager to own a fancier house than his neighbor. In 1857, the *Gazette* printed this worrisome dispatch from New Bedford:

"... the fashion of hooped skirts has added materially to the profits of the whaling interest by tripling the price of whalebone; and some fears are expressed ... that hoops may go out of fashion, or that steel or gutta percha may supersede whalebone, which has now reached an exceedingly high price."

Think of it, Island whaling master's having to worry about women's fashions! As it turned out, the worry was justified. Metal and rubber did replace bone in undergarments and hoops did go out of fashion.

□

There's a footnote in the Jeremiah

Pease diary this issue suggesting that it may have been impossible to make a one-day shopping trip from Edgartown to New Bedford before the advent of the steamboat. Well, it apparently was possible, as Devens, in 1837, wrote in his guide to the Cape:

"... from New Bedford to Edgartown [it is] not uncommon to sail in three hours and a half. The packets, though not large, are first rate and, with a smart breeze and favorable tide, will run 12 knots with safety."

You'd sleep well after that trip to the shops of New Bedford!

□

Island living had limitations in other ways than shopping as Richard L. Pease learned when he went off-Island to school. He wrote in his journal on June 13, 1839:

"This week I have been privileged with an opportunity of hearing three lectures on Chemistry by James Syman of New York -- a rare treat -- and, then, the protoxide of Nitrogen was inhaled by some -- what comical capers! What rare sport! How much we miss, cribbed in our 'island home'."

But Richard didn't succumb to the temptations of the city. Here's a poem he wrote about the same time:

"My Island Home, My Island Home,

Where blows the balmy Western breeze.

I would not give my Island home  
For all the bright Hesperides."

A.R.R.



*This lovely pencil sketch of the present West Tisbury church is by the same artist who drew those of the Indian Cemetery and the earlier church that are shown on pages 113 and 114. It seems likely that the artist was Dr. Charles E. Banks, eminent historian of the Island. The following information accompanies the drawing:*

**"Present West Tisbury Congregational Church, built in 1833, remodeled in 1866. The church was organized in 1673. The first pastor was Rev. John Mayhew, son of Rev. Thomas Mayhew and grandson of Governor Mayhew. He was joint pastor of the churches of Tisbury and Chilmark and preacher to the Indians. He continued his pastorate for sixteen years from the time of his settlement in 1673."**



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