Edgartown: A Town for Walking
A Walking Tour
Including a brief history, maps, photographs

Director's Report
Bits & Pieces

Unfold cover for map
Edgartown: A Town for Walking

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A BRIEF HISTORY

The first Englishmen known to have set foot on Martha's Vineyard were Bartholomew Gosnold and some of the crew of his ship Concord on May 22, 1602. They went ashore, it is now believed, on Cape Poge, the northern tip of Chappaquiddick. Captain Gosnold, on that day, named the Island Martha's Vineyard, honoring his infant daughter.

Although they seemed to like what they saw, they did not stay. Returning to the Concord, they sailed westward to Cuttyhunk, the most westerly of the Elizabeth Islands (also named by Gosnold), where they did stay for some months, and built the first English settlement in New England before returning home with a load of sassafras.

Thus Edgartown, or at least a remote tip of it, was one of the first places known to the English explorers of the early 17th Century.

However, the first official settlement of Martha's Vineyard was not until 1642 under the auspices of "Thomas Mayhew, his son, and their associates," who had been given "full power and authority to plant and inhabit" the islands of Martha's Vineyard, Nantucket and the Elizabeths by agents of King Charles of England. The grant had been made in October 1641, but it was not until the following year that Thomas Mayhew, Jr., "and some other persons" sailed into what is now Edgartown harbor. It was first called "Great Harbour," the name Edgar Towne not being used until 1671, when the town was incorporated.
That is the recorded history, but local legend tells of an earlier settlement. Some claim it was as early as 1632 when a small band of Englishmen, only four in number, left their ship which was bound from England for Virginia and had anchored off Cape Poge, "on account of distemper, which like a plague raged among the passengers and crew, twenty-five of whom died, or according to another account, scarcity of provisions was the occasion."

Those four passengers, a Pease, a Trapp, a Vincent and a Browning (some say a Norton), chose to stay here rather than continue on to Virginia. With the help of native Indians, they survived that first winter in caves they dug into the bluffs on the west side of the inner harbor. When the Mayhew party arrived, some years later, with official documentation, the earlier settlers were given some land and allowed to remain. The legend, which has had many advocates through the years, is known as the Pease Tradition.

Whether the earlier settlement occurred or not, the fact is that the Mayhews and their associates were the first authorized English settlers and they did take over the island. The name, Edgar Towne, was chosen to honor the only son of the Duke of York, brother of King Charles, who was childless. Edgar, a three-year-old, was next in line to the crown upon the death of his Uncle Charlie. The Mayhews, hoping to curry favor, chose the name, not knowing that Edgar had died a month before. It is said that this is the only Edgartown in the world. Had the youngster lived, there would be as many as there are Charlestown and Jamestown today.

The native Indians were not consulted on any of this. It has been estimated that there were about 3000 of them here when the Mayhews arrived. As far as written history is concerned there was little or no hostility between them and the newcomers. Of course, our history comes from the settlers, so we don't know the Indian version.

Gosnold, in 1602, made the first English landing on our island at Cape Poge.

Five generations of Mayhews devoted their energies to converting the natives to Christianity and they were very successful, being helped in no small part by various diseases the settlers brought from Europe. Not having a built-up immunity to these foreign diseases, the Indians died in great numbers. Seeing that the Christians were not dying, the surviving Indians were motivated to worship the white man's God. By 1674, the Indian population had been cut by 50 percent. By 1720, less than 80 years after the white man's arrival, the Indian population totalled only 800, a quarter of its original size, and was segregated into several areas of the Island. In Edgartown, they lived on Chappaquiddick (the place where Gosnold first landed) and at Farm Neck, near today's Felix Neck.

By 1764, the Island had 2300 white inhabitants (924 of them in Edgartown) and only 313 Indians, a small number of the total being on Chappaquiddick.

The white residents had done well in the first 100 years. While some were farmers, most had turned to the sea for their livelihood. Their real prosperity, however, was not until the early 1800s, the boom years of whaling. Although Edgartown never came close to having as many whaling vessels as New Bedford or Nantucket, many of its men did
crew, and command, whalers. As early as 1775, Martha's Vineyard had 156 seamen employed on whaling vessels. By the 1800s, more than 100 Edgartown men were masters and when they returned from a voyage with a full cargo, they were rich beyond their dreams. Most of the historic houses you will see on this walk were built for whaling masters during the golden era of whaling, from 1830 to 1845.

A smaller number of historic houses have survived from the 1700s. These houses are less pretentious and, to some, less impressive, but they are much older, with much history within their walls. They range from very small to very large, as you will see.

Edgartown is a town for walking. Its narrow streets, with old houses standing close to the sidewalks, give a strong feeling of history. If one can erase the images of the automobile and the power lines, it is not hard to imagine how the village looked a hundred, or even two hundred years ago.

After the Civil War, whaling went into a decline as petroleum became abundant, cheaper and better than whale oil. The Island was rescued from financial disaster by a religious happening, by which it was discovered to be a lovely summer vacation spot. It was all started by Jeremiah Pease, who had no such purpose in mind (you will see his house on your walk). In 1835, he convinced the Edgartown Methodists to hold a camp meeting in an oak grove he had selected in today's Oak Bluffs, then part of Edgartown. The camp meeting became an annual event, taking place each August and attracting at first hundreds, then thousands of Mainlanders. They discovered more than religion -- they discovered the lovely vistas, the sandy beaches and the blessed tranquility.

The word spread and soon off-Islanders, with few religious intentions, were building and buying summer houses in Oak Bluffs. It was not until nearly 1900 that these visitors discovered Edgartown and its stately houses. Gradually, the huge Captains' houses began to be bought by wealthy summer visitors and, to the benefit of all, have been kept from decline, preserving the flavor of an earlier period. Only a few of the larger homes you will see are owned and lived in by year-round residents. Today, most are owned by off-Islanders who come here each summer to enjoy this lovely town, a town that has maintained its sense of history.

It is hoped that, as you walk on this tour, that sense of history will be apparent.

Now to the Walk

This walk will take you through the most historical part of Edgartown, county seat of Dukes County, and will take from one to two hours, depending upon the depth of your interest. There are other historic buildings that you will not see because they are not located nearby, but the buildings you will see are representative of Edgartown's history.

Incidentally, some houses have dates on them that may not agree with those given here. Dating a house is an imprecise science and we can only say that our dates are our best judgement. We will be pleased to be corrected by more accurate research than ours.

The tour starts and ends at the Dukes County Historical Society, which is publishing this guide. The Society's buildings and grounds are open to the public. There are
many exhibits, including the 1854 Fresnel lens from Gay
Head Lighthouse, an 1852 Button hand-pumper fire engine,
old boats, various carriages and a replica of a whaler's
tryworks in which blubber was boiled down to extract the
oil. The Museum and the Thomas Cooke House have many
interesting displays of Vineyard artifacts. You should plan
to spend an hour or more there either before or after your
walk.

School Thomas Cooke House, built in 1766 for Squire
Street Cooke, a successful merchant, politician and Justice.
He served as Collector of Customs and the Customs Office
was in a front upstairs room from which there was an
unobstructed view of the harbor. There were no houses
between it and the water at the time it was built. From
School Street, you are looking at the rear of the house. The
summer kitchen ell and smaller attached shed were added
some years after the house was built. Squire Cooke also built
a house across the street.

46 Cooke Thomas Cooke House (the second) is across
Street School Street from the first, facing on Cooke Street.
Squire Cooke's eldest son, Thomas, Junior, married
Elizabeth Mayhew in 1790 and soon after, the father built
this larger house for himself, giving the older house to his
son and bride. The newer house has two end chimneys
rather than the massive central chimney of the old one,
allowing a central hall in the floor plan. The son, who stayed
in the older house, became Collector of Customs after his
father and used the same upstairs room as the office.

School Capt. Jethro Ripley House, the small house
Street across Cooke Street, was built in 1820 by one of
Edgartown's great story tellers, Capt. Ripley. When he
married in 1819, he bought the unfinished house, then on
Planting Field Way, for $100. It was being sold to satisfy
creditors. He moved it here and finished it, adding an ell
and a shop with some lumber he brought down from Maine
on one of his coastal voyages. Never a whaling master,
although he did crew on a few voyages as a young man,
he was captain of a coasting schooner that hauled cargo
along the east coast. An inspired story teller, he is the subject
of a book, Eighty Years Ashore and Afloat, published in 1873
and filled with his tales, tall and otherwise. Most of the
lumber he used to finish the house, he says, was given to
him in exchange for his story telling (but remember he was
a good story teller!).

37 Cooke Joseph Norton House, across School Street and
Street facing the Society entrance, was built about 1720
as a farmhouse on Vineyard Haven Road in what is now
Ocean Heights, making it the oldest house in this group.
However, it was not moved here until 1822, more than 100
years after it was built. The move was "by the help of stalwart
men, strong oxen and good Jamaica rum." Many Edgartown
houses have been moved as you will learn on this tour. The
main part of the house has hand-hewn beams, hand-split
lath and handmade hardware and nails. The plaster, we are
told, is a mixture unfamiliar to today's masons. The rear
ell and dormers were added in 1909.
Continue down School Street towards Main Street and the brick Court House.

School Ellis Lewis House, on the right, is said to have been built in part with lumber salvaged from the fourth Edgartown Meetinghouse, which was located in the West Side Cemetery on Pease's Point Way. It was in this Meetinghouse, the established Congregational Church, that Rev. Joseph Thaxter, Edgartown's spiritual leader, preached for 47 years. The new Congregational Meetinghouse was built in 1828, but the old one was not torn down until November 1846, which would date the house if it does, in fact, contain timbers from the old church. Ellis Lewis, its builder and owner, was a carpenter. He bought the old church from Sheriff Isaiah D. Pease, who had gotten it at auction for $122.40. This lovely house was a fancy tea room, with outdoor service in fine weather, early in this century.

The small house on the corner (37 School Street) is believed to have been built as Lewis's carpenter shop at about the same time as the house. In 1858, it was being used as a store. By 1898, it was listed as a dwelling.

Davis Thaxter Academy, the large private home with garden across School Street, was built in 1825 to be a private school by Leavitt Thaxter, son of Reverend Thaxter. The Reverend had served as Chaplain in Prescott's Company at the Battle of Concord Bridge and at Bunker Hill. During the early part of the Revolution he was with the troops during their long march down into Pennsylvania. He came to the Vineyard from Hingham, Mass., in 1780.

Young Leavitt, like his father, was a Harvard graduate and, after a spell of wild living (his father's term), he went into teaching. He taught in western Massachusetts and was headmaster of an academy in Georgia before returning to Edgartown to open his own school in this building in 1825. For several years, the school prospered with 40 or more scholars, at least one of whom came from Nantucket. It was still functioning in 1834, but there is evidence that it was closed that year and that Headmaster Thaxter, by now doing well as a lawyer and businessman, sold the school, but not the building, to David Davis. The building was sold to Capt. Alfred K. Fisher in 1839 for $3400 and he lived there after retiring from the sea. Leavitt, prosperous in his later years, built an elegant house farther along Davis Lane.

Davis Academy, diagonally across School Street, was built some time after February 4, 1836, by Davis, who may have bought out Thaxter's school business. Headmaster Davis, although coming from Farmington, Maine in 1829, was descended from an Edgartown family. The 1836 date is memorable because, according to Jeremiah Pease's diary of that year, "at about ½ past 12 o'clock (midnight) Fire was cried, the Church Bell rang, the People ran, it proved to be the Academy belonging to D. Davis, situated in the centre of the Town. The fire could not be subdued when the people arrived, it burned to the ground." This building was built to replace the one the fire destroyed. The Academy didn't last very long as Davis, like Thaxter, discovered there were better ways to make a living. He was a lawyer, State Representative and Trial Justice, apparently with a reputation for stinginess. His obituary stated: "that he was unduly selfish, he could not admit... people who supposed him to be thus selfish were very much mistaken; that he had given away thousands upon thousands of dollars."

After closing the school, he lived upstairs, allowing the first floor, with its large assembly room, to be used for concerts and lectures. The Edgartown Lyceum, an evening lecture series, was held there. Davis Lane, on which the house faces, was originally a footpath known as Pilgrim's Way because it was the shortcut taken from the harbor to Reverend Thaxter's church on Pease's Point Way.

Continue down School Street toward Main Street.

School Henry Ripley House, on the corner across from Street Davis Academy, was built between 1820 and 1830 and is better known as the Capt. Aaron D. Littlefield House, although it was built for Henry Ripley. Aaron, a native of
Maine, came here in 1857 and in 1860 married Betsey Stewart. It was about then that he bought this house. He served in the Navy during the Civil War, after which he joined the United States Revenue Service (now the Coast Guard) in which he rose to the rank of Captain. He died in 1917.

26 School Jared Coffin House, next on the left, was built by one of Edgartown’s master craftsmen for himself and family in 1823. It was occupied continuously by the Coffin family until recently. During some reshingling a few years ago one board in the sheathing was found to be 24 feet long and 26 inches wide. Notice the decorative cornice treatment and the graceful portico. The Coffin family owned a wide swath of land from Pease’s Point Way to the harbor and, as you will see, there are many Coffin houses on the tour.

25 School Holmes Coffin House, across the street, is one of them. It was built in 1829 by Jared for his brother Holmes, who was a mason and made the foundation (probably for both houses). He also laid a stone curbing, the first in the town. When built, this was the only house in the block on that side of the street, a street which was merely a cartway. Some time later, it was called Maple Street. This house also has had several names. It is often called the Hebron Vincent House. Reverend Vincent was one of the founders of the Wesleyan Campground at Oak Bluffs and wrote a two-volume history of it. In 1832, he married Mrs. Lydia R. Coffin, widow of Holmes, who died in 1831, and moved into the house where, many years later, he wrote his history.

20 School Baptists Church, now a private residence, was built in 1839, at a time when the Baptists and Methodists were rapidly increasing their congregations as they vied with each other for converts from among the Congregationalists. The building was designed by Frederick Baylies, Jr., of Edgartown, son of the last missionary to the

School Street, looking toward Main, when the Baptist Church was a church.

Indians on the Island. Originally, it had a boxlike steeple. This was Baylies’s second church, his first being the Congregational Church which you will see at the end of this tour. The Baptists joined the Congregationalists to form the Federated Church in 1925 and this building was converted into the Masonic Temple. It became a private residence in 1979.

Across the street, in the 1890’s, was the home and shop of Francis Pent, the town’s undertaker. “A full glass hearse furnished when requested. A night bell in front of his residence will be answered promptly.” The shop, in the open space to the right of the house, was connected to the second floor of the residence by a bridge.

16 School Sheriff Keniston House, next to the former church, is thought to have been built some time around 1730, although its history is not clear. It was bought by the Sheriff from Widow Pent in 1856. Her husband had died in 1841. If it does go back to 1730, it must have been built by some one other than a Pent, as there is no record of the family being here that early. The first Pent on the
Island, Anthony, came from the West Indies a few years before the Revolution. Widow Pent’s husband was in the first generation born on the Island.

Samuel Keniston, who bought the house from the widow, was a Tufts graduate and served as Clerk of Courts for many years. From 1878 to 1888, he owned and edited the Vineyard Gazette. Among his writings are many poems and one novel, The Islanders -- A Romance of Martha’s Vineyard, the latter written under a pseudonym.

The house is also interesting because it is one of five identical houses on the tour. It is interesting, too, because Widow Deborah Pent was the eldest child of Joseph Ripley, a Revolutionary War militiaman and Edgartown’s only avowed athiest at a time when religious fervor peaked with the arrival of the Methodist and Baptist evangelists. His self-written epitaph:

By the force of vegetation
I was brought to life and action,
And when Life and action that shall cease,
I shall return to the same source.

School St. Elizabeth’s Catholic Church is a relatively new structure. Originally, there were two houses on the site, one was the Ralph Cleaveland House and faced School Street. It was moved to Main Street and is now the church rectory. The other, facing Main Street, was torn down. It was the home of Edward D. Chadwick, the town bell ringer, who rang the Methodist Church bell before there was a tower clock. He rang it at 7 a.m., 12 noon, and 6 p.m., all year round, plus a 9 p.m. ring in summer. Mr. Chadwick was the father of Keyes Chadwick, famed Vineyard duck-decoy carver.

Main Dukes County Court House was built in 1858 and is one of the few brick buildings in Edgartown. Originally, it was a simple square building. Some years later, a tiny brick jail and a wooden dwelling for the deputy sheriff were built on the left. They were torn down in 1873 when a larger jail was built farther out Main Street. The two wings were added in 1955.

Turn left and walk up Main Street, which was laid out in 1654.
It was called Holmes Hole Road.

Main & Methodist Church, now called the Old Whaling Church Church, opened for services in 1843, although it was not completely finished until 1849. Construction began in July 1842, the culmination of the phenomenal growth of Methodism in Edgartown. In 30 years, the sect went from virtual social outcasts to being the preeminent church, one attended by most of the well-to-do. Like the Baptist Church, it was designed by Baylies, the last of his three churches. It has 106 box pews and seats 800. There was no organ in the church until 1869 when a Simmons Fisher organ was installed. The tower clock was installed in 1889, having been presented to the town (it is town property) by Charles Darrow in memory of his grandfather Capt. Chase Pease, a Methodist pioneer. The tower is 92 feet tall. Some beams in the building are 50 feet long without splices. Wooden pegs were used throughout. In recent years the Methodist congregation has dwindled and the building is now owned and maintained by the Martha’s Vineyard Historical Preservation Society, which converted the sanctuary into
a performance center in which concerts, lectures and town meetings are held.

**Main Dr. Daniel Fisher House**, the large house past the church, was built in 1840 for Doctor Fisher, who came to the Island in 1824 to practice medicine. He was born in Sharon, Mass. In 1829, he married Grace C. Coffin, daughter of a successful whaling entrepreneur, and he discovered that there was more money in that business than in medicine, although he did continue to practice on a reduced scale. He owned a whale-oil refinery, a spermaceti candle factory, a hard-tack bakery to supply whalers, the wharf that is today's Town Dock, plus a grist mill near the North Road in West Tisbury (then Tisbury). He was the founder and first president of the Martha's Vineyard National Bank, the Island's first. A visiting journalist in 1857 described him as "the tallest, strongest-built, healthiest and handsomest, as well as the wealthiest and most influential inhabitant of Martha's Vineyard. He is certainly a monarch to look at, and he carried the sceptre of the Island in his pocket (the key of the Martha's Vineyard Bank)."

The Federal-style house was designed by a Boston architect. Its framing is of Maine pine that had soaked in lime water for two years at Fisher's "Oil Fort," a walled area farther up Main Street, on the site of today's County Jail, where he stored his whale oil. In the 1920s, the house was owned by United States Senator William M. Butler as a summer home. The Senator's father was a Methodist preacher at the Campground in 1874 when President Ulysses S. Grant made his memorable visit and young William sat on the President's knee under the big tent, or so it is said.

**Main Vincent House**, the old shingled building behind the Fisher house, is one of the oldest houses on the Island, having been built in the 1670s as a farmhouse on Edgartown Great Pond. Moved to its present location in 1977, it has been restored and is open to the public in the summer. It is the oldest unaltered house on the Island and is well worth a visit.

**Main Capt. Thomas Mellen House**, next after the Fisher house, was built before 1840 by one of Edgartown's finest carpenters, Ariel Norton. Thomas Mellen, who bought it some years later, went to sea as a 16-year-old on the ship Omega in 1850. Twelve years and two voyages later, he was second mate on the Onward of New Bedford which returned with nearly 7000 barrels of oil and 63,000 pounds of whalebone, total value being $300,000, the Civil War making oil prices skyrocket. He returned to sea almost at once as Captain, master of the Levi Starbuck, which was captured and burned by the confederate cruiser Alabama. After the Civil War he made several more voyages, including one as master of the Europa, which rescued 244 sailors in 1871 when scores of ships were frozen in the Arctic ice, their hulls crushed. He settled down in Edgartown shortly afterwards, owning and operating (like many retired captains) a grocery store on Main Street in
which stories were told by the hour. He died in 1911, age 77.

Main Capt. Joshua H. Snow House, on the corner Street across Pease's Point Way, was built about 1848, according to local legend, with money that the captain's wife, Cindy, earned selling home-made candies. It is a story to take with a grain of Lucinda's sugar. Later it was the home of Richard L. Pease, historian, postmaster, census taker, Register of Probate, and Edgartown antiquarian. It was his research that was the basis for much of Charles E. Banks's monumental history of the Island. His daughter, Harriet M. Pease, who lived here after his death, was the outstanding genealogist of her time and she, too, was of great help to Dr. Banks.

There are four outstanding examples of early Island houses in this area. The Joshua Snow house is a full Cape, its twin chimneys and graceful canopy over the front door making it exceptional. To the left of it (113 Main Street) is a three-quarter Cape (sporting a one-story addition) and around the corner to the right of the Snow house, at 14 Pease's Point Way, is a half Cape, the basic starter house of Island families in the 1700s. On Main Street but facing Green Street (123 Main Street) is a duplicate of the Sheriff Keniston house on School Street. Together, these four houses provide a good sense of early Island architecture.

Cross over Main Street. The flagpole in the triangle commemorates Edgartown residents who served in World War I. Look beyond the flagpole and you will see, on the left, the large Shiverick house.

Pease's Dr. Clement F. Shiverick House, was built in Point in 1840 by the doctor who practiced here in the Way mid-1800s, taking over most of Dr. Fisher's practice. It was (and still is) one of the largest houses in town and its rooftop cupola was a sensation when built. The ell at the rear was the doctor's office. The inside of the house was extensively remodeled in 1875. More recently, it has been converted to an inn.

View of Main St. in 1890s, when the Daniel Fisher House was not white.

Out Pease's Point Way a short distance is the Westside Cemetery where Reverend Thaxter's meetinghouse was located. He lived next door and the site (the house is gone) is marked with a plaque.

Walk back down Main Street, retracing your steps for a block. The curbing along here was laid in October 1854, the first effort by the town to create sidewalks. There was, of course, no hardtop, just sand. Much later, the streets were surfaced with crushed shells (scallop, principally), giving them a lovely white appearance. This practice continued on many streets in town until the 1930s.

On the right you will pass a series of smaller old houses that don't get the attention they deserve. They were lived in during the 1800s by such great Edgartown families as the Luces, the Jernegans, the Smiths, the Marchants and the Vinsons. Dr. Fisher's son, also Daniel, lived in one of them about 1860. The old-fashioned front porches are remnants of an era when sitting on the front porch was a summer evening's entertainment. The large shingled house, just before the Catholic Church, is the Rectory which, as mentioned earlier, was moved around from School Street when the church was built.

Look down Church Street, past the Methodist Church. The first building on the right, a tiny building with
decorative wooden urns on top of its roof facade, was formerly located down Main Street as the town's postoffice.

Dukes County Savings Bank, Main and School Streets, has also been moved (and greatly expanded). The original building, in the center, was once a grocery store farther down Main Street. About 1910, it was moved here as the home of the Edgartown Daughters of the American Revolution.

Edgartown Town Hall, next door, was built in 1828 as the Methodist Meetinghouse, replacing a smaller one, on a different site, built in 1821. As Methodism grew, the larger columned church you just passed was built. The town bought the old church in 1849, housing the fire department on the first floor and using the sanctuary for a Town Hall. In the early 1900s, the hall was renovated to make it suitable for theatrical productions. Summer theater groups used it for a while, but when the local movie house burned down, it was converted to movies.

Most buildings on Main Street between here and the harbor were built in the 1800s. Most, if not all, have been modified to serve the changing needs of retailers. The large building just past the Town Hall retains much of its original style and is one of the oldest buildings on Main Street. Known locally as the Yellow House (the front, facing South Summer Street, is yellow), it was built about 1805 as a one-story house by Capt. Chase Pease, long-time County Jailer and early Methodist whose memorial is the Town Clock. Some years later, as Capt. Pease prospered, the original house was lifted and a new first floor built under it. The ell was built as a separate building in the back yard in the 1820s and was the first Methodist meetinghouse, tradition tells us. Later it was added to the house when the Methodists built their own house of worship next door on land provided by the captain.

In the next block, the small park was the site of Edgartown's movie theater until it burned down. The hardware store across the street was built in 1912 with lodge rooms for the Order of Redmen upstairs and the postoffice and telephone exchange on the first floor. It was at this time that the D.A.R. building and old postoffice were moved up the street.

The next building, the one with the graceful second-floor windows, was for years called Gothic Hall, because of the windows. Built early in the 1800s, it has had many uses. Bailies and Coffin, merchants, occupied the ground floor and Daniel Fellows had his law office upstairs early in its life. Later, Richard E. Norton had a grocery store and a harness repair shop on the first floor and his daughters ran a fashionable ice-cream parlor upstairs. In the late 1800s, the Episcopalians, who had just begun to organize in town, held services upstairs in Gothic Hall before building their church in 1899. Early in the 1900s, Capt. Jethro C. Cottle ran a fine dry-goods store in the building.

Next, on the same side of Main Street, is a very old building, the Desire Coffin House, now housing offices of the Martha's Vineyard National Bank, founded by Dr. Daniel Fisher in 1855, across the street in today's Edgartown.
The two stores to left of Gothic Hall were moved up Main St. in early 1900s.

National Bank building. Research by Jonathan Scott, architectural historian, disclosed that it was moved here in 1805 by Dr. Samuel Whelden from a site where it had been built about 1690 by Joshua Daggett near the cemetery. Like the Yellow House, it had been built as a one-story house. When it was moved, it was jacked up and a new first floor installed below. In 1812, Whelden sold it back to James Coffin, from whom he had bought it seven years before. Coffin apparently bought the enlarged house for his daughter, Desire, who had married John Osborn, mariner. Father Coffin, a wealthy ship owner, lived just around the corner on North Water Street. The walkway, which goes into a park, between it and Gothic Hall is shown on old maps as a “cartway.”

The corner building, housing the drug store, was probably built in the 1840s with shops on the ground floor and the United States Customs Office upstairs. Edgartown was then a port of entry for whalers and their cargoes had to be passed through Customs.

Across the street, the brick bank building was built in 1855 and it was the first brick building in town. Built as the home of Dr. Fisher’s Martha’s Vineyard Bank, it now houses the Edgartown National Bank, which took it over in 1905 when the first bank moved to Vineyard Haven. On the site before 1855 was the Capt. George Marchant house, where Edgar Marchant, founder and editor of the Vineyard Gazette, was born in 1814. He ran the newspaper from the second floor of the building (much altered) diagonally across the street.

Along this block on the bank side of Main Street are several shops that are outwardly little changed from their beginnings. All have long histories. Today, most are seasonal, catering to the thousands who come here in the summer. One that is used all year is the Benjamin Hall office, across from the Desire Coffin House. Early in this century it was John Mendence’s candy store with a pool hall in back.

Face the harbor and turn left on North Water Street, walking parallel to the water.
22 North Water Capt. Charles W. Fisher House, on the next corner, is modern in comparison, having been built in 1892. Capt. Fisher is said to have taken the largest sperm whale on record with the bark *Alaska* in 1884. The next year, he married Parnell Pease and she sailed with him to the Pacific on a whaling voyage. She was in her 20s, he in his 50s. A few years after she got back, Captain Fisher built her this “modern style house on the pretentious side with Victorian ornamentation.” But the bride preferred her old house, a block away, because from there she couldn’t see the water. She had seen enough, she said.

There are many Fishers in Edgartown whaling history, but the most famous, Dr. Daniel Fisher, who made more money from whaling than any of them, was not related to the local family, having moved here from Sharon, Mass. And he never went whaling.

Up the street a few steps is the Kelley House, on the right. It has a long history as a hostelry. John Harper began keeping a tavern on this site in 1748. He was followed by his son-in-law, Lemuel Kelley, whose son William continued the inn, giving it the name Kelley House. Since then it has had other names, including Marcy House, Great Harbour Inn and Sea View Hotel, the last about 1890. It became the Kelley House again when William Kelley, a descendant of Lemuel, took over around 1900.

56 North Water Capt. Thomas Worth House, now Edgartown Inn, across Simpson’s Lane, was built about 1800 for the Captain after he returned to his home town from Hudson, N.Y., where he had lived for ten years. His oldest son, born in Hudson, grew up in this house and later became Major General William Jenkins Worth, hero of the Seminole Indian War and the Mexican War. He also served as Commandant of West Point. He was buried with great pageantry under a 51-foot granite obelisk in Madison Square, New York City, after he died of malaria in 1849. The house was sold in 1811 to Capt. Leonard Jernegan, who
was lost in the Gulf Stream, along with 43 passengers and crew, when his schooner capsized in an 1820 storm. It first became an inn when Andrew Gibbs bought it in 1832 and named it the Gibbs House. John R. Norton married Andrew's daughter, Charity, and took over the inn under the name Edgartown Hotel. Among its best-known guests were Nathaniel Hawthorne and Daniel Webster. Hawthorne, it is said, was inspired to write "Chippings from a Chisel" of *Twice-Told Tales* during his stay here.

**North Timothy Daggett House**, diagonally across the street, was built for Thomas Pease about 1750. It is said to be the only pre-Revolutionary War house in Edgartown with a hip roof. When Capt. Timothy Daggett, shipmaster and owner, bought it in 1805, he ran an inn and a store here. The basement, facing the water at ground level, was a favorite hangout for sailors. Local legend includes this story: "It is said of the keeper of the store that he was heard to remark as he assisted in rolling in the barrels of rum and whiskey: 'Here goes your soul, Peggy.' Peggy being the name of his wife -- a woman of huge dimensions and a large appetite for such things." In 1840, a room with board cost $1.40 a week. As it has been, off and on, it is once again an inn.

Continue down North Water Street. The Public Library you just passed was built in 1905 with a $5000 Carnegie grant. It has been much expanded since. This part of North Water Street is among the most photographed on the Island because of its captain's houses. Not all were whaling masters, some being captains of merchant schooners. When the houses were built there were few buildings on the harbor side of the street, which at the time was a narrow cartway. Several of the houses on the left stand at an angle to the street. Legend has it that this was done so wives could more easily see their husbands' vessels as they entered the outer harbor after a long voyage. A romantic tale, but it is more likely that they were built parallel to the lot lines, none of which is at right angles to the street, perhaps because the street was a meandering cartway at the time.

**North Capt. Samuel Osborn House**, next to the Library and much altered, was the home of the master of a coaster, a schooner that carried cargo up and down the East coast. The Island was not a big exporter, but for some years there was an excess of corn and Captain Osborn would haul it to Maine where he traded it for cedar posts and shingles. The house was probably built in the early 1800s. In the 1890s, it had a four-story tower, complete with glassed-in observation platform, making it the tallest structure (steeples excepted) in town.

**North Peleg Crossman House**, two houses up, is among the most photographed houses in town because of its handsome doorway. It was built in 1784 when Peleg married Peggi Ferguson. He died in 1825 and the house was bought by Timothy Coffin, who sold it to the Marchant brothers, Frederick and Henry, for $470.14. In later years, it was known as the Donaldson house.

Across the street are two houses that, although newer, are of historical interest. One, 67 North Water, was built in the 1850s by Joseph Thaxter Pease, Collector of Customs, first Cashier of the Martha's Vineyard Bank and son of Jeremiah Pease, founder of the Campground. The other, 73 North Water, was the home of Capt. Ira Darrow, also Customs Collector (1860-61) and an ardent Democrat in a town of Republicans. To celebrate Ulysses S. Grant's
Presidential election in 1868, the Republicans shot off fireworks and had a torchlight parade along North Water Street. Democrat Ira stood outside his brightly lit house and graciously invited the victors in for a celebratory drink.

In the late 1800s, the dominant family on North Water Street was the Peases. One of them, Tristram Daggett Pease, lived in the second house from the corner (74 North Water) and operated a grocery store in the next block, across the street. The corner house next to him was an inn, the Seaside House, operated by George Smith.

Morse Street, which runs down to the water, was named for Uriah Morse, a North Carolinian who came to Edgartown by way of Nantucket. He was a shipwright and a cooper, trades of great importance in the whaling era. He and his son, Uriah, owned the dock where they built barrels and whaleboats, the small boats from which the whales were harpooned. Their boats, it was said, were "the luckiest afloat." The Morse wharf was a favorite of Nantucket whalers in the mid-1800s. They were unable to get into their own harbor because of the shallow water at its entrance and they discharged their cargo and outfitted their vessels here. The long voyages to the Pacific and Arctic required larger vessels which drew more water than the earlier Atlantic whalers.

Capt. John O. Morse House, the large home on the corner, was built about 1840 by Uriah's eldest son, John, who became a successful whaling master, although his career was brief. From 1829 to 1834, he twice skippered the ship Hector, returning with a record 2500 barrels of sperm oil on the second voyage. Starbuck's History of the American Whale Fishery gives an account of Capt. Morse's battle with a sperm whale that took "the Captain's boat in his mouth, held it on end and shook it in pieces in a moment." Fortunately, the captain survived and, from another boat, buried "his lance in the whale's vitals, killing him almost instantly." In 1849, when Vineyarders were eager to join the Gold Rush, he and a few others bought the old bark Sarah and, with John as master, hauled a load of Islanders to California. Unsuccessful at gold mining, Capt. Morse shipped a crew in California and went whaling in the Pacific. It was on this cruise that he died at the age of 48. The record shows that his death occurred on February 27, 1851 at Paita, Peru. However, the Society has the log of the last voyage and here are the last two entries:

"Sunday, February 23. Later part of the day the island of Gorgona bearing S by W, six miles distant. Sent in the Starboard boat to see about an anchorage and probability of obtaining wood, water and recruits.

"Monday, February 24. Commences with fine weather, wind SW, steering by to the SSE, the boat having returning with a favorable report."

Thus ends the journal, which appears to have been kept by Capt. Morse. Gorgona, an island of Colombia, is 500 miles north of Paita. Because there are no more entries in the journal it would seem that he may have died on Gorgona, if the February 27 date of death is correct.

After he built this house about 1840, he spent several years ashore buying and selling real estate, at which he was also very successful, as the scale of his house indicates. Originally, there was a porch only on the first floor, with a handsome balustrade atop the porch roof. The second porch was added early in the 1900s.
In 1886, one hundred years ago, there were five busy commercial wharfs on Edgartown harbor and very few houses. The bridge at right went to the lighthouse.

Below, postcard mailed to Mrs. Hertford Mayhew of Chilmark in March 1907 shows the waterfront from the Town Dock to beyond Morse Street.
Across the street, in 1832, the Pease Brothers built a grocery store on the site of the house there today.

**North Capt. Jason Luce, Jr., House**, set back from the street, was in line with its neighbors when built by Dr. Samuel Wheldon in 1838. It apparently didn't suit the doctor's fancy as on the following year he traded houses with Capt. Luce, who had just returned from the Pacific on the maiden voyage of Edgartown's proudest whaler, the *Splendid*. Capt. Luce was her first master. The house he exchanged with Dr. Wheldon was his family home (the Teller House, it was known as later) on South Summer Street. This North Water Street house was moved back to its present location in 1924.

**North Capt. Jared Fisher House** is the three-story Greek Revival house with a widow's walk on its roof. In summer, a mannequin patiently waits on the roof, peering through a spyglass for her husband's overdue ship. The house was built in 1832 for Capt. George Lawrence by Thomas M. Coffin, master builder. Shortly after (some say before its completion), it was sold to Capt. Jared Fisher and was owned by his descendants until 1961 when it was taken over by the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities. One story has it that the first piano to come to the Island was brought here by Desire Osborn Fisher, wife of Jared Fisher, Jr. To Vineyarders, the house is still thought of as the Bliss House because Eliza Fisher, Jared's granddaughter, who inherited the house, married Leonard Bliss and it remained in that family until 1961.

Across the street during the first half of the 1800s was the Gorham and Fisher Spermaceti Candle factory, a long narrow shed on the waterfront. Dr. Fisher later bought out Gorham's interest. These candles, made from spermaceti, a waxy substance taken from a cavity in the head of the sperm whale, were the finest candles available, burning clean and bright. With the development of whale-oil lamps and later kerosene lamps, the spermaceti candle business went into a decline.

**North Capt. Edwin Coffin House**, next on the left, is, except for the absence of a third floor, a virtual twin of its neighbor. It was built about 1840 for Capt. Coffin, whaling master and ship owner, whose father-in-law Squire Norton lived next door. Capt. Coffin served in the Navy during the Civil War as a Lieutenant. After the war, he sold the house and took up farming at Lambert's Cove, where his wife had grown up. Lt. William C. Pease, son of Jeremiah, and later captain in the United States Revenue Service (now the Coast Guard) lived in an apartment in the house from 1847 to 1849. The house directly across the street was the Bay View Hotel in the 1890s.

**North Squire J. Presbury Norton House**, the shingled house next door, was probably built in 1830 when Squire Norton moved to Edgartown from Lambert's Cove to become Collector of Customs. He followed Thomas Cooke, Jr., in the position and operated the Customs Office in his home from 1830 until 1842, when former headmaster, Leavitt Thaxter, took over. Tradition has it that there was an old small building, now an ell on the rear, to which the 1830 structure was added. When the Squire died, the house
went to his daughter, who had married Capt. Edwin Coffin and lived next door. Her son, Capt. Edwin Coffin, Jr., moved into the house with his family. Captain Edwin Junior had a long career at sea in whaling, coasting and exploring. He served on a merchant vessel in Alaska during the Nome gold rush. From 1903 to 1905, he was in command of the steam yacht America, chartered for the Fiala-Ziegler Polar Expedition into the Arctic Zone.

94 North Capt. John Oliver Norton House is on the water corner of Cottage Street. He was said by some to have been "brisk, fiery and tyrannical, the prototype of the Hollywood whaling master." He took his wife, Charity, on most of his voyages just to keep peace. His crews hated him, it was said, and would have murdered him except they supposed "the old lady would feel bad." The house is often called the Charity Norton house.

As you continue out North Water Street, you should remember that 150 years ago this was mostly open land, the edge of town. There were only a few houses, and behind them were meadows in which horses and cows grazed and hay was mowed. On the water side, there were no houses as late as 1858. Farther out, along the shore, was a large area covered by saltworks owned by Thomas Cooke, Jr., and others. Ocean water pumped into the beds was evaporated by the sun, leaving salt crystals.

108 North Capt. Robert Wimpenny House, the third past Cottage Street, was built in 1802 by the captain who was in China trade. It was said that he was one of the few foreigners allowed inside the walls of the old Chinese port cities. His ship was lost in a typhoon with all hands. About 1850, Capt. John H. Pease bought the house and in 1855 leased it to P. A. Sinnott, who turned it into an inn, the Ocean House. In June 1855 it was opened with great fanfare. About 100 persons plus the New Bedford Brass Band arrived aboard the steamer Metacomet (Sinnott was from New Bedford) to mark the occasion. The band paraded through the streets, ending up in a mammoth tent where the guests had dinner and danced until midnight. The Gazette described Mr. Sinnott as "a connoisseur in epicurianism," and urged its readers to try his supper, $1.50 complete.

Across the street a plank walkway led to the lighthouse after 1828. The lighthouse was built on a manmade island of granite blocks and was connected to land by a long walkway, or bridge as it was called.

Vulnerable to ice and storm damage (40 feet of it were washed away in its second winter), it was replaced by a causeway many years later. Slowly sand built up around the lighthouse and now there is a lovely beach there, open to the public. It is accessible from farther up the street.

The original lighthouse was a keeper's dwelling with a glassed cupola containing the light on its roof. The present light was placed on the site in 1935, having been moved here from Ipswich, Mass.

110 North Capt. Eric Gabrielson House, two houses farther along, was built by Capt. Gabrielson of the Revenue Service in the late 1800s. It is of interest because the captain's Chinese cabin boy grew up to be Charles Jones Soong, father of the Soong sisters, one of whom became Madame Chiang Kai Chek, wife of the Chinese leader after World War II, and another married Sun Yat-Sen, the Chinese revolutionist. The cabin boy stayed here often.
Old lighthouse, atop a granite island, was attached to shore by a bridge.

North Jeremiah Pease House was built in 1832 by Thomas Coffin for one of Edgartown's most important citizens. Jeremiah was the man who persuaded the Methodist Society to set up a Campground near Squash Meadow. He selected the site and, in doing so, began what is now Oak Bluffs. He had many occupations, starting out as a cordwainer (shoe and boot maker). Later he became a surveyor, a bone setter, Deputy Collector of Customs, Methodist lay preacher and, for many years, the Keeper of the Edgartown Light. He was the unpaid spiritual leader of the Eastville Methodists, going there every Sunday to preach and exhort.

North Capt. Joseph Swazey House, next on the left, is probably one of the oldest houses on the street. It is thought to have been built in 1766 when the captain married Susanna Pease. Joseph, a master mariner, and his brother, Anthony, are believed to have come here from Lisbon, the first of many Portuguese to settle here. They came from a distinguished family (their father was the Portuguese Ambassador to England), but were determined to start a new life in America. The house has had many enlargements and alterations, of course.

North Jeremiah Pease, Jr., House, next door, was built about 1855. The junior Jeremiah was, like his father, very active in the Methodist church and served as Deputy Collector of Customs from 1861 to 1890. An active Republican, he held several town offices.

North General Charles J. Allen House, which sits back from the street, is relatively new and is said to have been the first "summer house" in Edgartown. Known as "Sea Rest," it was built about 1890 by then-Colonel Allen of Washington, D.C.

North Harborview Hotel, also built in the 1890s, had financial difficulties for a few years, but soon prospered and, in the words of the late Henry Beetle Hough of Vineyard Gazette fame, became "one of the most important factors in the growth of the town as a summer resort." One of the buildings to the left of the drive was originally part of the Mattakeesett Inn, built at Katama in 1873. After the Inn failed, the building was moved here. Another house on the property was moved up from a spot just below the Ocean House.
Starbuck  Capt. William Cooke Pease House, around Neck Rd.  the corner on Starbuck Neck Road, was moved here in 1923 from the site of today's Edgartown Market on Main Street. It was built before 1850 by Frederick Baylies, Edgartown's best-known architect, as his own home and in 1853, when Baylies moved to No. Bridgewater, it was bought by then-Lt. Pease of the U. S. Revenue Service for $1875. He was another son of Jeremiah and is the most famous, becoming important in the history of the Revenue Service (today's Coast Guard). The house's ornate Federal style makes it well worth a peak through the shrubbery which hides it.

Now retrace your steps back to Daggett Street, opposite the Library, and turn left to head down to the harbor.

Dock Old Sculpin Gallery, at the corner of Dock Street  Street, is on the site of Daniel Fisher's whale-oil refinery. By the 1890s, it contained a feed mill run by the Norton Brothers. Later it was converted into a boat shop by Manuel Swartz, well-known builder of Vineyard catboats, fine furniture, decoys and other items.

The wharf, once owned by Dr. Fisher, is now public

Chappaquiddick ferry slip in the 1920s. Skiff on shore is the Yates ferry property. Years ago it was called Steamboat Wharf when the steamers from Wood's Hole and New Bedford stopped here. Chappaquiddick ferry, with its slip alongside the wharf, has a long history. Until about 1920, passengers were rowed across to Chappy in a skiff for a few cents. The best remembered ferryman was Jimmy Yates whose strong back and barrel chest made it look easy. Freight was floated across on a barge. There was a bell on each shore so passengers could ring for the ferry when they wanted to cross.

Dock Street (it was called Front Street) a hundred years ago was crowded with workshops rather than retail stores.

Heading for Chappy with a fare (and a broken oar) is Ferryman Jimmy Yates.
Among them were a blacksmithy, a chandlery, a marble shop where tombstones were carved (Hawthorne's "Chippings" was inspired here), a hardtack bakery, a wooden bilge pump shop and a lumber yard. In the 1850s, the largest buildings were occupied by Dr. Fisher's whale-oil refinery. The wharf at the end of Kelley Street was once a coal dock and the real estate office on the corner had a scale in front for weighing loaded wagons. The third wharf, the one at the foot of Main Street, was Osborne's Wharf, owned by Samuel Osborne, Jr. His whalers would tie up there to unload their cargoes and to be outfitted for the next voyage. It is now the Edgartown Yacht Club dock. Much of this land is man-made as the water came almost up to the street.

Dock Street when it was a "working" and not a walking street, about 1910.

Noontime, on a summer day, and not a stroller in sight on lower Main Street.

At Main Street, turn right, heading back up to Water Street.

The buildings along here, on both sides, have been altered considerably, but under the facades are skeletons of much older structures. Several on the left had to be rebuilt after a major fire, Edgartown's worst, in 1872. It was the biggest test the 1852 Button hand pumper ever had.

There's a story that goes with the fire. The firemen, all volunteers (as today), set up the pumper on Osborne's Wharf, dropping its intake hose into the harbor. In shifts, they pumped for hours trying to knock down the flames. Suddenly they ran out of water and one fireman rushed over to check the intake hose and shouted back: "We've pumped the harbor dry!" Calmer heads assured him that the tide had fallen.

At the Four Corners (the bank building), turn left, heading up South Water Street.

2 South Water, next to the bank, was built in 1825 by the Vineyard's best-known furniture maker as his home. His chairs, an adaptation of the pigeonhole type, are collector's items today. He managed Squire Cooke's saltworks out past the Lighthouse. Heman
Crosswalks were "paved," but streets were muddy, even at So. Water and Main. married the widow of Rev. Joseph Thaxter. When the town widened the street, the house was moved back four feet to get the front steps out of the road. The house next to it is another of the same design as the Sheriff Kenniston house on School Street and was probably built about the same time, around 1730. In these houses, the Victorian treatment around the doors was done much later.

3 South Old Hall House, across the street and now the Water Harborside Inn, has had a variety of uses since it was built in the 1700s. In 1845, it was a dry goods store known as Oak Hall. Later it became a boarding house, called Hall House, a name it still had in the early 1900s.

South Chappaquiddick House was for many years the Water quarters of the Home Club, a genteel social club for men of status in the early 1900s. It was built by Thomas Jernegan in 1819. His wife was the daughter of Rev. Thaxter and her mother lived across the street. Capt. Alexander P. Fisher, master of the ship General Scott, owned it for a while. It became the Chappaquiddick House when it was bought by John J. Jeremiah, a pioneer Chappy summer resident, who used it as a gathering place for residents of that island, waiting to be picked up by their own boats.

View of Osborne's Wharf and harbor from Home Club yard about 1910.

Directly across the street (Capt. Obediah House -- a meaningless name) is a house Lt. William Cooke Pease bought in 1849 when, his family growing, he moved out of the apartment in the Edwin Coffin house. Four years later, he bought the much grander Baylies house on Main Street, as we have seen. There is evidence that his mother lived here as a widow after Jeremiah died in 1857.

South Capt. Tristram P. Ripley House was the showplace of its day when built about 1850, the year the captain married Eliza M. Mayhew, "the beauty of her day." He was master of such famous whalers as Champion, Charles W. Morgan, Young Phenix and Mercury. Eliza went with him on several voyages. When he retired, the captain went into the wood and coal business with his neighbor, Capt. Alexander P. Fisher. In the 1900s, the house was converted to an inn, being run under several names, one being the Studley House, Capt. George H. Studley, innkeeper.

South Capt. Thomas Milton House was built by Water Thomas M. Coffin in 1840 for Capt. Milton, retired sea captain, who had become a successful merchant here. Milton was born in England and, it is said, came here first as a cabin boy on a whaler. Another story has him coming
first on the privateer Yankee in the war of 1812. Records show that he was here in 1808, aged 21 years, and on March 17 of that year he married an Edgartown girl, Jane Hammet Pratt, "one of three illegitimate daughters of one Widow Pratt. Mrs. Milton was illiterate, could neither read nor write, but . . . of fine character and superior qualities." His residence, at the time of the wedding, was Salem, Mass.

He was master of several merchant vessels and did well financially, buying several pieces of Edgartown property before he retired from the sea. In 1839, after his retirement, he bought a dry-goods store on Main Street and became, like many retired skippers, a storekeeper. He paid Thomas Coffin $900 to build this house in 1840, material to be furnished and hauled to the site by Capt. Milton. There seemed to be some rush about the project as the contract stated that he must deliver "a horse cart load at once."

Better known than the house is the Pagoda Tree, said to have been brought from China in a pot by the captain in 1837 and planted here before the house was built. The story, like many old captains' tales, is clouded. He is known to have skippered a packet between Boston and Philadelphia for some years before he retired in about 1837. There is no record of him being in China trade, so perhaps he picked up the tree from another vessel in one of the ports. The tree, incidentally, is called the Flame Tree in the Orient, not the Pagoda Tree. Its horticultural name is Sophora Japonica.

The captain's son, William, one of the country's first makers of ready-made clothing, became a very wealthy man with an estate in Jamaica Plain, Mass.

Not yet historical, the large house on the shore (29A) below the Pagoda Tree was built in 1934 by Vernon Foster. In 1948, it was purchased by the late James Cagney, Hollywood actor, who came here often until he sold it in 1952 and moved to his Roaring Brook farm in Chilmark.

South Victorian Inn, across the street, built in 1857, was the home of Capt. LaFayette Rowley. It has been an inn for much of its life and is a fine example of Victorian design.

South Timothy Coffin, Jr., House, next to the inn, is another house by master builder Jared Coffin. In 1828, after building this one, Jared said, "My house, built in 1823, is an improvement over Henry Ripley's (1820) and Mr. Coffin's house is an improvement over mine." It is believed that he was referring principally to the chimney arrangement, which allowed an improved floor plan. The interior woodwork of this house has been said to be the finest in Edgartown. Its graceful doorway and its portico with fluted pillars and balustraded roof are evidence of its fine craftsmanship.

South Coffin-Hobart House (on the corner) has an unclear history. It is thought to have been built by Caleb Hobart, who married the widow of Rodolphus Coffin some time after 1841. Rodolphus, who died of consumption as a young man, was the brother of Timothy, who lived next door. One report states that on the site was a "big, rambling old house" owned by Rodolphus's father, that was torn down by Hobart after he married widow Coffin and then built this house.

South Capt. Abraham Osborn House, on the other corner, also has a Coffin family connection. Capt. Osborn, a whaling master, married Eunice Coffin, sister of Timothy, Jr., and Rodolphus, in 1827. In 1834, he built this house and, according to Henry Hough, he bought Edgartown's first piano from Chickerin & Mackay in 1835. You'll recall that we have already credited Desire Osborn Fisher with the first piano. You can take your pick. When he retired from the sea, Capt. Osborn turned the house into an inn. One of his frequent guests was Capt. Raphael Semmes, superintendent of the Boston Lighthouse District, who came here to do business on occasion. Osborn and Semmes became friends. In the Civil War, Capt. Semmes, a Southerner, was master of the Confederate raider Alabama, which captured as her first prize the Ocmulgee of Edgartown.
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Abraham Osborn, Jr., son of his friend, the innkeeper, was captain of the captured ship. Small world, they must have said.

Notice the Gothic details of the third-story window, a precursor of the Victorian style, and the neo-Greek cornice and portico. When the younger Abraham retired, he continued to operate the inn, naming it the Ocean View House. Among his guests was Alexander Graham Bell, visiting the Vineyard during his lengthy research on deaf mutism.

John Coffin House, with the three white chimneys (across the street), is one of the most historic houses in town, despite its appearance. A portion of the house, buried by much enlargement and modification, is said to have been built by John Coffin who came here from Nantucket in 1682 and set up a blacksmithy on the site. He was a son of Tristram and Dionis Coffin, early settlers of Nantucket. The lot was purchased from Thomas Paine’s estate. Paine, Governor Thomas Mayhew’s stepson, was lost at sea in 1657, along with Thomas Mayhew, Jr., on a voyage to England.

When built, it was 24 by 32 feet with a shed roof and faced

A peaceful vista: View from Collins Beach toward Tower Hill in the 1880s. the harbor. It was only one story high. In the 1700s, the house was owned by various craftsmen, tailors and cooperers among them. In the 1800s, there were two other houses on the lot. One, on the corner of Cooke Street, was torn down. The other, close to the water near the wharf, was the home of Grafton Norton. Some time before 1900 it was moved to the corner of South Water and High Streets.

Turn left, heading towards the water at Cooke Street. The wharf in front of you was built by Grafton Norton in the 1830s. The beach along side is known as Collins Beach and is open to the public. The building on the wharf is the Edgartown Reading Room, built in 1902 by William M. Butler as a boathouse. Now, it houses a men’s social club that had its origin during Prohibition. Despite the name, there is little reading done here — local legend has it that its only book is the telephone book.

Take a few minutes to enjoy the view of the harbor. The high ground off to the right was originally called Burrying Hill as it is the site of the town’s first cemetery. Now it is called Tower Hill. The low ground behind the two houses on the beach was known as The Slough and is tidal wetlands. Turn away from the harbor and look at the three houses on the high ground above the beach. You are looking at the front of the houses, their back doors open onto South Water Street.

Grafton Norton House, on your right, is the one Beach with the hip roof and widow’s walk. Grafton was a wealthy man with ownership in many whaling vessels. He
and Benjamin Worth built the wharf in 1833 and the house was probably built some years later as Grafton had a house on the other side of the street before building this one. He was a forceful entrepreneur and made a lot of money.

They apparently built the wharf without obtaining the required beach rights from the Mayhews. A law suit resulted. It was an acrimonious dispute, as documents in the Society Archives disclose, but apparently was settled amicably. One Mayhew complaint was that Norton had covered a large spring that had been used for years to fill the water casks of ships and Mayhew demanded compensation for the loss of income from it. The first cargo of oil unloaded on the new wharf was in June 1834, from the ship Meridien. Capt. Grafton N. Collins, master of the Walter Scott on two voyages, bought the Norton house when he retired from whaling.

Collins Mayhew Homestead, the handsome Georgian Beach house on the left as you look up from the beach, was built about 1840 by descendants of Governor Mayhew. It is now the Federated Church parsonage, which is appropriate because it was the Mayhews, father and son, who started the church in the 1600s. To its left, until 1910, there was a much older house, one built by Governor Mayhew about 1670, after his first home had burned down. Sadly, the old house fell into disrepair and was torn down. This spot was chosen by the Governor as his home lot and it has a commanding view of the expanse of the harbor. The center house of the three, is not important historically, but it does have the Mayhew family burial plot behind it, as you will see.

Walk back up to South Water Street. The house directly in front of you across the street was a grocery store for years. Turn left up South Water.

67 South Old Methodist Parsonage, on your left as you turn, was the residence of Methodist preachers during the prosperous years of the denomination, when the huge columned church on Main Street was overflowing with worshippers each Sunday. It is now a private home.

South Mayhew Burial Plot, left, contains, it is believed, the remains of eight members of the Island’s first family. The earliest burials were without marked stones, as was the custom. These, it is believed, include Gov. Thomas Mayhew and his second wife, Jane. His only son, Thomas Jr., was lost at sea. It is thought that the Governor’s favorite daughter, Hannah, is buried here. Others are the Governor’s grandson, Matthew, and his wife, Mary. Three stones identify the other three: great-grandson Matthew, his wife, Anna, and their son, Matthew. There is evidence that the Governor and his wife were buried under the granite boulder barely protruding above the surface nearest the sidewalk. Other Edgartown residents of that period were buried on Burying Hill, now Tower Hill, but the Mayhews had their own plot, befitting their “first family” status.

75 South Mayhew Parsonage, just past the graves, is the same handsome house you saw, more impressively, from the beach. The open space, across which is a lovely view of the harbor, is approximately where the old Governor Mayhew House stood before it was torn down in 1910.
Capt. Valentine Pease House, across Water Street, is often called the Moby Dick house because Capt. Pease is believed to have been the prototype for Captain Ahab, the tyrannical master in Herman Melville's novel, Moby Dick. Pease, master of the Acushnet, the whaler on which Melville sailed as a green hand in 1841, built the house between 1822 and 1836. The captain's reputation was apparently deserved. In November 1841, the Acushnet put into Patia, Peru and "her crew of 26 men stormed ashore. After three days of fighting in the streets and other disruptions," depositions were taken of the crewmen about the ill treatment by Capt. Pease. "One of the crewmen to declare that Captain Pease was not humanely treating his crew was Herman Melville," according to the report of the U.S. Consul there.

Joseph Allen Athearn House, the large house with the brick drive and facing the harbor, was owned by one of the few Athearns in Edgartown. The Athearn family is of great historical importance to the Island, but most of them lived up-Island. It played a key role in a 1673 "rebellion" against the Mayhew rule, a rebellion which was squelched. Joseph, a carpenter, was born in Tisbury, but moved to Edgartown when he married Susan Coffin in 1832. It is believed that the house dates back to that time. Besides being an Athearn, Joseph is memorable by having been killed by a lightning bolt at Main and Green Streets in 1867 as he returned from Dr. Fisher's "Oil Fort," where he apparently worked.

Nunnepeog House, last on the left before the open space, was originally sited where the garage and brick drive of the Athearn house are today. It is not certain who built it, some say Joseph Athearn. In 1858, it was lived in by Edmund Bradley, retired sea captain, who is thought to have run a store there. It became well known, in the 1930s, when Louise Meikleham opened her shop, the Seagull and the Whale, in it, selling homemade jams, jellys and breads. At the time, her father who owned the Athearn house, was, like others, having financial problems in the Depression. The Nunnepeog was moved to its present site about 1950.

Old Grafton Norton House, the large shingled house across the street, was also moved, but about 100 years before. It originally was located near Grafton Norton's Wharf and was Grafton's home before he built his new house on Collins Beach. It is not clear when it was moved, but it was still in its original location in 1848.

Capt. Rufus Pease House, the large yellow house at the corner of Dunham Road, is notable not only for its beauty, but also for its intricate and handsome fence, which is well worth examining. The house is believed to have been built by Edward Worth in about 1838. Capt. Pease was master of the ship Awashonks of Falmouth on two very successful voyages bringing a total of 4300 barrels of sperm oil. After the first voyage in 1840 he bought the house for $1650. In 1865, he was appointed Commissioner of Wrecks and Shipwrecked Goods by Gov. John Andrew.

The lowland between the street and the harbor was called The Slough and extended almost to today's School Street at high tide. In the 1600s, South Water Street did not run through...
because at high water it was virtually impassable. For that reason Pease's Point Way, at the top of the hill, became the main thoroughfare from Katama. This was considered sort of waste land and in the late 1600s there was a tannery on its shore.

Retrace your steps back along South Water Street, remembering that this was Governor Mayhew's homestead when the settlers first came.

Before you get to Cooke Street notice the shingled house (70 South Water) on the left. It is the same design we have seen so often on this tour.

Continue to Davis Lane, the street beyond Cooke Street. Turn left and proceed to South Summer Street.

Davis Lane, originally Pilgrim's Alley, was also known as Cross Street in the 1890s. Today's name apparently honors David Davis, headmaster and judge.

33 South Capt. Jared J. Jernegan House, on the corner of Summer Street opposite the Gazette office, was the home of another famous whaling master. Jared started as a cabin boy at age 13 and by the time he was 26 had been made captain. He married the daughter of Capt. Jethro Ripley and she, along with their daughter, accompanied him on at least one of his voyages. The daughter, Laura, kept a journal that gives an interesting child's view of whaling. In 1862, Capt. Jernegan survived the loss of his ship Erie in a hurricane off Cape Horn. He retired to this house, his birthplace, in 1889. The four linden trees in front were planted by him in 1861.

34 South Capt Benjamin Smith House, the Gazette office, was owned by a military captain, not a whaler. He commanded a company of militia on the Island during the Revolutionary War and later was County Sheriff and Town Clerk. Two of his sons were sea captains. His wife was Love Coffin, which is probably why his house is here. The Coffins owned a broad sweep of land from the harbor back to Pease's Point Way and most of the oldest houses were built by members of the family. The Gazette moved into the house in 1939 and has done much to preserve its antiquity.

Turn right and head towards Main Street.

27 South Samuel Osborne, Jr., House, now the Charlotte Summer Inn, was built in 1865 for one of Edgartown's most successful businessmen, Sam Osborne. He owned and operated the principal wharf in town at the foot of Main Street (today's Yacht Club dock) and several buildings on Main Street as well. He was agent and owner of various whaling vessels. A leading politician, he represented the Island at the State House, was Sheriff of Dukes County,
and a member of Governor Andrew’s Council in 1863–64. A Republican, he was an ardent supporter of Ulysses S. Grant. When Grant was elected President, the parade started here and the Gazette wrote:

“Hon. S. Osborne’s house was lighted in every window from the cupola down and from its architectural form presented a splendid and imposing appearance. In front, between the pillars of the piazza, Chinese lanterns were suspended. Over the archway to the entrance the pillars were draped in red, white and blue . . . across the street were suspended three or four large flags.”

He didn’t always back a winner, however. He was a major financial supporter of the Martha’s Vineyard Railroad and the Katama development of the 1870s, losing a great deal of money on both. His house, now a lovely inn, has been a store at various periods.

South J. Coffin House, across the street, now part of the Summer Charlotte Inn, is believed to have been built in the early 1700s. It is another of many Coffin houses in this part of town.

Turn around and walk back toward the church. The large house

Capt. Luce House was popular with boarders as the Teller House in the 1920s.

on the right, (40 South Summer) was for years a popular rooming house, the Teller House, where many summer visitors stayed.

South Capt. Jason Luce, Sr., House, known as the Summer Teller House in the early 1900s, was built by Capt. Luce in about 1798. The house was inherited by his son, Jason, Jr., also a whaling master. As we have seen, son Jason, returning from his voyage on the Splendid (as master), swapped this house in 1839 for the brand-new house built by Dr. Samuel Whelden on North Water Street. The doctor, a prominent Baptist and first senior Warden of Edgartown’s Masonic Lodge, perhaps thought this more central location would be better for his practice.

South Capt. Obed Fisher House, next door, is one of Summer five identical houses on this tour. Capt. Fisher was a pilot who steered vessels safely through the treacherous shoals of Nantucket and Vineyard Sounds. He was married in 1801 and bought the house and land from Jonathan Pease. In the following years, he bought up much of the land around his house and in 1828 sold it to the building committee of the Congregational Church for $100 the lot on which the church now stands.
The Congregational Church dominated South Summer St. in the mid-1800s.

South Federated Church, formerly the Congregational, Summer was the first church designed by Frederick Baylies, Jr., and, to many, it is his best. Notice the woodwork in the steeple and the graceful windows above the doors. The entrances face Main Street as, when the church was built, there were few buildings, if any, between here and Main Street. There was no Summer Street, the only street being behind the church, Meetinghouse Way, leading from the harbor to the old meetinghouse at the cemetery (today’s Cooke Street). There were few houses in the vicinity, Obed Fisher’s being the nearest. It was a lovely open setting for this splendid building. The steeple has the strong spiritual quality very much needed at a time when the denomination was being fragmented by the Baptists and Methodists. Only a handful of traditionalists stayed with the church, boldly investing in this huge edifice. For years, they had difficulty selling the pews, which seat 400 (and filling them too). The interior is a delightfully plain, Puritanic sanctuary. The Hook and Hastings organ, a gift of Allen Coffin, was installed in 1841. He bought it second hand from the Old North Church in Boston. The wall clock, which still works, was donated in 1840 by the Ingraham Clock Company. Alongside the entrance is an old schoolhouse, moved here in 1850, to serve as the parish house. It was enlarged in 1858.

It is fitting that the tour ends here because this church goes back to the Island’s beginnings, having been founded by Gov. Thomas Mayhew and his son. This is the Fifth Meetinghouse the church has had. After its fragmentation,
the church seemed destined to collapse, but it has survived, the only one of Edgartown's three early churches to do so. The Baptist Church is now a private home and the Methodist Church is a Center for the Performing Arts, although services are held in the vestry. But this glorious building with its inspirational steeple, the oldest church in Edgartown, continues to hold services every Sunday morning. It is worth a visit.

Turn right on Cooke Street, once Meetinghouse Way, and you are back at the Dukes County Historical Society where the tour began. If you have not already toured the Thomas Cooke House you should do so. It is a splendid example of a Colonial house.

Acknowledgements

The historical data included in this tour guide came from many sources, all of them preserved in the Archives of the Dukes County Historical Society. This is an enlargement of a walking tour originally prepared by Jay Ryan while working at the Society in the summer of 1975. It is impossible to mention all the sources that were used by him and by the present author, but our thanks go to each of them, many of whom are no longer here to accept our gratitude.

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Director's Report

By this time you should have received your guest tickets for use this summer, a reminder that June 17th, when the Cooke House opens, is not far off.

On May 20th we will sponsor a bus trip to New Bedford to visit both a new and an old museum. The 1843 Rotch-Jones-Duff House was only recently opened and seeing the restoration of its gardens and greenhouse by the Buzzards Bay Garden Club and the careful interior work in progress should be a special aspect of the tour. A visit to the Old Whaling Museum is scheduled for the afternoon.

Once again we will have a Sheep-to-Shawl demonstration by the Island's Nootse Fibre Guild. Tentatively scheduled for Saturday, June 13th, it will be confirmed by ads and posters. Our 18th Century loom and other items related to weaving will be on view. This will be an interesting event for the whole family.

Joanne Coffin Clark, who joined the staff in January as Membership Secretary, has been very busy, thanks to the many members who have been prompt in sending in their dues. We are ahead of last year in membership dues and contributions to the Preservation Fund. Your gifts have made it possible for us to have had work done on an oil portrait and a pencil drawing and to schedule several other objects for work later in the year. The painting is of Amanda Vincent Mayhew and dates from the 1830s. The drawing of three whaleships, including the Europa, was done by Walter S. Osborn in 1874, at age 15, and is the gift of Mrs. Thomas C. Crosby. Three more rooms in the Cooke House have been painted, our fence repaired and the handsome Edgartown street lamp is now in place at the School Street entrance, a gift of Mrs. Ward Berry.

We continue to be grateful to volunteers for their many contributions. Sam Carroll, who has a large collection of Vineyard postcards of his own, is putting ours into more useful order and Dr. Louise Gurren has been using her training in linguistics to examine and catalog a large collection of material in the Warner Gockin collection. This year we will begin a new volunteer program of staffing the Gatehouse and appreciate the help that has already been offered.

The summer promises to be busy and we hope you will find time to visit the Society for historical or genealogical research, to view the exhibits, or to attend a special event. Be sure to mark your calendar for our annual meeting on August 18th.

MARIAN R. HALPERIN
Bits & Pieces

EVERYBODY loves a good story - that’s why good stories grow into “history.” Even those who hesitate to enshrine them keep them alive with the euphemism: “Local tradition has it that . . .” It has a nice ring to it, but it avoids the issue.

Our Island has many such stories. Should we strengthen them by repetition? Or, lacking proof, should we lay them to rest, taking some of the sparkle out of our “history”?

Research into Edgartown’s old houses brought this to mind.

Take the story that Capt. Joshua Snow’s house was paid for by money his wife, Lucinda, made selling her candies. If true, she must have sold a lot of candy! The captain owned land and buildings on Chappaquiddick, a comfortable corner pew in the Congregational Church, a boat or two, part interest in a local store, plus his lovely house filled with furniture. The inventory of his estate filled four pages. So much was involved that the Probate Court was asked to rule on the validity of his will. It seems that he had deliberately destroyed his last will, but the court (Justice Hebron Vincent) ruled that he was deranged when he did it. A copy of the destroyed will was produced by the heir, his nephew.

The captain’s hard work and good management would seem maligned by the story of Lucinda’s candy selling.

Take the famed Pagoda Tree - a story enshrined in Island lore. Did Captain Milton really bring it from China? We have no evidence he was in China trade. Wish we did.

Then there is the hoary explanation for the way some houses on North Water Street are angled to the street. We’ve all told the story: It was so wives could see their husbands’ vessels returning home more easily. It seems unlikely. The houses that face more towards the outer harbor are the ones that are set, quite normally, parallel to the lot lines. The ones that are askew actually face more the other way, down-harbor. Must we throw out that lovely story?

At the Society we have stories of our own that we hated to give up. One explained why the floors in the Cooke House slant downward from the central chimney. The house, we used to explain, was built by ship’s carpenters and that was the way they built decks so the water would run out through the scuppers. So our floors slant. Good story, but not true. The floors slant because the central chimney rests on a broad, deep foundation that hasn’t settled as much as the perimeter foundation which is narrower and shallower. As the outer walls settled more, the floors took on a slant.

How often have you heard that Dr. Daniel Fisher, our wealthy oil baron, supplied all the nation’s lighthouses with oil? Not true. He sold some oil to the Lighthouse Service, but so did others. His candle factory is said to have been the largest in the world. We have no evidence to support that either.

Wish we did. It doesn’t seem fair to have to give up those good stories!

A.R.R.