

The Journal of Martha's Vineyard and the Elizabeth Islands History

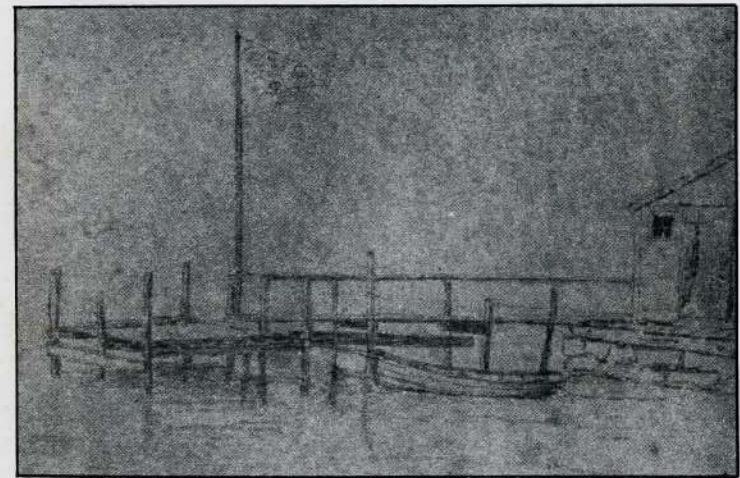


THE DUKES COUNTY INTELLIGENCER

VOL. 28, NO. 2

NOVEMBER 1986

From Laura Jernegan's Sketch Book



The first Edgartown Yacht Club pier, August 17, 1905

Jared Jernegan's Second Family

by ARTHUR R. RAILTON

Charlie Fisher, the Perfect Partner

Jeremiah Pease Diary

The First West Tisbury Land Boom

by JOHN A. HOWLAND

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in loving memory of
her mother

Our thanks to the above and, once again, to those named earlier for their help in the continuing work of preserving our buildings and historical treasures.

THE DUKES COUNTY INTELLIGENCER

Vol. 28, No. 2

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Josephine, died in her infancy without ever having seen her father. When his third child was born, his wife died of childbirth complications. Within a year, the infant, also named Rebecca, had died, like his first born, without having seen him.

Jared, whaling in the Pacific, was now a widower with one child, his son, Aylmer, whose care was taken over by Rebecca's parents, the Ripleys. Whales were becoming harder to find and voyages had to be lengthened to as much as four years in order to make them profitable. Jared, depressed and discouraged, wrote to his brother-in-law, Alonzo Ripley, in January 1859:

. . . you was very fortunate in not going Whaleing. . . .
I do assure you Whaleing cannot be carried on but a few years longer unless Oil goes up to a very high price. . . .
It would afford me grate pleasure to return home off of the second Northern Season but I do not expect so good fortune. I expect to be obliged to go three."

While the ruggedly handsome Jared was away, townspeople began speculating about who among the unmarried women of Edgartown would win the young widower's heart upon his return. He was now 34, a prosperous whaling master who had, after his father died, bought the family home on South Summer Street (now part of the Charlotte Inn) -- a most eligible male. The eight-year-old Aylmer must have learned of the talk and was worried, or so his Aunt Mary Jane Mellen thought. In a letter to Jared, she wrote that Aylmer feared he "should one day have a crows & cruel mother." Jared wrote back, reassuring his sister-in-law that nothing of the sort would happen:

I loved your Sister with a pure heart, yes I loved her with a heart that never was soiled by loveing another before or since hear death. If others are planing for me to unite myself with another I do not thank them. Say to them that your Sister has left a Husband that would sooner die than to think of such a thing as to give himself to another for many years to come. And purhaps never.



*Jared Jernegan,
whaling master,
at about the
time of his
marriage to
Helen Clark.*

He added a note to his son, Aylmer:

I am coming home and I am not going to sea again. . . .
you are all the boy I have gut and . . . if you ohnly do as
I wish for you to, I shall be very proud to call you Son.

That was written from the Sandwich Islands (Hawaii) on April 14, 1860. It was nearly a year later, early in March 1861, before Jared returned to Edgartown, the voyage having lasted nearly four years. He was, no doubt, happy to get home, albeit to an empty house and a sorrowing family. His in-laws, the Ripleys, had invited him, in a letter, to move in with them and he had agreed to do so temporarily, writing:

I will come and make my home with you at first for I feel this to be right and I would be near my Boy until he gets well acquainted with me.

We don't know how long he lived with the Ripleys, but probably not very long. Despite his pledge of undying devotion to their daughter, within three months he had remarried after what must have been a whirlwind romance. His bride, a 21-year-old school teacher (he was 35), named

Helen McLellan Clark, was not a native Vineyarder, having moved to Edgartown from Gorham, Maine, some years before. She lived with her Aunt Chloe, wife of Dr. John Pierce, who lived on Pierce Lane. A year or so after her graduation from the local high school, she was hired as assistant teacher in the primary school.

They were married in her home town, Gorham, on June 5, 1861. It is not known how Jared's in-laws, the Ripleys, and other Edgartown families reacted to this sudden remarriage, but it is likely that they disapproved. Rebecca, his first wife, had borne three children and had died after the birth of the third. Now, within three months of his return to a grieving family, he was remarrying -- and to a non-Islander. It would seem that there must have been talk around town.

But Jared would not have cared. His bride, young, bright and adventurous, introduced him to a new life style, clearly bringing happiness to the sorrowing man. She not only brought him happiness, but in the years that followed she brought him a second family -- a most interesting family of three unusual children.

First to arrive was Laura, born June 29, 1862, only twenty-six days after Jared had sailed for Honolulu as master of his old ship *Erie*. It had been sold and the new owner had converted it into a merchant vessel, which was put into packet service between New Bedford and Honolulu. No long whaling voyage this time for Jared. But that first voyage was ill-fated and it was a miracle that the new father survived to see his daughter; two of his crew were not so lucky. In four days of hurricane winds off Cape Horn, the *Erie* was dismantled, her crew exhausted from continuous pumping as the seas crashed over the damaged hull, when on August 20, the ship *Southern Rights* hove into sight. Captain Knowles reported the rescue this way:

. . . fell in with the ship *Erie*, in distress, foremast and bowsprit gone, sails blown away, bulwarks gone and decks



Helen Clark
Jernegan, Jared's
young wife, and
mother of his
second family.

completely swept of everything fore and aft, boats, caboose house and all, and ship in a sinking condition. Took from her the captain, officers and crew, fifteen in number. It was blowing a gale at the time. . . . The crew did not even save their clothes. They would have undoubtedly perished that night if not rescued, as it come on to blow a perfect hurricane, very cold with snow.

It was mid-November before Jared was able to make his way back to Edgartown.¹ Grateful for his miraculous survival, he enjoyed six months ashore with his new bride and family. Aylmer, now nine years old, was, for the first time, getting to know his father. Laura, still an infant, brought out the tenderness hidden under the shell of the rough captain.

But the call of the sea and the need to support his new family took over and in June 1863, he left as master of the bark *Oriole* on a whaling voyage to the Pacific. For the first time he grew lonesome at sea and late in 1864 he wrote Helen inviting her to meet him in San Francisco the next fall to sail with him back to New Bedford. She was to bring the baby Laura with her.

The invitation was a bold one. The journey would be long and arduous for the mother and three-year-old child. They

¹Helen must have had a most worrisome wait. On Oct. 31, 1862, the *Gazette* reported that the *Erie* had been sighted on August 20, abandoned, with no sign of the crew.

were to sail to Panama, take a train across the Isthmus, then sail up to San Francisco. If the ship's agent, who opposed the idea, would not send the *Oriole* to San Francisco, she would have to take a packet to Honolulu. And, as he wrote, it would be expensive:

Now how much do you guess I think it will cost for you to meet me on this voyage, well I will say about \$1000, altho I shall not be surprised if it should over-run this amount. . . . I assure you I shall never, never regret this amount being spent that I may have you with me. . . . I shall let you git rate up into my lap just as you used to, then I will tell my beautiful little wife how lonely I have been for more than two years. . . . Sometimes I think perhaps Mr. Jones will make me an offer in monny not to send for you to meet me, if so I will write him I am not one that will sell the society of my darling wife.

His invitation involved such a long trip for the mother and child that it must have created some criticism around Edgartown. Jared suspected it would:

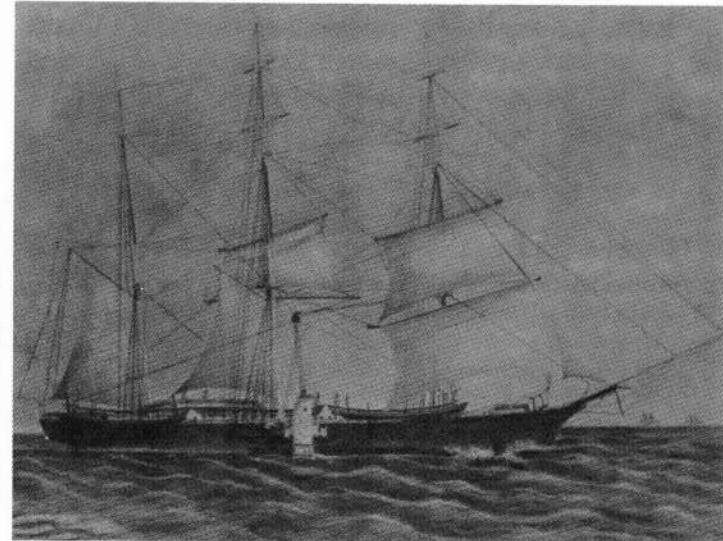
What did your friends say when you told them I had sent for you. Oh, me thinks there were some very long faces and now let me guess who put on the longest face (your aunt Chilot, now am I not write? Never mind I will forgive her. . .).²

Not one to turn down an adventure, Helen sailed from New York in September 1865, but without Laura. She had left her daughter with Aunt Pierce. Aylmer probably stayed with the Ripleys, although Helen, writing about her trip years later, doesn't mention him. As Jared had suspected, Mr. Jones, the ship's agent, would not let him take the *Oriole* to San Francisco to meet Helen so, after a stay of two weeks in the Palace Hotel, San Francisco, she took passage to Honolulu aboard a steamer. Six weeks after leaving Edgartown, she landed in Honolulu where Captain Jared and the *Oriole* were preparing to return to New Bedford. She enjoyed the trip home:

We boarded a month, then sailed in the *Oriole* for home. . . . The passage home was nearly five months, a

²Aunt Chilot was Charlotte S. Coffin, wife of Jared W. Coffin.

New Bedford Whaling Museum



Bark Oriole on which Helen sailed with Jared back from Honolulu in 1866.

few gales of wind but most of the time pleasant and I enjoyed the sea.

When they arrived in New Bedford on April 6, 1866, Captain Jared's share of the profitable voyage was \$16,000. He had been away three and a half years, Helen seven months.

With his family again united and comfortably off financially, Jared was content to stay ashore. On December 17, 1866, the couple's first son was born: Prescott Ford Jernegan, a name destined to make headlines.

Apparently Helen did enjoy life aboard a whaler because in October 1868 when Jared left on the *Roman* for a Pacific whaling voyage, she and the two youngest children were with him. This voyage has become well known because Laura, six years old at its start, kept a small diary that is now in the Society Archives. She described sailing around Cape Horn, watching whales being killed and their blubber being tried. The first half of her diary ends on March 29, 1869, when they arrived at Honolulu, where Helen and the children remained while the *Roman* went Arctic whaling.

They lived very well in Honolulu. There was even another Edgartown family there for companionship, as Helen recalled later:

We rented a cottage on Fort street and occupied it with Mrs. Mellen³ and her little girl Laura then two years old. Two chinamen brought all our meals in to us from the Hotel. There was a large front yard filled with banana and fig trees.

In October, Jared and the *Roman* returned from the Arctic and shipped the oil to New Bedford aboard another vessel. A month later, they sailed again, this time on a between-seasons cruise to the Equator for sperm whales. Helen and the children went along. Laura did not resume her diary on this voyage, which lasted until March 1870. The *Oriole* left for the Arctic soon after, leaving Helen and the children once again in Honolulu. Laura made only one diary entry during this stay on the island. It was on September 26, 1870, six months after returning from the southern voyage:

It has blown real hard for two days. Prescott cut his foot last night it bleed. I am in Honolulu. It is a real pretty place. Mama is making a dress for me. Papa is up north where it is cold, he will come back pretty soon. I have two kittens here and one aboard the ship.

Helen, in a reminiscence of their stay, gives us more details:

We hired a small cottage of four rooms near Punch Bowl on Fort St., and lived here till November when [Jared] arrived from the Arctic. Our meals were sent from the Hotel by two Chinamen, so that I had no care of house keeping. We used to take pleasant walks and were often invited to drive. . . . I had a native woman to take care of Prescott. She lived in the yard in a grass house. She was a Catholic and had taught Prescott to always cross his forehead before eating. They never cooked the fish, always eating it raw. . . . We were often invited to Wikikee to a picnic and would sit on the beach and watch the natives ride the surf boards.

When the *Roman* returned in October, its Arctic oil was once again shipped to New Bedford and it was soon off on

³Wife of Capt. Thomas Mellen of Edgartown, famous for having been master of the *Levi Starbuck* when it was captured and burned in November 1862 by the Confederate raider *Alabama*. He was now master of the *Europa*.

another between-seasons voyage with Helen and the children aboard. Many years later, Helen wrote to Marcus, her third child, describing a traumatic event on that voyage:

In December we went to the Marquesas Islands. The ships alway stop here to get fresh water. . . . I was the first white woman who had ever landed on the Islands and I was an object of curiosity for the natives. They came on board the ship to sell fruit and one of the men gave Prescott a small black pig and it used to follow him round the deck. The natives wore no clothing and were tatooed all over. . . . The day we were going to sail, the sailors went on shore and when they returned to the ship had been drinking and refused to obey the order given by the mate. This was a mutiny. Seventeen men took three boats and left the ship, after nearly killing the mate and a second officer. We were glad to see them leave the ship as I expected we would all be killed or that they would set fire to the ship. We left the harbor as soon as possible with the crew of only nine men and arrived in Honolulu in March 1871.

The *Roman* was scheduled for another Arctic trip so Jared sent his family home. In May, they went by steamer to San Francisco, thence across the country by train, arriving in Edgartown on May 27, 1871. The *Gazette* did not seem impressed:

Mrs. Helen M. Jernegan and her two children arrived home last Saturday from the Sandwich Islands. Mrs. Jernegan accompanied her husband, Capt. Jared Jernegan, master of the whaling barque *Roman* of New Bedford when he sailed from that port and has been absent about thirty months. The *Roman* has gone to the Arctic Ocean for another season.

That Arctic season was a disastrous one, not only for the *Roman*, but for 32 other whalers. The fleet worked its way into the Arctic Ocean, following the whales, and beginning September 1, 1871, was caught in drifting icebergs and ice flows. On September 7th, "the *Roman* was drifted bodily out to sea by two floes, and crushed like an eggshell. The crew narrowly escaped." Altogether, 1200 men (also some wives and children of captains) were rescued by six whalers

fortunate enough to have escaped before the ice moved in.⁴ Jared and the other captains, after arriving in Honolulu were taken to San Francisco by steamer, from which port the news was telegraphed east. Helen, and other Vineyarders, first learned of the disaster about November 7th. By November 24, Jared was back in Edgartown.

Helen never went to sea again. On August 6, 1872, a third child was born, Marcus Wilson Jernegan, who was to become a nationally renowned historian. Jared continued whaling, making seven more voyages before he retired in April 1888. He settled down to raise hens, grow vegetables and spin yarns in quiet Edgartown, proud of the achievements of his family. He didn't know it at the time, but some of that pride was to be lost before he died. Right now, his four children were all doing well.

Aylmer Bradford Jernegan

When Jared retired, his oldest son, Aylmer, had left the Island. He married a young woman in Lynn, Mass., and was already the father of two (a third died in infancy in 1887), making Jared twice a grandfather. Aylmer named his second child Jared, assuring the continuation of the name for another generation.

It is not clear exactly when Aylmer moved away. He was still living with Helen and her children in November 1876. A letter written by Laura to her mother, who was off-Island, contains several mentions of Al or Ally, then 22 years old. He must have left soon after because on March 22, 1879, he was married in Lynn, where he later became an engineer on the Boston, Revere Beach & Lynn Railroad.

It is not easy to judge from this distance, but he seems to have gotten very little of Jared's attention once the new family arrived. He was 14, a little older than Jared was on his first voyage, when Helen and the two children went on the *Roman*, yet he was left behind, probably staying with his grandparents, the Ripleys. He received nothing from the

⁴One of the rescue vessels was the *Europa*, Capt. Thomas Mellen of Edgartown.

estate of his father, although he was Jared's eldest son. Nor did his son, Jared, his grandfather's namesake, receive anything. It would appear that the relationship was not so close as Jared had promised his mother-in-law, Mrs. Ripley, in 1860:

I thank you with my whole heart for taking care of my Boy. How glad I shall feel to take my Alymer (*sic*) upon my knee and talk about his Beloved Mother, fear nothing for Alymer, he has a father that will never suffer a hare of his head to be injured. Alymer shall have everything done for him that will prove for his interest.⁵

We cannot know, of course, whether Aylmer was bitter about having been displaced by Helen and her new family or whether he felt that he had been turned over to "a crows and cruel mother," as he had feared. That would seem totally contrary to Helen's character, but it is possible that he did feel neglected and displaced in the affections of his father. He visited Edgartown occasionally in later life, usually when Helen was off-Island. He and young Jared attended the wedding of his step-sister, Laura, a most elegant affair.

Helen McLellan Clark Jernegan

Jared married Helen Clark in 1861 after a whirlwind courtship. Three months after he arrived home a widower, they were married in her home town, Gorham, Maine. Young, vivacious and pretty, she was an Edgartown teacher at the time, living with an aunt, Mrs. Chloe McLellan Pierce, wife of Dr. John Pierce, on Pierce Lane. Helen had another aunt in town, Mrs. Charlotte S. Coffin, wife of Jared W. Coffin. Both aunts were from Gorham and had moved to Edgartown after their marriages.

We are not certain when Helen came to Edgartown. One account states that she arrived at age eleven and attended school in town. She was an assistant teacher at the North Primary School from September 3 until December 28, 1859, and from May until December 1860. Her salary was \$13 a month, the lowest pay for primary teachers at the time.

⁵Jared regularly misspelled his son's name, an unusual one, to be sure, and he was a poor speller!

Early in March 1861, when Jared arrived home for the first time after Rebecca's death, school was not in session. Miss Clark had lots of time for socializing. She never went back to teaching after they were married on June 5.

Doubtless, tongues wagged over the brevity of the courtship. Here was this 21-year-old assistant teacher in a primary school being romanced by a 36-year-old whaling master within weeks of his return home to a grieving family. Perhaps that was why the wedding was held in Maine rather than in Edgartown, although it must be added that Jared's first marriage was also off-island, in Stonington, Conn.

Helen was a spunky lass and clearly the spark plug of the new Jernegan family. She did not hesitate when Jared asked her to come to the Pacific to sail home with him, even though it meant leaving three-year-old Laura with her Aunt Chloe Pierce for eight months. That, too, probably caused tongues to wag about this young, feisty woman who didn't know that a woman's place was at home taking care of her child (and step-child).

But that wasn't to be her only voyage. As we have seen, two years after their son, Prescott, was born, she packed up both children, Laura and the baby, and sailed off with Jared on a Pacific whaling voyage aboard the ship *Roman*, leaving her stepson, Aylmer, now 14 years old, in Edgartown. There was no stopping this woman!

There is, of course, no way to know if tongues did wag. Things like that are not written in public documents -- or weren't at the time. But we do have in our Archives some notes suggesting that the second Mrs. Jernegan was not exactly a favorite with Edgartown natives. Written by a knowledgeable lady, Miss Harriet Pease, daughter of Richard L. Pease, Island historian, the comments may not be proof, but they do suggest something. Miss Pease, a genealogist, wrote on the back of a genealogical chart of Capt. Jared Jernegan, she had filled out for Mrs. A. C. Pratt in the 1890s, apologizing because the material had not been sent earlier:

Sent a paper to Mrs. Helen Jernegan and it has not been



Courtesy Barbara Phillips estate

*Helen Jernegan, a proud and strong lady,
in her later years.*

returned nor do I believe it will be -- did not think so when I sent it. By all that is good and great do not overlook Prescott's title: R-e-v-e-r-e-n-d!

Miss Pease had been unfair. Helen Jernegan did return the form, properly filled out, but not until some months later. She had originally listed Prescott as "Prof. Phillips Coll. at Andover," but had lined that out and above it she had written, "Newton Theological Seminary." On the back of the form Helen had returned, Miss Pease repeated her warning, apparently quoting Helen:

"Prescott is Reverend." (His mother says so.) "Been ordained." "Is now studying in Newton Theological Seminary." You must not let him appear without his title. That would never do. His father "wants a book," and all the "family glory must be found therein."

Even a generous interpretation of the notes makes one sense a dislike by Hattie Pease for Helen Jernegan. Also clear is the pride that Mrs. Jernegan had in her talented family. This is worth remembering as we learn of the adventures of Prescott a few years later. "Pride goeth before a fall," it is said, and that surely was the case here.

But it is understandable that there was pride in this young woman from Maine, who had come to Edgartown, married a prosperous whaling master, had sailed twice around Cape Horn, witnessed a mutiny, lived like a queen in Hawaii, picnicking on Waikiki when only natives rode surfboards, and whose two sons were college educated (Marcus, her youngest child, was going to Brown, following Prescott's footsteps.)

Helen lived a long life. She died in February 1934, in her 94th year, one of the last of the whaling wives that were so much a part of Vineyard history.

Laura Jernegan Spear

The first child of Helen and Jared, Laura, was born June 29, 1862, six weeks after her father had left on the *Erie* on its ill-fated first voyage as a merchant vessel. Before the infant was two months old, the *Erie* had been lost off Cape Horn, her father miraculously saved.

As mentioned earlier, Laura has become somewhat famous for the simple, intermittent journal she wrote as a six-year-old girl sailing on her father's whaler, *Roman*. It provides, despite its naivety, a good sense of the monotony of whaling and of its occasional drama.

But Laura Jernegan was more than a child diarist. She became an accomplished musician, teaching piano and violin, and serving for ten years as organist in the Edgartown Baptist Church. She studied at the New England Conservatory of Music for a year. All this was before her marriage to Herbert W. Spear, an officer in the United States Revenue Marine Service. The wedding was the outstanding social event of 1894 in Edgartown, as the *Gazette* account

Courtesy Barbara Phillips estate



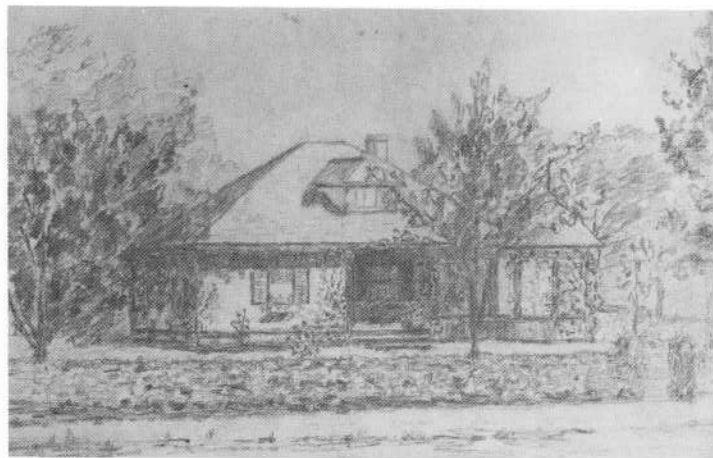
Laura Jernegan and Herbert Spear in 1894, their wedding year.

made clear:

The bride looked all that was lovely and charming. She wore an elegant gown of brocade silk, court train, cut decollete, trimmed with Point Guipure and gold lace, and carried a bouquet of bride roses. The groom was in the full dress uniform of his rank in the Revenue Marine Service.

Officiating at the ceremony, which took place in the front parlor of the family home on Summer Street, was the bride's brother, Rev. Prescott Ford Jernegan, pastor of the Baptist Church in Middletown, Conn. It was an elegant affair:

During the hours devoted to the reception, a continuous flow of Edgartown's best people paid their respect to Capt. and Mrs. Jernegan and extended their congratulations to the newly wedded pair, who received them with a charming cordiality. . . . After paying their respects to the bridal party, the guests passed through a second parlor into the dining room, where was displayed an array of wedding gifts seldom if ever equalled in the history of weddings in this town. . . . This morning the newly wedded couple left by



Laura made this sketch of "The Bungalow" on Summer Street in 1905.

steamer for a two weeks' trip abroad⁶. . . Mrs. Spear is one of Edgartown's most accomplished daughters. . . and Mr. Spear is entitled to the same congratulations which have been given to a long line of predecessors who have, in the past, found in this old sea-port town the star magnet of their lives.

In attendance, among many others, were Aylmer and his son, Jared. They must have been overwhelmed by the outpouring of gifts from the community and the elegance of the occasion. It was, no doubt, a far cry from their life style in Lynn. Ushering the hundreds who were invited to the reception were the officers of the Revenue Cutter on which the groom served, all wearing fancy dress uniforms.

For Helen, mother of the bride, it surely was the highpoint of her life: her lovely daughter being married in their fine home by her handsome son, the Reverend Prescott Jernegan, with the whole town looking on. It was a moment she must have carried in her memory throughout life.

The bridegroom was a chief engineer in the Revenue Service and was soon transferred to Baltimore where, from 1901 to 1907, Laura studied art at the Maryland Art

⁶Abroad would seem to have meant to the mainland. One couldn't go to Europe and back in two weeks then.

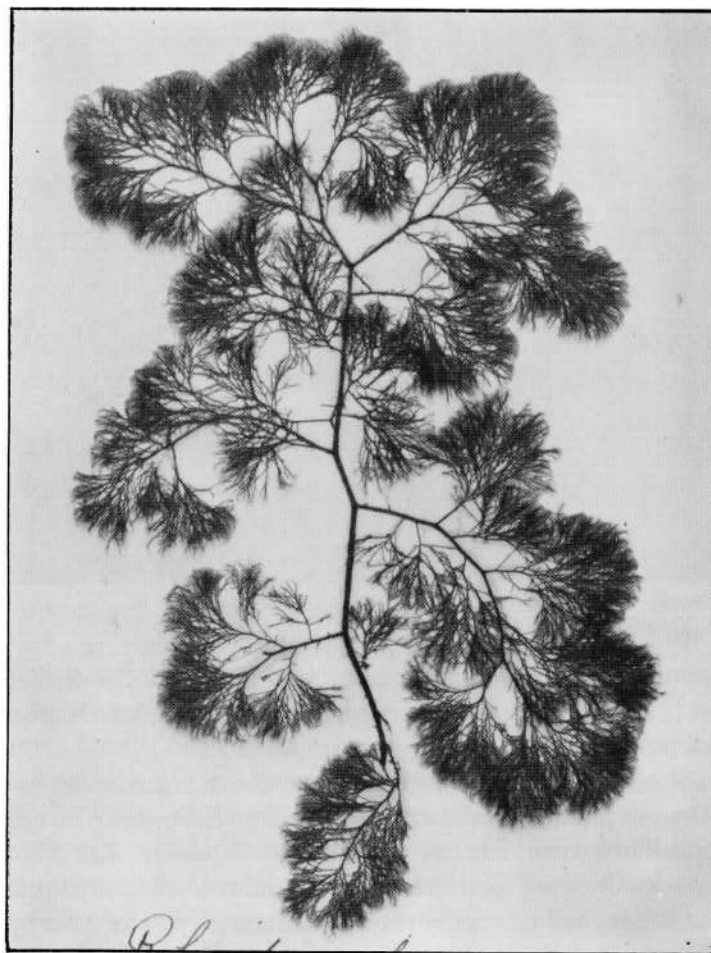


Courtesy Barbara Phillips estate

On the bungalow porch: Laura, standing, right; her son, Prescott, in front; Helen, standing, left; her mother, Mrs. Clark, seated.

Institute. Her talent served her well after Mr. Spear died in 1912, when she moved to Edgartown to start a new career to support herself and her son, Carleton.

She established an antique shop and tea garden at her summer place, "The Bungalow," on South Summer Street, one block from her mother's house. Quickly, her "Tea Garden in the Pines" became a popular local institution. As the more lucrative antique business grew, she gave up the tea garden and opened a larger antique shop on lower Main Street, at the corner of Dock Street. When the Great Depression cut into sales of antiques, she opened another shop in Oak Bluffs, between the steamboat landing and Circuit Avenue, where she sold gifts and souvenirs, with her specialty, sea mosses, being displayed in abundance. Before her marriage one of her many interests was the collection, classification and mounting of Vineyard sea mosses. For her gift shop she began mounting them on cards which she sold as greeting cards and, in larger displays, as



One of Helen's many sea-moss specimens: *Rhodmela Subfusca*.

art work suitable for framing. In one season, she sold 16,000 cards displaying the graceful grasses.

Laura never remarried, living in a small house she had built in the 1920s at "Oakdale," near Trapp's Pond (her "Bungalow" on Summer Street was a summer house), where her brother, Marcus, also had a camp.

It was there, in a place she loved, that she died on June 30, 1947, aged 85 years.

Prescott Ford Jernegan

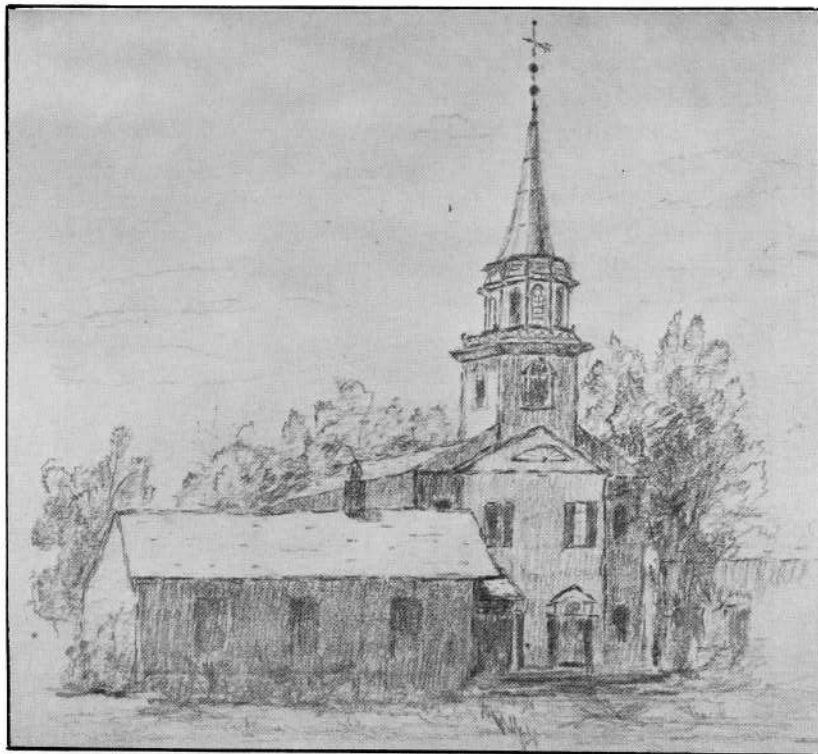
Summarizing the varied life of Prescott Ford Jernegan, the first son of Helen and Jared, is not easy. He had a career as variegated as his father's was homogeneous. He was born December 17, 1866, the same year Helen sailed back from Honolulu with Jared. Before he was two, Prescott had already been whaling aboard the *Roman*, with his mother and sister. While his father went Arctic whaling, he lived in luxury in Honolulu. As a small boy, he had crossed the American continent by rail and by the time he started school he must have considered himself far more sophisticated and experienced than the schoolmates around him.

He was apparently a likable child. Even after her second son, Marcus, was born, Helen kept Prescott as her favorite, despite his mischievous nature. While staying in a New Bedford hotel prior to sailing on the *Roman*, Prescott, hardly more than an infant, tossed his kitten out the window and his father had to get him another. Aboard the *Roman*, he often played tricks, as his sister wrote: "the old cook sat on a stool in the doorway of the galley. . . . Prescott stole up, snatched off his old, greasy cap, and threw it overboard."

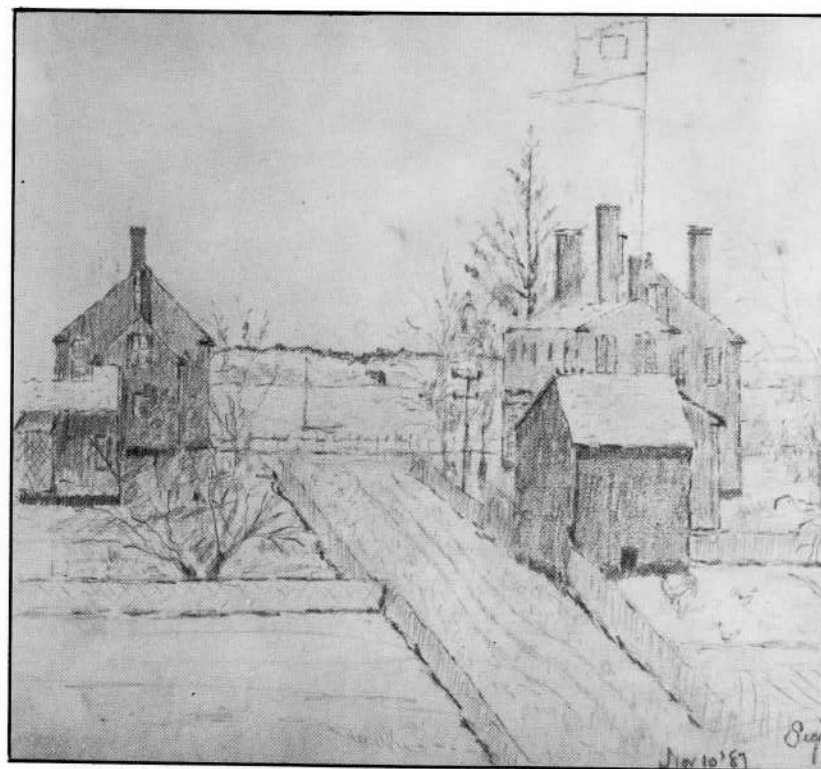
At one of the Marquesas Islands, when they had stopped for fresh fruit and water on the *Roman*, a naked native, attracted by the lively youngster, gave him a small black pig. It became his pet, constantly following him around the deck. In Honolulu, while playing in the yard, he saw the untended horse and buggy of his mother's visitor and decided, at age three, that "he would take a ride, so he climbed into the carriage and drove off alone. . . . it was a wonder he was not killed," his mother wrote years later.

Jared also was fond of him. Helen wrote of the time when the family was in Honolulu and a Captain McKenzie passed by. He asked Prescott, "What is your name?" Prescott respectfully took off his hat and replied, "I am Capt. Jared Jernegan's 'buster boy.' That being the name his father often called him by."

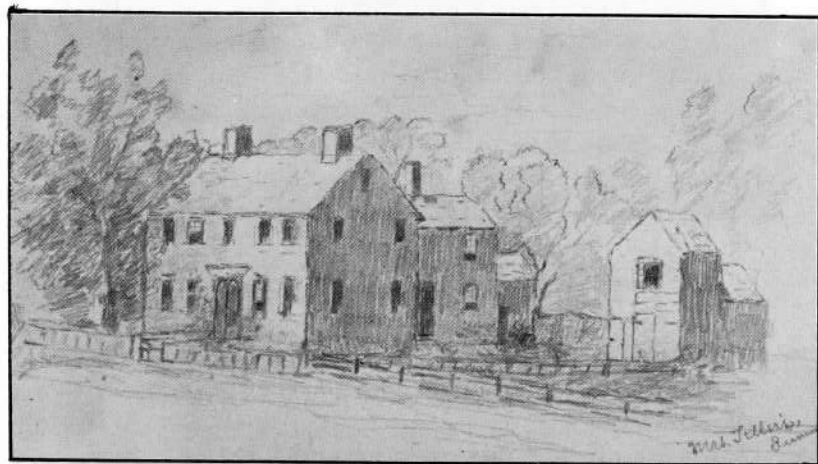
Growing up in Edgartown, he and Charles E. Fisher



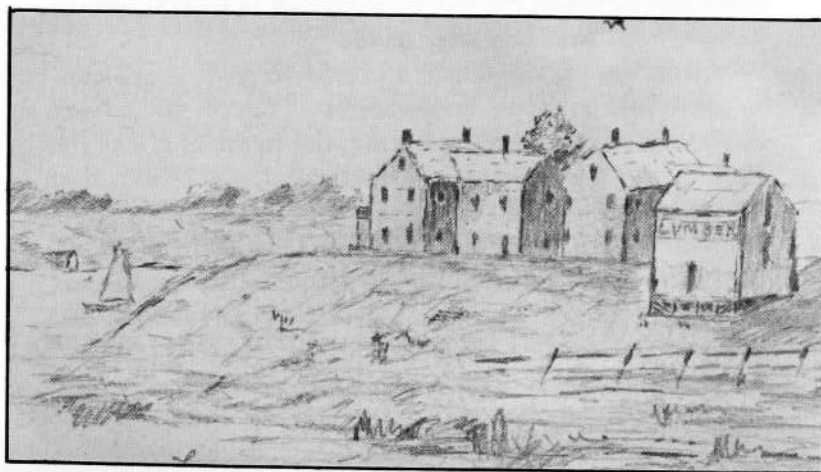
Edgartown Congregational Church when it faced onto an empty lot.



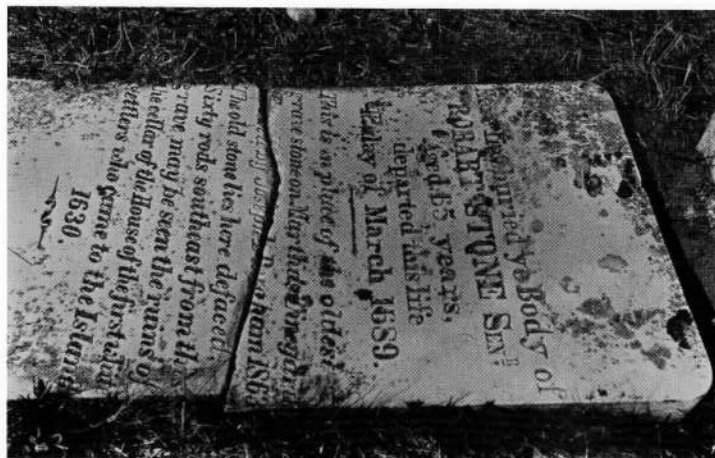
Right, Capt. Abraham Osborn House, when it was a Signal Station.



Mrs. Teller's, later a well-known rooming house, on South Summer St.



Tower Hill from So. Water St., with Chappaquiddick in the background.



Prescott cracked this stone with a hammer "for a super sensation," he said. became boyhood chums. They went through school together. Once Charlie saved Prescott's life by pulling him out of the cold water of Great Pond when he had fallen through while skating. They fantasized of wild adventures together, occasionally getting into trouble. Prescott admitted that once "for a super sensation I cracked with a hammer the gravestone of the first white settler to die on the Island. The caretaker of the ancient cemetery threatened me with jail and I went home and asked God to spare me that humiliation, which He did, a forerunner of several narrow escapes from that fate later in life."

Prescott was a good student and enjoyed reading. His sister wrote in a letter when he was eight: "Prescott got a book this morning down to the library, the name of it was the *Forest Exiles*. It is real good." He admitted, much later, that he stole copies of Bealle's Dime Novels from a local store, reading them surreptitiously in a shack made of old lumber behind the barn. Describing his crime he wrote: "Later, when I 'got religion' I scraped together a dollar and handed it to the storekeeper in restitution. He looked dumbly at me and slowly pocketed the dollar, with an emotion beyond words."

By the time he was twelve, he was a tall, active, overgrown

lad (to use his own words) and had read about 200 books of travel and adventure. But his life was not all fun, he wrote: "Mother used to make me call on two great aunts, venerable and estimable ladies.⁷ They tried to amuse me, but in a dull way and these compulsory social calls prejudiced me for life against social gatherings."

During one of the frequent religious revivals on the Island, he was "born again." Within three months, "I was leading prayer meetings and telling my elders how to live. . . . I was soon appointed sexton, then Sunday School secretary and at 16 was elected a deacon, said to be the youngest in New England."

No doubt, he was greatly encouraged in this direction by his mother. His father was a church member, but according to Prescott, he was "no fanatic."

Prescott remembered once asking his father: "Why don't you take an active part in prayer meetings?" Jared, astounded by the question, replied, "If after the life I have lived, God does not wish to meet me, I do not wish to meet Him."

It seems clear that it was Helen who encouraged Prescott in a religious direction. After high school, he went to Phillips Academy in Andover, doing four years work in two. From there he went to Brown College where he was graduated in 1899, Phi Beta Kappa, with honors in Greek and logic. He was class treasurer, president of the chess club and member of the crew. During Prescott's years at Brown, Jared suffered some financial losses and the student began preaching in nearby towns to earn money to support himself.

"I had no social life, no parties, cards, drinking, smoking or dancing. . . . Studying, praying, preaching, and always economizing to the last cent," was how he remembered that period.

Upon graduation, he was ordained in the Baptist ministry and took a position teaching Greek and Latin at Phillips Andover Academy. He preached every Sunday (for money) and tutored "rich men's sons at two dollars an hour."

⁷These were Mrs. Pierce and Mrs. Coffin, sisters, mentioned earlier.

It was at this time that he read Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward* and suddenly became engrossed in the growing struggle between capital and labor. "This book changed the whole later course of my life," he wrote many years later.

After teaching for a year, he enrolled in Newton Theological Seminary, having decided upon the ministry for a calling, "perhaps because the only competing vocations I had considered were piracy and printing. . . . My father objected; local preachers were paid \$700 a year, while he was making several thousand. But I despised business."

In the summer after his first year at Newton, he went to Europe, bicycling in England, France and Germany, with a brief stop at Monte Carlo, where he thought he had a system for beating the bank. Just as he thought it was starting to work, he lost all his money. He left, sure he could perfect it, and promised himself he would come back and make his fortune.⁸

After his graduation from Newton, where he had an outstanding record as a "tireless student," he married Betsey E. Phinney of Edgartown, daughter of Capt. and Mrs. Adelbert Phinney. She went by her middle name, Evelyn. She was younger than he and had been a classmate of Marcus.⁹ They had been engaged for six years, but she had broken the engagement while he was in Europe. Just before his graduation, she announced she was coming back to him.

The *Gazette* described the bridegroom this way:

Reverend Mr. Jernegan is a young man whom Edgartown is delighted to own as a son, who has taken high honors in college and university and is rapidly making for himself a name in the Baptist denomination as a preacher of marked ability. He has just entered upon the duties of pastor of a large and wealthy Society at Middletown, Conn.

The *Gazette* extends to Mr. Jernegan and his fair bride its

⁸He did return, shortly after his marriage, on borrowed money. Once again, he lost everything and had to cable home for money to get back.

⁹Evelyn was a leading performer at the graduation, delivering an essay, "Influence of Women in the Home," reciting "The Lady of Provence," singing "While the Ships Go Sailing By," and two other selections. She also wrote the Class Ode. Of course, there were only nine in the class!

congratulations, with the wish that their future life may be like the morning of their marriage day -- without a cloud.

His salary at Middletown was \$1400, twice the amount Edgartown preachers were getting. Both Helen and Jared must have been pleased.

By the end of his first year at Middletown, there were a few rumblings of disapproval in the congregation. He was an unconventional preacher; he seemed less interested in saving souls for eternity than in making life on earth more equitable. That disturbed some of the more prosperous members of the church. It was a period of economic misery following the Panic of 1893 and he organized a program in which homeless men could earn a small daily wage by chopping wood. Many townspeople were not pleased to have "hoboes" wandering around Middletown.

The rumblings against him grew louder and, after a discussion with the officials of the church, he offered them his resignation, expecting it would be turned down. It was accepted and he was out of work, his only money being the \$100 that the congregation gave him as a parting gift.

His wife and son went to Edgartown and he moved into a rooming house in Boston while he looked for a new post. After a few unsuccessful interviews, he was recommended by President Andrews of the Newton Seminary as a candidate at the DeLand Baptist Church in Florida. It was the summer church of John B. Stetson, the wealthy hat manufacturer, who had an estate there and who paid one-third of the pastor's salary. After an interview in New York, Prescott was hired. He had learned what was expected of a preacher and in DeLand his sermons were more conventional. Discussing that period later, Prescott wrote:

Stetson made it plain to me in an inoffensive way that he considered himself a much more important man than I, with my modest distinction as a scholar, preacher and writer of theological articles. I differed with him but was careful not to tell him so; I had more respect for my bread and butter than in Middletown.

On his vacation in the summer of 1896, he and his family

returned to Edgartown where Prescott came down with typhoid fever. For six weeks, he was seriously ill, often "in the delirium of fever." Lying in bed in virtual isolation because of the contagious nature of the disease, he began to question his belief. At DeLand, he had started to doubt the theology practised in the church, and had turned more toward philosophy:

I was through with theology, but did not know it [he wrote later]; I kept on preaching, just as some men "go through life holding their wives' hands because they are afraid, if they let go, they will kill them."

During one of his lucid periods, his nurse read to him a newspaper story of the discovery of small amounts of gold in sea water by a noted English chemist:

It took but a moment for the nurse to read the brief paragraph. I did not hear what he next read; a sudden mad fancy seized my imagination. . . it instantly occurred to me that since gold was already contained in sea water it would be an easy matter to conceal more gold there, then sell the "secret" for a large sum of money and disappear to parts unknown. . . . A consuming desire to exploit this scheme seized me like a physical shock and never left me till the plan was consummated in ruin.

There was another shock awaiting him. During his quarantine, his wife had gone to Philadelphia, to visit friends. When he finally was well enough to leave his room, his wife returned and announced that she had met a young oculist in Philadelphia and she wanted to marry him. She asked Prescott for a divorce:

I did not try to dissuade her. . . . For the first time in my life, a human being in whom I had placed absolute confidence had utterly failed me. . . . I have never completely trusted anyone since. . . . for a Baptist minister to secure a divorce was tantamount to giving up the ministry; I stood at the greatest crossroads of my life thus far. . . . the man I had been for 15 years of religion and four years of marriage vanished. . . . By the time I reached DeLand, I was a man of one idea -- a fixed one and a wrong one.

Waiting for him in DeLand was his boyhood chum,

Charlie Fisher, who had lost his job in Brooklyn and had decided to seek his fortune in Florida. Together, they discussed Prescott's bold plan, just as in their youth they had talked of being pirates.

After telling the pulpit committee of his wife's request for a divorce, Prescott was asked to resign, which he did. His mind was on more exciting matters. The two friends, Prescott and Charlie, took the steamer to New York to carry out their scheme:

We were both socialists in principle and had been considering joining the socialist colony then forming at Topolobampo on the west coast of Mexico. He was as ready as I to strip of his wealth one of the legalized robbers who were fattening on the toil of the common people. . . . Many of the barons of industry were unscrupulous and selfish; they prospered on their ability to save their skins and their reputations while they filled their pockets by evading the law. . . . The scheme was all wrong, but I thought it was all right, so I plunged ahead with the same fearlessness with which I had hammered dishonest capitalists from my pulpit. . . . They had laughed at my thunderings. . . now I would strike back.

Before embarking on the plan, Prescott made a brief visit to Edgartown. It seems unlikely that he told anybody of his decision to give up the ministry or of his wife's request for a divorce, about which he had done nothing. It is not known where Evelyn was, but she was probably with her oculist in Philadelphia. The *Gazette*, knowing none of this, reported on his visit November 26, 1896:

Rev. Prescott Ford Jernegan of DeLand, Fla., arrived Saturday for a few days' stay, leaving again for the south on Tuesday. He occupied the Baptist pulpit here on Sunday afternoon. Mr. Jernegan, we are pleased to state, is fully recovered from his recent severe illness, typhoid fever, and on Sunday preached with his old-time power and vigor.

No doubt, he put everything he could muster into that sermon. It was the last sermon he ever preached. Instead of returning south, as the *Gazette* stated, he went to Connecticut to begin to carry out the bold plan he and Charlie had conceived.

The two Edgartown men were successful beyond their dreams, but not exactly as they had planned. They were not able to entice some greedy capitalist, who had gotten his money unethically, to invest in their proposal. Instead, in less than two years, they created a company that had more than 1000 stockholders, who invested \$750,000 in the Electrolytic Marine Salts Company of Lubec, Maine.

The story of those two years is too long and too complex to be told in this issue; it must wait for another time.¹⁰ It is enough to state here that the whole thing was a scam. Gold, the company claimed, was being taken in profitable quantities from the ocean by a secret process known only to Prescott and Charlie. Each week, an ingot of gold worth \$2000. was delivered to the Boston office where it was displayed. Eager investors poured in, anxious to put money into this miracle. The stock, which sold at first for 35 cents, hit \$1.45 before the bubble burst.

That occurred on July 31, 1898, when the *New York Herald* published the sensational news, as told to the paper by one of Charlie's friends in whom he had confided, that the gold produced each week came not from the ocean, but from old jewelry that Charlie was melting down in the company laboratory, a room that only Charlie and Prescott were allowed to enter. The informer, William Phelan, had tried to blackmail the two men, but they refused to pay him what he demanded and so he sold the story to the newspaper for \$100.

Prescott and Charlie didn't see the stories. They had both left the country, each carrying a suitcase filled with money. It is not known exactly how much Charlie took, estimates were \$100,000. Prescott admitted that he had \$150,000 in his valise and that, according to the contract he had with the company, the money was legitimately his. He and Charlie were to receive 45 percent of the money raised by the sale of stock for rights to their secret process. The

¹⁰We have a manuscript telling the entire story in Prescott's words. It is, he wrote, the only true account of the company's history.

stockholders knew of the arrangement. The two men had just taken their rightful share, Prescott said.

The big-city press gave the story front-page coverage, rivalling the space devoted to the Spanish-American War. The *Gazette*, more sensitive to the human tragedy involved, was discreet:

Former Edgartownians are giving the country much material for the newspapers just now, but friends of the families, and they are all of us, certainly hope that things are not so bad as the zealous newspapers have painted. The wise person hurries not in pronouncing judgment. [August 4, 1898].

This was the total coverage the weekly newspaper gave the story. It never mentioned it again.

The *Boston Globe* sent a reporter to Edgartown and his account, occupying a full page complete with drawings, was published August 7, 1898. He had interviewed Captain Jared in his garden. The proud old sea captain, then 73 years old, talked about Prescott:

He never mentioned gold to me. He knew better. I had sailed over too many miles of salt water to be taken in. . . . My boy Prescott has gone wrong. . . . Now he must take the consequences. I shall not worry about him. When my boy Marcus came down here with that valise full of money his brother Prescott had given to him I said to him, "Don't keep a cent of it. Give it up. Tell the truth and I will love you." He turned the money over to the detectives. It was for some of the people who invested, I think a minister and somebody else. . . . Marcus gave it up. Marcus is all right. . . . If Prescott had followed my advice he would not be hiding now. The women folks take it pretty hard. His mother is all worked up over it. If they wasn't, I would ask you in. . . .

Surely, Helen was shaken. Prescott had been her pride. He had even involved Marcus. At the time, Marcus was a graduate student at Brown and had acted, he admitted, as an unsuspecting agent, carrying money from one bank to another while Prescott and Charlie prepared to leave the country. Prescott had told him that it had something to do with supporting the price of the stock and must be

confidential. Prescott was right. Had the stockholders found out what he was doing, the price would have plummeted, as it soon did.

Jared, holding his head high, told the *Globe* reporter, "it would take more than that to give me a shock." He died six months later, on January 13, 1899. Prescott's disgrace no doubt was a contributing factor. Helen, younger and stronger, lived another 35 years, dying on February 26, 1934.

But that isn't the end of Prescott's story. He lived a long life and a respectable one, building a new reputation as a teacher, scholar and historian. The road back wasn't an easy one. Within a year, living with his wife and son in Vienna, Austria, he decided he could not be happy spending money obtained by fraud.¹¹ He sent all but \$6000 to the Treasurer of the Electrolytic Marine Salts Company and authorized him to withdraw another \$35,000 that he still had in a bank:

I was now down to about \$6000. . . . [and I thought] I ought to use it in a last effort to find a profitable process of extracting gold from sea water.¹²

He moved to England in May 1899 and looked up the scientist, Eduard Sonstadt, whose discovery had inspired the entire scheme when that newspaper account was read to him in Edgartown. The two men kept experimenting and, it seemed, were getting close to success (at least in Prescott's eyes) when the aging scientist became ill and died. His funds running out, Prescott abandoned the work in March 1900. His wife and son, Lelan Phinney Jernegan, had already returned to the United States. The family was divided and virtually penniless.

Prescott was determined to make a new life for himself, alone. He went to Alaska in another vain chase after gold, this time joining the crowds of prospectors seeking gold on

¹¹Prescott's dilemma was that he had set out to take money from a rich exploitive capitalist, but ended up taking from folks like himself, often clergymen and their widows. Stockholders, it is said, got back about 35 cents per share (selling price ranged from 35 cents to \$1.45 at its peak). He claimed to have gotten less than \$35,000 from the scam, including expenses.

¹²He wanted desperately to prove he was not a swindler. He was.



Jared's casket, at home before his funeral. Down the stairs with the rosewood balusters, Laura had come in 1894, a radiant, beautiful bride.

the beach sands near Nome.¹³ Disillusioned and broke, he returned to Seattle with nothing but a small sack of gold dust, for which he got \$200. He signed up with a labor gang building a pier at Lake Winnipeg in the frigid Canadian wilderness for \$2 a day. That finished, he found a job in an Everett, Washington, saw mill.

After six weeks of work in the saw mill at \$1.75 a day, I began to think that I was getting nowhere fast when a letter came offering me a position to teach in the Philippines at \$1000 a year. . . . William H. Taft, chairman of the Philippine Commission, had called for 1000 teachers¹⁴. . . . The War Department turned the power of appointment over to college presidents and my old teacher, President Andrews, gave me an appointment. . . . [his] faith in me and friendship for me never wavered.

Prescott taught in the Philippines from 1901 until 1910, building a reputation of which he was justifiably proud. He wrote several books on Philippine history that were used as textbooks and also the words to a patriotic song that for years was an unofficial national anthem.

Although he was halfway around the world from Lubec, Maine, and the now-defunct Electrolytic Marine Salts

¹³Prescott wrote: "It was my last gamble for gold: the dream had faded. I decided to quit gold."

¹⁴This program could be considered the original United States Peace Corps, predating the Kennedy program by 60 years (see John T. Galvin's article in *The Pilot*, May 2, 1986).

Company, he could not escape his past. Late in 1903, a visitor to the village where Prescott was teaching recognized the name (he had never tried to hide behind an assumed name). He was staying with Prescott overnight because there was no other suitable place available. When he got back to the States, the visitor published a sensational article about "discovering the swindler teaching democracy." To Prescott's great embarrassment, it was reprinted in a leading Manila newspaper.

Now I had to explain the article, even to my landlord. His comment was that if he had been lucky enough to get his hands on so much money he would not have given any of it back. . . . "You had the name; you might as well have had the game."

Despite his fear that he would lose his teaching position, he weathered the embarrassment. Throughout his teaching career he lived with the knowledge that he might be fired because of his past. Some years later, while he was principal of Hilo High School in Hawaii, a detective-story magazine revived the story, causing much talk in the school. He was not fired, but the Superintendent demoted him from principal to teacher.

In 1906, his wife, Betsey Evelyn Phinney, now living in St. Louis, was given an uncontested divorce on the grounds of desertion. He had not seen her since going to Alaska. Their son was then 13 years old.

He left the Philippines in 1910 and spent a year in California, living miles from any town and earning some occasional money by giving illustrated lectures on Philippine history. He hoped to make some money with his writing, but had little success.¹⁵ Tired of the loneliness and low on funds, he accepted the post as high-school principal in Hawaii, from which he retired in 1924 on a small, but comfortable, pension.

After the divorce, he twice remarried, both times happily,

¹⁵In 1927, he did write a book, which he published himself, entitled *Man and His God*. "I sold some of the books by mail and gave away hundreds," he wrote. "It was the most satisfying achievement of my life."

although both wives died of illness within six years. By his second wife, Gertrude Browning, he had another son, Prescott Edward Jernegan, about whom he wrote: "She left me a son whose affection has never failed me and whose actions have never shamed me." He must have been thinking of his own father as he wrote those words.

Three years after he retired, he returned to the United States, this time visiting his mother and sister, Laura, in Edgartown. The visit was scarcely noticed by the *Gazette*, but there was an article in the *New Bedford Standard*, in which he said:

"I came East principally to see my mother again," Mr. Jernegan told the *Standard*, as he took refuge from the island chill beside a glowing fire in the attractive tea room and antique shop of Mrs. Spear in Edgartown. "She was 88 years old last Thursday. . . . This is not my first visit since I went West. I was here for a visit of a few days three years ago."

That earlier visit seems to have gone unrecorded. This article in the *New Bedford* paper was friendly with no mention of the scandal in his past. It stated that:

. . . a quarter century as school teacher and school head in United States Government employ was terminated this summer by Prescott Ford Jernegan, recently of Hawaii, who is paying his second visit since 1901 to his mother, Mrs. Helen M. Jernegan. . . . and his sister, Mrs. Laura Spear.

After long years, deliverance from the sin of his past had come. A newspaper article about him could now be written without being headlined "Prescott Ford Jernegan, Greatest Swindler of the Nineteenth Century." It must have relieved his mother and sister. After a few days in Edgartown, he returned to California where he made his retirement home. When he died on February 23, 1942, he was visiting in Texas.

In 1934, looking back on his tumultuous life, he wrote:

I lived in my own world and had my own explanations for my conduct, both past and present. . . . Technically, I was a criminal; actually, if you prefer. But I never felt like one. . . . I was sorry for my error, still more for the losses of investors, but my self-respect never failed me. . . . no

man climbs to great heights by calling himself names, or accepting as infallible other people's opinion of him. For 25 years I served without scandal in a public career where respectability is at a premium. I felt as I acted; give my ancestors the credit, if any.

To Jared and Helen must go some of that credit.

Marcus Wilson Jernegan

In contrast to his brother, Marcus, the youngest in the family, lived a conventional, successful and distinguished life. He had no need to worry over the opinions of others about him; they were, it would seem, always very high. With the exception, of course, of that one period when he had put his reputation at risk as an agent of his brother. As Jared said, "Marcus is all right."

Born August 6, 1872, the year after the *Roman* was crushed in the Arctic ice, he was a good student, like his siblings. When he was graduated from Edgartown High School in 1889, he was the only boy in a class of nine. One of his classmates was his future sister-in-law, Evelyn Phinney. He was the class valedictorian.

After high school he, like Prescott, went to Phillips Andover, where during one of his three years there his brother was teaching. Then to Brown, the Baptist college, where he was awarded a bachelor's degree in 1896 and a master's in 1898, the year of Prescott's flight to Europe and of his own involvement in the preparations for his departure.

It is not clear how much Marcus was aware of during those hectic days at the end of July 1898. Prescott declared him guiltless in a letter to the *New York Herald* in September:

He served myself and Mr. Fisher in a purely secretarial capacity when he assisted us in New York. . . . In making a legal fight for the retention of my property, he did simply what the law gives to every accused person -- gave me the benefit of the doubt.

What Marcus did, using the name F. W. Thompson, was to buy negotiable United States bonds with cash given to him by Prescott, who was planning to take the securities with him to France. The purchases involved over several

JARED'S SECOND FAMILY



Courtesy Barbara Phillips estate

Helen, seated left, poses proudly with her handsome family at Laura's wedding. Standing: Brown student Marcus, left; Reverend Prescott, right. days were more than \$100,000.

Marcus was registered in a New York hotel under an assumed name: A. C. Spencer. On July 22 he engaged passage for Prescott and family, the ticket listing the passengers as Mr. and Mrs. Louis Sinclair, 15 Market Street, Chicago. That same day, Prescott withdrew \$28,000 from

a Brooklyn bank. The next day, Marcus went to the pier to see the family off on the steamship *Navarre*. Prescott handed him a valise with \$45,000 in it with which to buy more bonds to be sent to him in France.

The next day, a Sunday, Marcus left for Providence aboard the steamer *Plymouth*, the valuable suitcase firmly in grasp. A Pinkerton detective was following him (one of the New York banks had become suspicious of this young man who was always carrying so much money in cash). The detective tried to convince Marcus to turn the valise over to him, but Marcus refused, taking it with him to Edgartown where, as we have seen, Jared persuaded him to turn it over to the authorities.

There remains some confusion about how much money Marcus was entrusted with by his brother. On August 21, some weeks after the above incident occurred, Marcus wrote to Prescott in Europe:

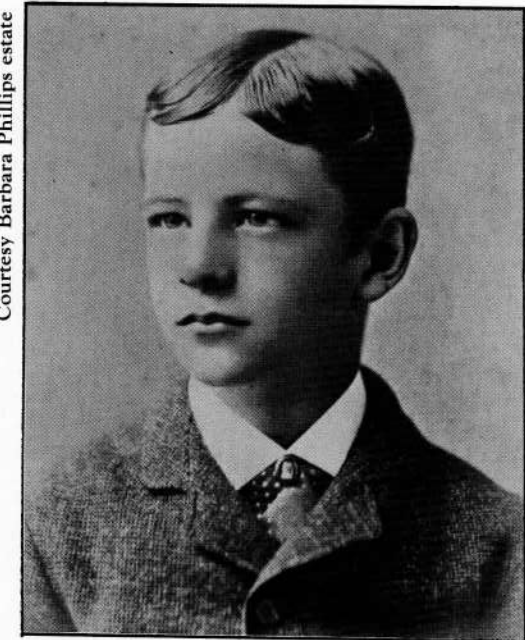
Papers have been served on me as a trustee and I have got to swear before a justice of peace the exact amount of property of yours in my possession. This I must do for two reasons: First, because I have serious doubt that you obtained the money either legally or morally by right; second, because I refuse absolutely to knowingly commit a perjury with selfish interest for all the money that was ever coined. . . . the truth must be told.

Prescott wrote in 1934 that he "made provisions before leaving New York" to repay three friends who had invested in the company. This may have been what Jared meant when he told the *Globe* reporter that the money Marcus had was "for some of the people who invested, I think a minister and somebody else." Two of Prescott's relatives had invested small sums in the stock and he said he had reimbursed them from his money. (Newspaper accounts stated that Laura had bought \$600 worth of stock.)

Marcus was judged innocent of any involvement in the swindle and no charges were brought against him after he turned the valise over to the authorities.

The people of Edgartown judged him guiltless when in

Courtesy Barbara Phillips estate



Marcus Wilson
Jernegan, on
his tenth
birthday
in 1882.

the fall of 1899, a year after the collapse of the company, he was named Principal of Schools, a somewhat misleading title as his major duties were teaching. He had one assistant teacher. He held the post for two years and his reports to the town were highly critical of the condition of the high school building, its grounds and its facilities:

At present, the library consists of an encyclopaedia of the edition of 1829, and a few histories of like antiquity. . . . it is unjust to our pupils to ask them to refer to a work printed 71 years since, for determining questions which are continually coming up in school work. . . . Another matter deserving attention is the need of a pump. Not to mention the convenience of water in a school building, for the many purposes for which it is daily needed, the risk of fire alone would seem to be reason enough for not delaying longer.

He left Edgartown to accept an appointment as Instructor of History at the University of Chicago, working towards his PhD. He received his doctorate in 1906 and spent the next year in Europe doing research for the Carnegie

Institute. Returning to the University of Chicago in 1908, he remained there until his retirement in 1937. Named to a full professorship in 1920, he became a regular participant in the famed radio program, "The University of Chicago Roundtable," and authored many books on history.

When Helen made out her will in 1932, she wrote: "In keeping with the wish of my late husband, I give, bequeath and devise to my youngest son, Marcus W. Jernegan, my house and lot situated on Summer Street," as well as whatever money remains after the payment of all obligations. She did not mention Prescott.

We don't know whether Marcus and Prescott ever met again after saying goodbye at the pier in New York City. A month after that incident, Marcus wrote of his feelings in a letter to Prescott:

I am disgusted with the whole business, as you can see by my last letter. . . . here I and the family have got to go through life with this disgrace hanging over our heads at every moment. There is not a town in the land where the finger of scorn will not be pointed at us, such is the publicity of this swindle.

Marcus need not have been so concerned. The public soon forgot his connection with the sea-water-gold swindle. He married Imogene Cameron of Traverse City, Michigan, in 1913, while teaching in Chicago. His field of study was history and he did considerable travelling and studying abroad. The couple had two daughters and the family spent summers at a camp he had built at Oakdale, near Trapp's Pond, in Edgartown. After he retired in 1937, he lived there part of the year. An honorary member of our Society, he gave occasional talks at Society meetings. At his death, in 1949, he was working on the history of the American whaling industry and his notes on the subject are in our Archives.

He was 76 years old when he died, the last of Jared's second family, truly as remarkable a family as any the Island has ever had. All were successful, each in a different way.



Dr. Marcus Wilson Jernegan, distinguished Professor of History at the University of Chicago.

All were proud of their heritage and, with the exception of the short period in Prescott's life, all lived up to it.



Charlie Fisher, the Perfect Partner

WHEN Rev. Prescott Ford Jernegan returned to Florida, his gold-from-sea-water plan firmly in mind, awaiting him there was a willing and most capable partner -- Charles Elmer Fisher, his boyhood chum and Edgartown schoolmate, with whom he had fantasized about a life of piracy while playing around the waterfront.

In Prescott's words, Charlie was "a typical soldier of fortune, ready for any fate that promised adventure and quick gain, a dashing, clever, bold and resourceful man. Withal, he had a gentle disarming manner, was successful with women and was quick thinking and plausible to a degree. . . . strongly resembled Aramis, one of the famous Three Musketeers of Dumas."

After leaving Edgartown, Charlie travelled widely and held many jobs: a clerk in a cotton mill; a pre-medical student for a year; a cavalryman in the British and American armies; a private detective and finally a floor walker in a Brooklyn department store. He had just been fired from this last post before joining his old schoolmate in Florida.

The two men, one an ordained minister, the other a soldier of fortune, were an ideal combination for what lay ahead. Both totally trusted the other; both were daring; both were at a crossroads in their lives. As Prescott described it:

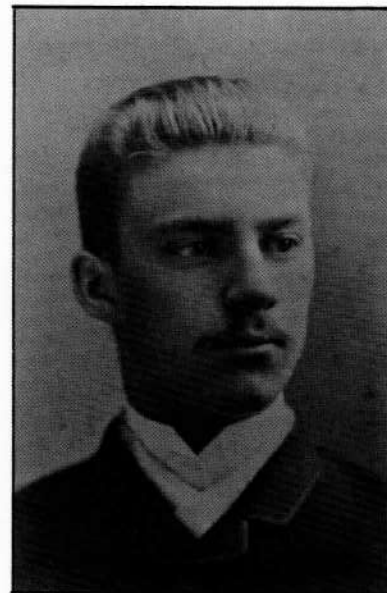
"My theology was bankrupt, my family broken up and I felt a driving force within me not to be resisted. . . .

the same forces that drove me on, drove him on, and he defended his course with the same sophistical arguments."

When the scam was revealed to the press by Charlie's friend, William Phelan, the stories all stated that Charlie had "salted" the accumulator boxes with flaked gold by walking to them underwater in a diving suit. That had been the plan at the beginning when Charlie confided in Phelan, but it was quickly abandoned after a test in which Charlie nearly drowned. Hauled ashore and resuscitated by Prescott, Charlie threw the diving suit into the ocean and never used it again.

Instead, by various slight-of-hand tricks, he "salted" the collected material after it was removed from the ocean. Such deviousness had been necessary only a few times early in the adventure, when the two men were persuading initial investors that they really could recover gold from the ocean. Once the stock company was formed, the collected material, the so-called gold-bearing mercury, was taken from the accumulators into the locked laboratory where Charlie "extracted" the gold that had been gathered, they said, from the sea water. In truth, he melted down old gold jewelry to make the ingots that were sent to Boston weekly to keep investors buying stock.

Without Charlie, there could have been no Electrolytic Marine Salts Company. He was as essential as Prescott. A week before the story broke



Charles Elmer Fisher, whose life after the scandal became a mystery.

in the press, he left for New Zealand with his share of the money. His life and death after that remain a mystery.

Charles Elmer Fisher was the son of Capt. Charles W. Fisher of Edgartown, whose house is on the corner of North Water and Winter Streets. Captain Fisher is said to have captured the largest sperm whale ever killed, yielding 168 barrels of oil, while master of the *Alaska* in 1884. When the sea-water-gold scandal broke open in July 1898, the captain was sailing home to New Bedford on the bark *Canton*, arriving there on September 10th. The next day he came to Edgartown by steamer and, no doubt, had long and painful talks with his wife, Nellie.

He didn't stay long. A month later, he left for San Francisco to take command of the whaler *Alice Knowles*. The following winter he again came to

Edgartown between cruises.¹

Then, in 1901, he purchased the bark *Gay Head* and, after his first voyage as master-owner, came home by train, leaving his vessel in San Francisco. Parnell ("Nellie") was in Boston when he arrived in December 1902. She was Charlie's step-mother, being the captain's second wife. They returned to Edgartown on December 11th.

In that week's issue, the *Gazette* published the following item:

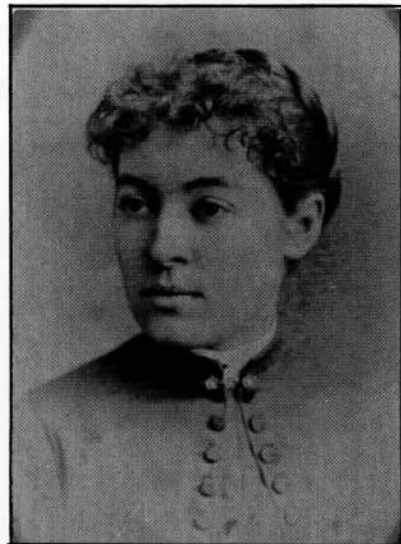
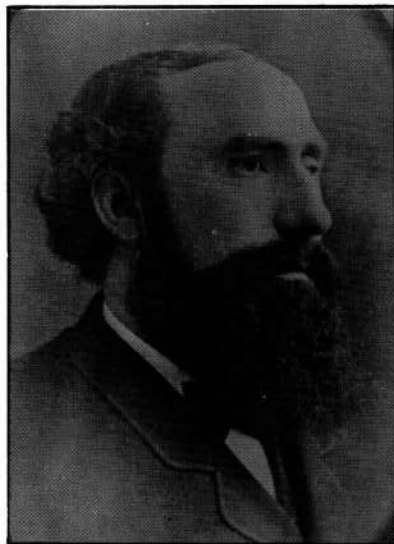
"News has been received by the family here of the death at Sydney, Australia, of Charles E. Fisher, son of Capt. Charles W. Fisher, of this town. He was 38 years of age and leaves a widow and one child. The cause of the death is said to be consumption."

That was the extent of Charlie's obituary. Captain Fisher, who had quelled a mutiny at gunpoint, had made up his mind what to do with the son who had disgraced the family. He declared him dead.

We discovered that the death announcement was untrue during research into the sea-water-gold story. In our Archives we have some of Nellie Fisher's letters. One of them was written by Mrs. Lulu Kelly, a friend of hers in Keri Keri, New Zealand, where she had lived while her husband went Pacific whaling some years before. It is dated February 1905 and contains this paragraph:

"Your boy Charlie -- always called

¹He didn't let the family disgrace change his habits. The *Gazette* ran this item on Jan. 4, 1900: "The first sleigh seen on the streets this winter was on Tuesday. Capt. Chas. W. Fisher took first honors, as usual, in this line. No snow, suitable for sleighing, ever escapes the Captain's notice."



Charlie's father, Capt. Fisher, and stepmother, Parnell "Nellie" Fisher.

Fisher -- is on one of the Union Company steamers going to Australia. He is working his way up, he says -- he is expected home soon for his holiday. He is a dear boy."

The letter was written more than three years after "the dear boy" had been declared dead by his father.

When Captain Fisher died November 10, 1905, a tall polished granite shaft was raised over his grave. On the reverse side is carved:

Charles Elmer Fisher
died in Sydney, N.S.W.
1864 - 1902

The monument was erected a year after Mrs. Kelly wrote her letter.²

The captain's will, drawn up in 1904, made it clear that he considered Charlie dead. In it, he bequeathed \$100 "to my grandson, Arthur Fisher,

²Incidentally, both dates are incorrect. Charlie was born in 1866, the same year as Prescott. It is not known when he died, but it was after 1904.

son of my son, Charles E. Fisher, deceased."³

Captain Fisher's death was sudden and expected. He was in New Bedford on his way home from San Francisco where he had, once again, left the *Gay Head*. Nellie was with him, having gone to meet him as was her custom. He complained of a chill soon after arriving and died in their hotel room a few hours later.

His obituary stated:

"He leaves a widow, but no children."

The captain had, once more, made his point.

³An affidavit in the Dukes County Probate Court dated Feb. 13, 1908, from New York state affirms that guardianship rights for "Charles A. Fisher, otherwise known as Arthur Fisher, infant, were duly granted to Lillian S. Fisher."



Footnotes to History

The First West Tisbury Land Boom

by JOHN A. HOWLAND

ONE need only glance in the *Vineyard Gazette* at the weekly Registry News and the Notices of Public Hearing by the beleaguered West Tisbury Planning Board to realize that West Tisbury is currently the object of a land "boom."

But it is by no means the first!

In July of 1668, Thomas Mayhew gave William Peabodie and Josiah Standish of Duxbury and James Allen of Sandwich permission to negotiate with the Sachem of Takemmy to purchase what lands they wished within the Sachem's bounds. For this they paid Mayhew 6 Pounds, 13 Shillings, 4 Pence.

James Allen was originally of Braintree, the son of Samuel Allen who had arrived on these shores shortly after the *Mayflower*.

Josiah Standish was a son of the doughty Miles and was married to Allen's sister, Sarah, and accordingly his brother-in-law.

William Peabodie was married to Elizabeth Alden, daughter of John and Priscilla who, if Longfellow is to be believed, was Josiah's father's lost love.

Thus all were first generation from the *Mayflower* or from succeeding boats when immigration laws were still so lax. And all this "in-lawing" or being "kissin' cousins" was one thing that drew these three together. But they apparently had no previous association with Martha's Vineyard nor

JOHN A. HOWLAND, a graduate of Brown, spent much of his career with A.T.&T. (before fragmentation) as Director of Advertising. Retired, he now lives in West Tisbury, where he spends rainy days amplifying historical footnotes. This is such an amplification.

any family on it.

What they also had in common however, and what has drawn so many other land speculators to the Island, was an eye for the fast buck. And the land they wanted to invest in was what is now West Tisbury.

Just what they bought from the Sachem under that grant and for how much is not recorded; but on August 2, 1669, along with a fourth partner, James Skiffe, also of Sandwich and presumably a crony of Allen's, they purchased from the Sachem for 80 Pounds a large tract starting at the mouth of the Tiasquam River and going easterly and southerly, and for a further consideration of 65 Pounds were granted all the meadows south to the water. The wording of these deeds and an interesting hand-drawn map are to be found in Banks *History of Martha's Vineyard, Vol. II, Annals of West Tisbury*.

In 1670, for another 5 Shillings, they negotiated the removal of a troublesome (to them) condition in the previous deed which prevented them from letting their cattle graze loose on adjacent Indian farm lands.

So for something over 151 Pounds, 33 Shillings, 4 Pence, they now owned about one-quarter of the Island, lands encompassing Tisbury and West Tisbury (with the exception of Christiantown) and a piece of Chilmark.

At some point around this time, a Benjamin Church had bought land from these four and erected a grist mill and in 1669 had sold off a portion of his land holdings to Joseph Merry for 120 Pounds. Assuming he had bought-in as a one-fifth partner at original investment cost of the whole (which is highly unlikely), he was turning over an investment of 30 Pounds for 120 in less than a year--a foreshadowing of current West Tisbury wheeler-dealing.

The "boom" was now on!

In 1671, the four "proprietors" sold off seven more parcels of their "development" to John Eddy, Isaac Robinson, James Skiffe, Sr., (father of the original James), Simon Athern, Jeramiah Whitne (*sic*), John Rogers and Thomas Mayhew,

Jr.* In 1685, Peabodie sold some more of his holdings to a Henry Luce.

Further parcels were subsequently sold to Jonathan Lambert, John Manter and others during the next few years. Just how much these subdivisions were sold for is not recorded, but it is known that the "homelots," as they were called, were of forty acres, indicating that the "developers" had also set up West Tisbury's first zoning law. And an inkling of the spiraling value of land is in the probate of the will of Simon Athern in 1715; his land at the time of his death was valued at 1234 pounds!

But before that time, two of the original four had decided to take the money and run. Standish and Peabodie pulled stakes, packed their profits and departed the Island for greener fields of speculation --Standish for Norwich, Connecticut, which he saw as a new pot of gold, and Peabodie for Rhode Island where another "boom" was then in progress. One wonders if they continued to prosper.

Of the other two, Allen and Skiffe remained to settle or further subdivide their tracts. The Allen name along with many of the others of those early purchasers are still, of course, common to the Island. Skiffe, alas, is found only as the name of some roads and locations.

Just what that original investment of 151 Pounds, 33 Shillings, 4 Pence plus translates to in current dollars is beyond my mathematics, but consider that the West Tisbury land alone of that original grant was carried as \$165 million of assessed valuation as of 1985!

*Thomas Mayhew, Jr., sailed from Boston for England in November 1657. The vessel was lost at sea with all hands.

Documents

The world of science is moving to the Vineyard at the time covered by this installment in the diary of Jeremiah Pease (1792-1857). It brought progress and problems.

The new Fresnel lens, the optical miracle of the day, was being installed in a new brick tower at Gay Head Light and would soon go into operation. The lens is now displayed on the Society grounds. The new keepers' dwelling, built at the same time, leaked badly and its roof had to be redone.

As Jeremiah wrote in the previous installment, a telegraph cable to the mainland was inaugurated. More than 1000 persons attended the ceremony. Unfortunately, during its first few months, the cable was broken several times by anchors of coastal schooners, putting it out of operation for days at a time.

Summer visitors were increasing. On one Saturday night, 107 off-Islanders were put up in a single Edgartown hotel.

Letters to the Gazette told of problems with the youth:

"Vice stalks abroad even at noonday, and night is rendered hideous by the intemperance and gambling which prevail."

Another resident wrote: "Young men, how do you propose to employ your time during the long winter evenings so near at hand? . . . We hope not in places of vice and wickedness, gambling hells (sic) and low bar-rooms."

But a stranger, visiting Edgartown and impressed with its charm, disagreed:

" . . . on Sunday evening last while

walking through the different streets. . . . quiet and good order reigned supreme. . . . the evils complained of seem to be more imaginary than real."

Jeremiah, busy with prayer meetings, funerals and his many occupations, tells us nothing about the problem.

July 1856

28th. Wly, light. Very warm 96.

30th. Wly, light. Rains a little. Sold a piece of land to James Toves, deed dated this day. \$300.

31st. Ely, light. Capt. Uriah Coffin dies very suddenly, aged 79 years.

August 1856

1st. SW, light. Funeral of Capt. Coffin. Warm & dry.

3rd. Ely, light. Warm. Attended Meetings at Pohogonit.

4th. Ely, light. Warm. Surveyed land at Deep Bottom for the Indians, per request of L. Thaxter & John Vinson, Commissioners.

5th. SEly. Surveyed land at Deep Bottom per request of Commissioners. Rains a good shower at night.

6th. S & SW, cloudy. Rains this morning. Engaged in draughting land for Indians at Deep Bottom.

7th. SW, fresh breeze. Surveyed land at Deep Bottom, J.V. was there P.M.

8th. SW, fresh breeze. Draughting.

9th. SW. Surveyed land at Deep Bottom.

10th. Wly, light. Warm. Attended meetings at E'Ville.

11th. SW. Surveyed land at Deep Bottom.

12th. SW, light. Draughting ditto.

13th. SW. Ditto.

14th. SW, light. Went to Camp Meeting at W. Grove, E. Chop.

Remained until the 21st. It was a very

excellent meeting, a great number professed Religion. I think this has been as good or perhaps the best meeting every held there.¹

23rd. SW. Engaged in draughting land at Deep Bottom. Brig _____ bought for whaling arrives from Plymouth. 24th. SW, light. warm. Attended Meetings in a grove near the M.D. School House.

27th. W to SW. Engaged surveying land at ChristianTown.

31st. SW. Pleasant. Attended Meetings in the Grove at M.D. Br. Thos. Stewart was there P.M. Mr. Daniel Vincent's Wife dies very suddenly.

September 1856

2nd. E, moderate breeze. Cloudy. Engaged surveying land at D. Bottom, ½ day. Some were sick & one absent at H. Hole. Did not do much.²

4th. SW, pleasant. Engaged surveying at Deep Bottom.

5th. SW, pleasant. Engaged surveying for Dr. Daniel Fisher.

7th. SW to W, pleasant. Attended meetings in the grove at M.D. Br. S. G. Vinson & Thos. Stewart were there and took an active part.

8th. NE to SW, pleasant. Engaged in writing deeds, etc., for Chas. & George E. James of Christian Town.

9th. W to SW, rains a little early this morning. Engaged surveying wharf for Jos. Mayhew.³

14th. NE, light. Pleasant. Attended

¹This would be Jeremiah's last camp meeting. He died a few weeks before the meeting of 1857.

²It is not clear what this reference to people at Holmes Hole means.

³Mayhew's Wharf, later Chadwick's, and now a restaurant, was, the Gazette reported, "in dilapidated condition and was being given extensive repairs."

meetings in the Grove at M. District. Br. Geo. Weeks was there and preached. It was an interesting time. 20th. SE, light. Cloudy. Sister Sophronia Fisher dies, aged 40. She died of the dropsy. She embraced Religion in early life and has been useful in that cause and I trust has gone to rest with her Redeemer. Rains at night.

21st. NE, light. Warm. Attended Meetings at E'Ville. Rains at nt. Funeral of Sister Sophronia Fisher. Service Revd. Mr. Sheldon of Chilmark, Holmes and _____ of Edgartown.

25th. SW, pleasant. Went to Chilmark on business.

28th. W to SW, light. Pleasant. Attended Meetings at E'Ville.

30th. NE to SE, fresh. Gale with thunder lightning and rain at nt. Attended court on business of Wid. Eliz Gray.

October 1856

5th. W to SW, light. Attended meetings at Pohogonut.

6th. NE, - fresh wind. Painters commenced painting my house.

7th. NE, fresh wind, clear. Painters engaged as above.

8th. SW. Ship *Champion*, Cap. Geo. Coffin, sails for Pacific Ocean.

9th. SW, pleasant. Got in all my corn and potatoes.

12th. NE to SW. Light, warm. Attended Meetings at E'Ville.

13th. SW. Engaged in surveying the road at H. Hole village, per request of County Commissioners.

18th. E to SE, A.M., little rain, Gale. P.M., SW, light breeze, pleasant. Mr. Charles Francis dies of a soar in his

stomach. He was a very kind obliging man, a good citizen, and a particular friend to myself and family. He embraced Religion a few years ago and died, as I trust, in the Lord. He was 46 years and 6 months old, has left a Wife and four daughters to mourn his loss. 19th. Wly, light, pleasant. Attended meetings at E'Ville.

20th. NEly, light, pleasant. Funeral of Mr. Francis, service by Revd. Mr. Blanchard of the Congregational Church. It was a very solemn and affecting time.

21st. Ely and calm, A.M. P.M. SW, light, very warm, pleasant day. Mr. Ralph Cleveland dies about 2 P.M., having been sick for several years past. We were school boys together and always lived in friendship. I trust he died a believer in the blessed Saviour of Mankind. Oh, how fast my friends are passing away.

22nd. SW. Funeral of Mr. Cleveland. Service by Revd. Mr. Holmes, Revd. S. Benton & Revd. Mr. Blanchard. He was 65 years old. It was time of deep reflections with me, and no doubt with many others as we followed him to the grave.⁴

25th. WNW. Moderate breeze. Our Daughter Velina visits us.

26th. Wly, light, pleasant. Attended meetings at E'Ville. Br. Geo. Weeks preached there.

27th. SW, pleasant. Velina returns to Bristol. Went to Deep Bottom on business of my own. Rains at Nt. a little.

⁴This is to be taken literally. The mourners did walk to the cemetery behind the casket, "following" him to the grave. By this time, the casket was carried in the town's hearse (now in the Society's collection), in earlier years it was carried on the shoulders of pallbearers.

30th. SW, fresh wind, clear. Bark *Louisa Sears*, Capt. Edward Mayhew, sails on a Whaling Voyage.

November 1856

2nd. SW, moderate breeze, pleasant. Attended Meetings at M.D.

5th. SW, fresh breeze, changes at nt., freezes, wind WNW.

7th. SW, fresh breeze. Schr. *Delaware* sails on a Whaling Voyage.

9th. NE to N, fresh breeze, rainy. Attended Meeting at E'Ville.

11th. NNW, fresh breeze, clear. Went to Christian Town on business with B. C. Marchant, Esqr.

20th. NNE, light. Ship *Richard Mitchell*, Capt. James Huxford, sails for Indian Ocean on a Whaling Voyage, ship recently bought from Nantucket.

22nd. SE to SW, rainy. Br. Henry Ripley dies, having been in a feeble state of health for many years. He was a pious man, a worthy citizen, and one of my most particular friends from early life to his death.

23rd. NW to SW, pleasant. Attended meetings at E'Ville. Br. Jason Luce dies of _____. He was a professor of Religion and became a very different man from what he was before that period, a very great change took place in his outward conduct. Aged 61.

24th. SSW, light. Funeral of Mr. Luce, service by Revd. Sanford Benton and Revd. Mr. Blanchard. Rains a little at nt.

26th. Ely, light, cloudy. Funeral of a Child of Mr. Jared W. Coffin, aged about 5 years. Service by Revd. Sanford Benton.

27th. NW, light, clear. Attended to business of Wid. Eliza Gray at her wood lot near the late dwelling of Mr. Simons Vincent. Thanksgiving day.

December 1856

1st. NW, light, cool. William leaves Town for Washington City.

The entries during the rest of December (except for the 22nd) are devoted entirely to comments about the weather and his regular meetings at Eastville and Middle District. The complete Christmas Day entry is: NW, very cold.

22nd. NNE, moderate cloudy & squally. Went to E'Ville to see Mrs. Harriet Bradley who had hurt her foot and ankle by accident.

January 1857

1st. NE, Moderate breeze, good weather for the season. Jeremiah and his family return from Bristol where they have been a few weeks on a visit.

3rd. E, snow storm, harbor freezes over, very cold.

4th. NW, cold. Did not attend Meeting at M.D. on account of snow. Funeral of Mrs. Hopy Weeks who died in Boston the 2nd Inst., aged 50 years. She was a pleasant respectable woman, her husband, Capt. Alexdr. P. Weeks, was lost at sea some time in Aug. last. He was very highly esteemed by the citizens of this place as a ship master, no man stood higher in the estimation of his acquaintances.

6th. NW, very cold. Ice makes fast, harbor freezes over at night, solid.

7th. NW, very cold. Harbor closed up with hard ice.

10th. W to SW, moderate, but cold. Heavy snow on the ground.

11th. NW, cold, snows. Did not attend Meetings at E'Ville.

14th. NNW, light wind, cold. Thaws a little in the sun at noon.

15th. NW, light wind, cold. Cloudy. Thumometer 4 below Zero at night.

16th. NW, clear, cold. Ice in the harbor

is very thick and hard.

17th. W to SW, cloudy, cold. Attended to business of Ellen Fellows, Probate.

18th. NE to N. Gale with snow. Thumometer 5 below Zero. Heavy Gale at Night. A great quantity of snow on the ground, more than I have seen at any one time for 40 years. Ice very thick in the harbor. Did not attend Meetings at E'Ville.

20th. NW, cold, clear. There is more snow on the ground now than there has been for 40 years past, not a square rod of ground, clear of snow, can be seen from the top of any house in the village for a fortnight past. No water to be seen in the Sound.

23rd. N to NW, fresh wind with snow. Extremely cold, thumometer 12 degrees below Zero, probably the coldest day since the remembrance of the oldest man upon this Island. No water to be seen in the Sound, every part of the harbor closed up with ice. 27th. S.E., rains a little, melts a little snow, some pieces of land appear, which have been covered with snow since the 3rd. day of this month.

28th. N to NE, cold. Harbor remains closed up with very thick ice.

30th. NW, light, pleasant. Thaws.

31st. E to ESE, Gale with rain. This has been the most severe month I ever knew on account of snow, ice, frost and cold. The thumometer has been from 4 to 12 or 13 degrees below Zero, the ice in the harbor is now 18 inches thick and extends to Cape Poge, and a great quantity floating in the Sound.

Director's Report

BY September 13, when the Cooke House closed for the season and we returned to winter hours, the guest book had been filled to the last page with names, not only from nearby, but from very far away. A steady stream of visitors and researchers continues to keep the museum and library busy.

We're grateful to the many volunteers who assisted in keeping our services going, especially those who filled in near the end of the season when several of our guides left early to return to college. Volunteer staffing of the Gatehouse was a success in every way and we look forward to continuing it next summer.

The last summer visitor at the Cooke House was a young woman cellist. She was guided by Nathalie Huntington who had volunteered for the day and who, when she learned of the visitor's special interest, was able to show her a cello that her (Natalie's) grandfather had made. With great enthusiasm and expertise, the visitor provided us with specific information about the unusual features of the Vineyard-made instrument as well as with recommendations for its restoration. It was a fitting ending for a summer that included many such mutually happy moments.

The Annual Meeting which had to be postponed one night because of rain attracted almost a hundred members and guests. Fortunately, the second day cleared in time for us to open the Cooke House and for Admiral and

Mrs. Allen Shinn to invite everyone to visit their beautiful and historic home across the street. We are grateful for their generosity in making possible this highlight of our meeting. President S. Bailey Norton, Jr. made the most important announcement of the evening when he reported that a building committee had been formed to make plans for much needed additional space for exhibitions, storage, and other staff and visitor needs.

On November 8 the Society has scheduled a lecture by Robert Mussey, Chief Furniture Conservator at the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities entitled "Home Care of Museum Quality Furniture." Mr. Mussey spent three days here in June under a grant program examining our furniture and other wooden objects. He made recommendations for care, restoration, and exhibition conditions and also provided a priority list. A number of his suggestions have already been put into practice and many more are scheduled.

This fall the Society will begin a new program by sponsoring an essay contest at the Regional High School. Included in the prizes is the possibility of having the winning essay published in the *Intelligencer*. We hope this contest, which will require consulting original documents at the Society, will increase our association with the Island schools. A special thank you goes to the High School history department for its

cooperation.

Gifts to the Society continue to arrive and the Council and staff are appreciative of the support they evidence, whether checks or securities, documents or artifacts. Not a day goes by when we don't discover another object that reflects recognition of the place the Society holds as the Island's chief repository for the preservation of Vineyard history -- and also makes those of us who work here aware of our responsibility for carrying out that trust.

One of the largest gifts ever received has come to the Society this fall as bequests from James E. Chadwick and his daughter, Esther C. Conklin. It includes whaling artifacts, ivory, documents, shells and dolls. Following cataloguing this winter we will report more fully on this extraordinary addition to the collection. In the meantime we want to express our appreciation to Mrs. Anneke W. Brook, Mrs. Conklin's niece, for her assistance. Among other gifts we have received are four pieces of scrimshaw, a bequest from Barbara Phillips, plus

an autobiographical manuscript by Prescott Jernegan.

For the third year, the Society will join in the celebration of "Christmas in Edgartown" by holding an Open House on Friday and Saturday, December 11 and 12, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Our mid-winter exhibition will have its opening on those days. Its title: *Helen, Laura and the Boys -- Jared Jernegan's Second Family*. We will display examples of Laura's art work and many other items, artistic and otherwise, from this memorable family.

You will be notified by mail, but please mark your calendar and come visit us during the holiday season.

On a personal note, I've just returned from a short stay in France where in every museum and historic site I visited I was reminded of how special the Society's holdings are and of the potential for improving our presentation and services. With the support of our membership, I look forward to helping make it happen.

MARIAN R. HALPERIN

Bits & Pieces

GOLD FEVER is easy to catch and that helps explain the success (if one can call it that) of Prescott Jernegan's scheme to extract the shiny metal from the ocean. Announce any plan for getting gold easily and people will line up to invest.

Prescott and Charlie merely had to convince a few men that their secret process would work and the money poured in. The first two men, one a jeweler and the other a greenhouse-man, were so anxious to believe that they could not force themselves to be too critical. One quick test on a frigid dock near Providence was all it took.

Gold does that to folks. In 1849, Vineyarders by the score formed gold-mining companies, chartered ships, sailed around Cape Horn to San Francisco, staked claims, panned for gold and, for the most part, came home sick and penniless.

In 1901, gold fever struck again. News spread around the world about the discovery of gold for the taking on the sandy beaches near Nome, Alaska. Twelve thousand men rushed north to hit the jackpot. Prescott Jernegan, now broke in England, joined the crowd. Gold still beckoned.

No doubt he thought that Alaska was remote enough so he would be safe from recognition. But there, clearly visible from the beach, was the Corwin Trading Company, run by two Edgartown men, Capt. Edwin Coffin and Capt. Ellsworth West. The two captains had found a better way to

make money in a gold rush: they sold tools and sifting machinery to the men with the aching backs and sore muscles. The two captains got rich. The men on the beach, did not.

We don't know if the two captains ever spotted Prescott in the mob. No doubt, he tried to avoid them.

After a few weeks of misery, Prescott left, taking to Seattle a small bag of gold dust that he sold for \$200. That was the only gold this man whom gold made famous had ever found. It was, he discovered, the hard way to get rich on gold. He had "earned" \$200,000 much easier by selling dreams.

That may have been the only gold Prescott ever got the hard way, but we have in the Society some that came easier -- from the sea, he said.

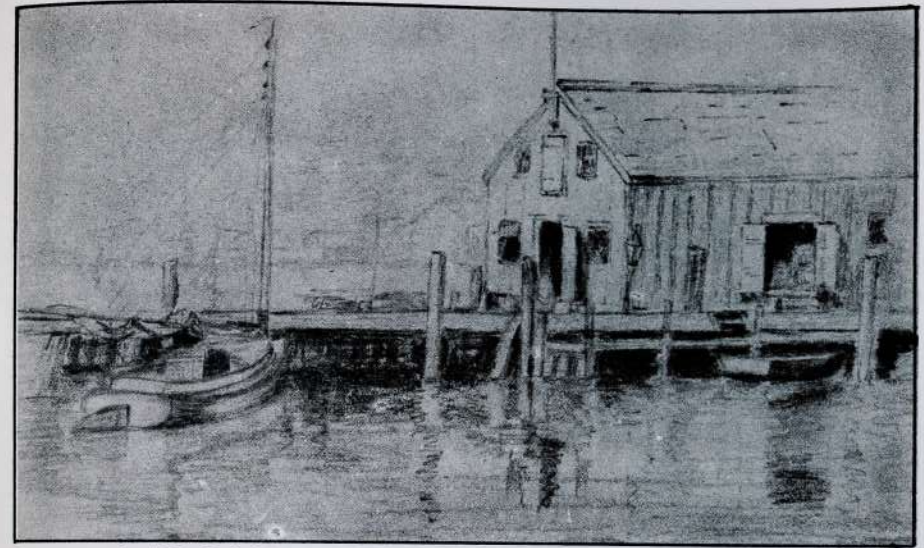
It's in a small box on the back of which, faintly legible in pencil, is this: "Gold from Sea Water. Prescott Jernegan gave to Alexander Goodspeed."

Inside is a chunk of gold about the size of a bracelet charm. Rough on one side and smooth on the other, it has an irregular shape. Thanks to the saving ways of the Coffin family, who married into the McLellan family, it has survived. Mr. Goodspeed was a McLellan from Gorham, Maine, a cousin of Prescott's mother.

At the time of the sea-water swindle, Alexander was a New Bedford lawyer and was Marcus's attorney when he fell under suspicion for helping Prescott. He must have been given the gold earlier, perhaps in an effort to get him to invest.

But we can't help wondering whose old wedding ring it might have been!

A.R.R.



Laura made "The Fish Market" sketch in August 1907

1987 Membership Dues

Early in January, we will mail out our annual requests for renewal of memberships (we are on a calendar-year basis) and for contributions to the 1987 Preservation Fund. There are major changes in the tax law for next year. If you know what they are and believe there is an advantage to giving in 1986, please do so. We will, of course, credit you for 1987 (see inside front cover for schedule). Should you do so, please ignore any reminder we send you in January. It is virtually impossible, it seems, to prevent some duplication in such cases.

If you prefer to wait for our notice, we will be grateful if you respond promptly. It is expensive, both in time and money, to send out second and third reminders. We prefer to spend our time in preserving history! We ask for your cooperation. Thank you.

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Helen Jernegan was selling sea mosses long before her daughter, Laura (who may have been doing the mounting). Ad is from an 1897 Directory.



One of Laura Jernegan's collection of sea mosses: Phyllitis. Many interesting grasses will be on display in our mid-winter exhibition.