

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



# THE DUKES COUNTY INTELLIGENCER

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From Sail Ho!, by Gordon Grant



## Rough Medicine: Doctoring the Whalemen

by  
JOAN DRUETT

## Daniel Webster, Fisherman, On the Vineyard

by ARTHUR R. RAILTON

The Lapwing and Other "Small Tokens of Respect"

More about Capt. James A. Tilton  
And the Bark *Bowhead*

Documents: *Jeremiah Pease Diary*

Books

Bits & Pieces

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**NOTICE**

News of the Society, previously printed in this journal, will now be published in the Society's forthcoming newsletter, which will be mailed to members on a regular basis.

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Vol. 30, No. 2

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

It maintains two historic houses, both providing guided tours to the public during the summer, one in Edgartown and the other in Vineyard Haven. A nominal fee is charged to non-members.

In Edgartown, the Thomas Thomas Cooke House, circa 1765, is on the corner of School and Cooke Streets. Acquired by the Society in 1935, it is maintained as a museum of Island history.

Also on the Society grounds in Edgartown are the Francis Foster Museum and Gale Huntington Library. Both are open to the public year round. The Museum has an exhibition of the Vineyard's maritime heritage. The Library contains logs, journals, genealogies and other Island documents, plus many photographs and volumes of history.

The Edgartown property also includes the Gay Head Lighthouse exhibit with its 1854 Fresnel lens and the Carriage Shed containing various old boats and wagons, including an 1854 hand pumper fire engine. These, too, are open to the public all year.

In Vineyard Haven, the Society maintains the Jirah Luce House, circa 1804, formerly operated by the Tisbury Museum, now part of the Dukes County Historical Society. The exhibits are of early Vineyard explorers and settlers, with emphasis on the maritime history of Holmes Hole, as Vineyard Haven was once called.

The public is invited to visit the Society and also to take out a membership, which includes a subscription to this quarterly journal and free admission to our buildings.

## Rough Medicine: Doctoring the Whalemen

by JOAN DRUETT

ON October 14, 1837, a young surgeon named John B. King arrived at Edgartown, on Martha's Vineyard. He came in a lighter from Nantucket to join the whaleship *Aurora*, Capt. John Hussey Jr., for a whaling voyage.

Why the young Doctor King should have concluded he should go a-whaling is somewhat of a mystery, but he approached his voyage with a lively sense of adventure. The journal he kept, now held by the Nantucket Historical Society, is redolent with his most vivacious interest in everything he saw and did.

Edgartown of October 1837 certainly held interest. On Sunday the 15th. ("no work done this day"), Doctor King took a walk through the town, paying particular attention to the churches. Edgartown, he wrote, boasted "a Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian and a small Unilateralist meeting [house.]"<sup>1</sup> Then he found a gravestone in the churchyard which intrigued him greatly.

There were "many handsome marble monuments and tombstones," and "among the handsomest, one erected by an inhabitant of the Island enumerating his own good qualities and speaking of himself as among the departed." The person memorialized by this edifice, Doctor King noted

<sup>1</sup> This is the first mention we have seen of a "Unilateralist" church in Edgartown. Does any member know any more?

JOAN DRUETT lives in Hamilton in New Zealand, her native land. A teacher until 1984 when she gave it up to write full-time, having won several awards for her work. In 1986, on a Fulbright Fellowship for a study of whaling history, she did research in Hawaii and New England, including at our Society. This article is one result. Another is her work-in-progress, *Petticoat Whalers*, an account of whaling women. Her latest novel, *Abigail*, will soon be published.



with startled amusement, was "alive and well."

Then he described the monument. It was made of "white marble about 2 feet square by 6 or 8 feet high with handsomely sculptured inscriptions on 3 of its sides. On one side is enscribed the name of the person," he noted. The owner of this memorial to vanity was one "Ichabod Norton Esq." On the next side, the inscription read, "endeared to his fellow citizens by his firmness and fidelity in publick affairs, and for his uprightness in all his private dealings. By his prudence and economy," the inscription continued, "he amass'd a large fortune which he wisely distributed for the benefit of his friends."

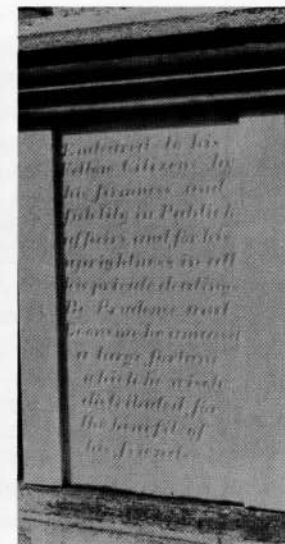
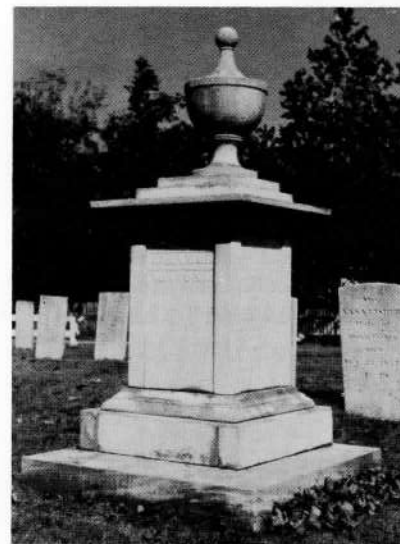
Such an eulogium, as Doctor King noted, was most impressive, if true. There was another epitaph on the third side, written in similar vein. It read: "His house was a home for the traveller and his hand ever open to relieve the wants of others. Having arrived to a good old age he was at length gathered to his fathers, meriting the noblest of mottoes — an honest man."

The fourth side, John King recorded, was left blank, "and when he is really dead it should confirm the eulogiums so strongly blazoned forth. If true." Doctor King further commented that "the person who pointed the monument out to me stated that the remarkable virtues he Ichabod Norton Esq. claimed were not generally attributed to him."<sup>2</sup>

Building one's own gravestone, complete with glowing epitaph, was indeed a notable eccentricity and certainly helped young Doctor King spend his time most interestingly while he waited for Capt. John Hussey to take on a crew of Martha's Vineyard men.

The surgeon, however, was too conscientious to spend all his time so frivolously. The young Vineyarders who were signing on so recklessly for three years a-whaling in the fabled Pacific might disregard the dangers of accident and

<sup>2</sup> The monument still stands in the Edgartown cemetery. The fourth side remains blank. Apparently, there was nothing more to say. The only addition after Ichabod's death was its date, June 29, 1847, and his age, 86.



Ichabod Norton's marble monument in Edgartown. Inscription, which was carved for Ichabod before his death, is fulsome in its praise.

disease, but Doctor King was very aware that life out there was hazardous. Dysentery, "yellow jack," intermittent fevers, agues and stoppages, cholera and blood poisoning, all awaited. The only weapons Doctor King had at his command were his knowledge and the medical chest. So, he used much of his journal in making sure his knowledge, and his chest, were complete.

First, he made a list of the contents of the chest:

1. Alum, for bleeding from the bowels.
2. Antimonial wine, for coughs.
3. Basilicon ointment, for blistering.
4. Blister plaster.
5. Blue vitriol, for removing warts and chancres.
6. Burgundy pitch, for blisters.
7. Calomel and jalap, purgatives.
8. Calomel pills, ditto.
9. Camomile, for purging.
10. Castor oil, ditto.
11. Camphor gum, for fevers and nervousness.

12. Salts of lemon, given with opium for fevers.
13. Cream of tartar, for scurvy and fevers.
14. Dover's powder, for boils, dysentery, dropsy and insomnia.
15. Balsam copaiba, for venereal disease, piles and dysentery.
16. Elixir vitriol, ditto.
17. Emetic tartar, take with camomile for fever.
18. Ether, for seasickness.
19. Flax seed, drunk as a tea for "clap" gonorrhea.
20. Flowers of sulphur, for skin eruptions and itch.
21. Glauber salts, a cooling purge and for swollen testicles.
22. Ipecac, an emetic.
23. Kino, for diarrhea.
24. Laudanum, for pain and seasickness.
25. Mercurial ointment, for syphilis and chancres.
26. Nitre, for stoppage of the urine.
27. Olive oil, a purgative for cholera.
28. Opium, for dysentery and vomiting.
29. Paregoric, for indigestion.
30. Peppermint, for colic.
31. Rhubarb, for loose bowels.
32. Simple ointment, for blisters and chafing.
33. Hartshorn, for faintness.
34. Spirits of nitre, for dropsy.
35. Syrup of squills, for coughs.
36. Myrrh, for ulcerated gums (as in scurvy).
37. White vitriol, for "clap" (and sore eyes!).
38. Quinine, for intermittent fever (malaria).
39. Gum arabic, for indigestion.
40. Chloride of lime, for destroying infection.

Those Vineyard men were lucky to be going a-whaling with a doctor on board. French whalers and many English whalers carried surgeons of a sort, mostly to make certain that the men who pleaded sick were not malingering. On American and Australasian whalers, the skipper was usually the fellow in charge of the doctoring.<sup>3</sup> Hence, the numbers on the little bottles in the medicine chest. The fact that the

<sup>3</sup> Hobart Tasmania, Australia Town Advertiser, 8 Feb. 1862, p.2.: "By order of the French Government the captains of French whaling ships must carry a surgeon if their crew exceeds 20 men. . . No such law exists for British or American ships — to the detriment of their crews. . ."

master held the key to the chest did not guarantee at all that he could understand the names on the bottles, or, in some cases, even read them. Accordingly, the firm that supplied the chest provided numbers for the bottles and a book telling the skipper which bottle to use, and when to use it.

Legend has it that on one voyage, the captain, running out of number 11, made up the deficiency by mixing equal parts of numbers 5 and 6, but one feels hopeful that Doctor King would not have resorted to this.

However, in 1837 the presence of a doctor on board would certainly not have guaranteed the good health of the *Aurora's* crew. Doctors at that time came in two types, based on the school of thought they favored. They either believed in purgatives, and swore by calomel and bleeding, or else they belonged to the "blister" set. Evidently, by the list of medicines in his chest, Doctor King belonged to the blister school.

Blistering was achieved by the laying on of a blister plaster, or mustard, or burgundy pitch, or some other caustic substance on the affected part of the body. It seems incredible now that anyone should try to cure a headache, for instance, by making a big blister on the nape of the neck, but perhaps it did seem as if it worked inasmuch as the new pain would be so intense that the original pain would be insignificant by comparison.

Far too often the only useful thing a doctor could do was to sign the death certificate. In 1834, Captain Hill of the English whaler *Japan* fired his doctor and set him forward, claiming that Doctor Brown allowed the men to go off-duty sick far too easily. Removing the doctor from the cabin did not seem to make much difference to the health of the crew. They all had scurvy, most surely, but then scurvy was endemic on whaleships because of the lack of fresh food. The favorite medicine prescribed by ships' doctors was a hearty tot of rum. The most-used prosthetic was the truss. Seamen were prone to hernia because of the labor of hauling

heavy tubs of salt water over the bow to wash down the ship. It was no wonder then that most New England owners refused to ship a doctor on a voyage: the master, they reasoned, could give out rum or issue a truss just as easily as any medic.<sup>4</sup>

It was little wonder, too, that the skippers of that era believed in their own home remedies and that their journals and logs are littered with medical "receipts," along with the more traditional entries. The master of the *Good Return* (1844-47), wrote: "Remedy for Piles — take twice a day 20 drops of Balsam Copavia on sugar and a light dose of salts daily and use mercurial ointment on the fundamental extremity," signing the prescription "John Swift, MD when necessary."

The captains were certainly resourceful medics, if need be. Captain Charles Henry Robbins of *Clara Bell* described it as "our mischievous practice of medicine." He was referring to the time a Madagascar native came aboard "clutching his aching belly and groaning in misery. I knew what he wanted and gave him a nip of New England rum. Instantaneous cure!" But, the man explained, he had been ill for a year, surely one treatment was not enough. The captain agreed to treat him for ten days and with the help of his mate the following regimen was decided upon:

- Day one: half-glass rum, four tablespoons castor oil
- Day two: hot drops, sugar and water.
- Day three: vinegar and pepper sauce.
- Day four: molasses and mustard.
- Day five: brandy and red pepper.
- Day six: cayenne and cheese.
- Day seven: onions, mustard and chili.
- Day eight: rum and castor oil.
- Day nine: arnica, paregoric and mustard.
- Day ten: straight whiskey.

<sup>4</sup> In the log of the *Japan*, 1854, the ship's doctor, Brown, was accused by the captain of worsening ailments so the crewman wouldn't be able to pull regular duty. The doctor denied it: "I told him I could not prevent a man being taken bad — my only wish was to attend them when sick, which I had always done." One of the men had been excused from duty because of severe hernias. The captain, tired of his being excused, banished the doctor to the forecabin, declaring he could issue trusses as well as any medic.

Despite the patient's "hideous grimaces," the results were excellent, according to Captain Robbins, and "when the time expired he was thoroughly cured. As is commonly the case, he got well in spite of his medicine!"<sup>5</sup>

There were other inspired or home-tested remedies, some surprisingly sensible, some remarkably silly. Capt. John Swift believed in horseradish for hoarseness because "horse" and "hoarse" sounded the same. Turtle oil, rubbing the feet and general massage were heavily relied upon. A report that a captain or his wife had dysentery was enough to draw all the ships in the vicinity into their company, for everyone had his or her own pet remedy for the frightening affliction.

It is odd how each era has its taboo subjects of conversation. Nowadays we speak freely of items such as undergarments, a subject that would send a 19th-century Vineyard "respectable" into fits of flushes, but the people of that day had a preoccupation with bowels and testicles that today we would find embarrassing.

Enema injections were a major part of most treatments and venereal disease was described with the same fine lack of delicacy. The doctor on ship *Java* of Fairhaven in 1854, a Doctor Noddy, treated one seaman so often for "the venereal" that he nicknamed the man "Don Quixote." This disease was no stranger aboard whalers. "Mr. Hussey again well of the venereal," wrote the captain of ship *Magnolia* (1851) in philosophical tones, "but still down with the Liver Complaint."<sup>6</sup>

Whaling masters were equally resourceful when they were faced with such operations as tooth-pulling (a frequent operation) and drawing monstrous boils. Boils were eased by the dramatic process of smearing with brown soap and sugar, leaving it on overnight. In the morning, the mouth of a small bottle was placed over the infection. Then the bottle was heated. The slight vacuum that resulted from the

<sup>5</sup> Capt. Charles Henry Robbins, *The Gam*, H.S.Hutchinson, New Bedford, 1899, pp.161-162.

<sup>6</sup> Log, *Magnolia*, Gershon L. Cox, 1851-1854.

cooling drew the boil and the crater was dressed. Wounds, also frequent, were stitched and then bound with tarry rope in the same blithe manner. Chewed tobacco cuds were a popular antiseptic.

Accidents were frequent and often resulted in the need for the amputation of a limb. Understandably, that was usually enough to send many skippers out looking for a doctor or other captains to assist. Some legendary captains coped.<sup>7</sup>

Capt. Jim Huntting once treated a man who had lost the major portion of one hand and all of one foot in a whaleline. He cleaned up the wounds with a carving knife, a carpenter's saw and a fishhook. The operation was such that the crew had to take turns helping him, for they kept fainting on the job.

Another tale is of a Captain Coffin who himself was hurt so badly in an accident that he knew his leg would have to be amputated. Being the master, the medic and the patient, he knew the situation was complicated. But he was more than equal to the task. He sent for his pistol and a knife and said to his mate: "Now, sir, you gotta lop off this here leg, and if you flinch — well, sir, you get shot in the head." Then he sat as steady as a rock while the mate did his work with the knife, the captain holding the pistol unwaveringly until the operation was completed. No sooner was the ghastly wound wrapped and tidily out of sight than both men promptly fainted.<sup>8</sup>

Other skippers were equally resourceful. Captain Robinson of the whaler *Offley* from Hobart required nothing more than an axe to amputate the frostbitten fingers of a seaman at Desolation Island in 1858. More than a year later when the *Offley* arrived back home with a live sea lion on

<sup>7</sup> Hartson H. Bodfish of Vineyard Haven wrote home from Herschel Island in 1891, while wintering there as First Mate under Capt. James A. Tilton: "I tell you Capt. Tilton and I missed our vocation when we started whaling. We ought to have been surgeons. We administer chloroform and off with them toes." (See *Intelligencer*, Feb. 1967, for the complete letter.

<sup>8</sup> Dionis Coffin Riggs, *From Off-Island*, Whittlesey, N.Y., 1940.

her deck, the animal was put on exhibition and the money raised was given to the man who had lost his fingers in that speedy amputation.

When Capt. Charles Ray commanded the ship *Norman* in 1855, his third mate, Mr. King, was taken out of a boat by a whale and had his right foot mangled in the line. The master took the injured mate on board, cut off the foot above the ankle, sewed the flap and then resumed the chase, killing the whale.<sup>9</sup>

Most skippers, however, were not quite so flamboyantly resourceful, especially when it came to amputation. If no doctor was available, they asked for assistance from other skippers who were nearby.

At Herschel Island, while the fleet was iced in, the third mate of the *Navarch*, Mr. A.D. West, was shot in the arm while gunning on shore. His captain, John Cook, assembled the various captains to do the surgery. Captain Leavitt was assigned the job of surgeon, Captain Bodfish handled the chloroform, and Captains McKenna and Cook assisted.

They gave the patient a hearty slug of whiskey before administering the chloroform, just in case the heart was weak and needed encouragement. They boiled the tools and then rinsed them in "corrosive sublimate water." The chloroform was soaked onto cotton waste and administered through a makeshift trumpet. Hanging a watch from the ceiling to time the patient's heartbeats, they set to with a knife and saw. They even smoothed the bone ends with a file.

When patient West awoke, they showed him the dismembered arm and he said: "Kindly bury that there on the island." And they did. Mr. West survived to become a whaling master himself, certainly a testimonial to the surgery of those captains.<sup>10</sup>

But back in 1837, when Dr. John King joined the crew of the *Aurora* in Edgartown, there was no chloroform in his medicine chest to ease the pain of amputation. He must

<sup>9</sup> Arthur C. Lipman and George E. Osborne, "Medicine and Pharmacy Aboard New England Whaling Vessels," ts., New Bedford Free Public Library.

<sup>10</sup> Log *Navarch* (1893-96), Cook, Old Dartmouth Historical Society.



have worried about it, knowing full well that it was blood-curdingly likely he would have to perform one on some poor Vineyard lad. Though without chloroform, he did have the necessary tools. He listed them:

#### INSTRUMENTS IN CHEST

- 1 amputating knife.
- 1 tourniquet.
- 1 saw.
- 1 tenaculum (for hooking arteries).
- 2 bleeding lancets.
- 1 tooth key and hooks.
- 1 large injection syringe.
- Surgeon's needles for sewing wounds.
- 2 penis syringes.
- Patent lint, sticking plaster spread on cloth, soft leather for plasters, spare vials and corks.

Then, after his comment that "the books that are usually found in a ship contain no directions for performing amputations," the young Doctor King proceeded to note down, with great care and attention in inch-by-inch detail and the most gruesome clarity, the procedure for cutting off various limbs, ranging from entire legs down to mere toes.

"When an arm or leg has been . . . injured to such a degree that the loss of it is inevitable, amputation should be performed," he wrote, "making a healthy wound in the place of a mashed or torn mass that would certainly mortify and in all probability destroy the sufferer. Some plain directions for performing such operations in case of necessity may not be unacceptable."

A bracing statement indeed, one which gives the inescapable impression that not only the patient but also Doctor King and whatever assistants he could summon needed their fortitude bolstered as well. "The patient should be placed on a table with blankets and pillows for his head and back," he continued, "the sound leg being over the edge . . . with an assistant to hold it. The injured limb is held out by another . . ." A grave responsibility, surely.

From *Sail Ho!*, by Gordon Grant



*The Captain, sometime doctor, measures the cure from his ever-present medicine chest as the obviously ailing seaman looks on.*

Assistants to the procedure certainly had to be tough to stand some of the sights that Doctor King was describing with such meticulous care.

"The assistant should then grasp the thigh above the cut and draw the skin back while the operator [surgeon] clears



it from the flesh underneath for about an inch and a half," he explained. ". . . the assistant still firmly draws the skin up while the operator cuts down to the bone close to the retracted skin." The good doctor commented that "very little pain is felt from sawing a bone," which, we must assume, meant pain for the patient, not the sawer. The stitches, we are told, were made of strong sewing silk, purloined probably from the master's wife's sewing kit as it was not listed in his inventory.

"A bucket of warm water and some sponges and cloths must be at hand to wash away the blood," he recommended, stating what seems most agonizingly obvious. Cold water was recommended to drench the stump if the bleeding persisted after the wound was closed (the reader feels a harrowing suspicion that the water was almost certainly salt).

With what seems to be a wonderful sense of optimism that the patient will survive all this, Doctor King adds that the stitches "will come away in two or three weeks. . . The patient should use light diet and be kept cool. . . If the stump becomes hot and painful, wet the dressings with cold water and keep them moist. . . Simple ointment should be spread on the lint or rag and the wound treated as any other cut."

"Any other cut!" The suturing of the stump of a leg, no less. Those words, more than any of the bloodcurdling instructions previously given, indicate that those New England boys and men who sailed on the long whaling voyages had to have a sure rough courage to match the rough medicine that was all they could expect.

The whaler *Aurora* sailed out of Edgartown on Nov. 5, 1837, in rugged weather, but not before young Doctor King had performed his first operation. While the ship waited out a gale outside the harbor, he extracted two teeth for the smallest daughter of the lighthouse keeper.<sup>11</sup>

In the rest of his lively and entertaining, though intermittent, journal, Dr. John King described the incidents

of the voyage and the strange islands and coastlines that he saw. He carefully noted the prescriptions and treatments he dealt out to that crew of New Englanders. Doubtlessly to his own relief as well as the crew's, he did not have to perform a single amputation, despite all his preparations. He enjoyed his adventure and went whaling again on a second voyage. Not one to stay at home for long, in 1849, he headed a party of Nantucket and Vineyard men who sailed to seek their fortunes in the gold fields of California.

But that is another story.

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<sup>11</sup> She may have been the daughter of Lott Norton, Keeper of Cape Poge Light at the time.



## Daniel Webster, Fisherman, On the Vineyard

by ARTHUR R. RAILTON

DANIEL WEBSTER loved to fish — especially for bluefish. And he was allergic to pollen each September — “my annual affliction,” he called it.

These two facts brought the famous orator and Senator to the Vineyard in 1849. As he wrote to his close friend and longtime fishing companion, Richard M. Blatchford, August 5, 1849:

If to-morrow should be fair, we think of going to New Bedford, and perhaps to Nasahwan (*sic*), Martha's Vineyard, or Nantucket. . . Like you, I am disposed to ramble. I have no urgent professional business on hand, and am disposed to play. But in three weeks I must be looking out for the return of my annual affliction. What can I do with it? If they tell me it has not been known in Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket, I shall stay there. I will write you ‘from the first port.’ I have been talking about blue fish and bass in the Vineyard Sound and parts adjacent; but shall say nothing to you, until I shall have had some personal experience.”<sup>1</sup>

Friend Blatchford, who lived in New York City, was “a very able man of business . . . who more than once rescued Mr. Webster from serious difficulties in matters of property.”<sup>2</sup> This friend and frequent fishing companion was Webster's most regular correspondent during this period and rarely did a week pass without letters being written, on occasion even daily. One biographer described Webster's relationship with Blatchford this way: “No man, who was

<sup>1</sup>Fletcher Webster, Editor, *The Writings and Speeches of Daniel Webster*, *Private Correspondence*, v., 2, Little, Brown, and Co., Boston, 1903, pp. 330-31.

<sup>2</sup>George Ticknor Curtis, *Life of Daniel Webster*, R. Appleton and Co., N.Y., 1870, p. 214.

ARTHUR R. RAILTON is Editor of this journal.

not kindred to him in blood, ever had a larger share of his personal affection and confidence.”<sup>3</sup>

The next day was fair and, as planned, the Senator, Coraline, his second wife, and Miss Downes, a relative of Mrs. Webster's, left Boston at 8 a.m. The party arrived in New Bedford at 10:30. After an early lunch, the two women toured the town, while the Senator did some local politicking. In mid-afternoon, they boarded the steamboat. Webster doesn't mention the name of the steamer, but it was probably the *Massachusetts*, which made a stop at Holmes Hole four days a week on her way to Nantucket. She had gone into service in 1842. The fare from New Bedford to Nantucket was “\$2.00 a trip, meals extra.” The meals were full course. A sign in the main saloon stated: “Passengers desiring dinner will please notify the clerk soon after leaving the wharf, so as to give the steward time to make the necessary arrangements.”<sup>4</sup>

John Pease's stagecoach met the steamer at Holmes Hole “in readiness to convey all the passengers to Edgartown, without any unnecessary delay. Fare, fifty cents.” The Senator had not announced his visit and, like any other passenger, boarded the stage. The following morning, he wrote to friend Blatchford, describing the trip:

. . . dined on board, stopped to land passengers at Nasahwn (*sic*); came through Wood's Hole, where the tide runs like Hellgate; stopped here also for passengers; this place is eighteen miles from New Bedford; then cross the Vineyard Sound, seven miles to Holmes Hole, then landed, took seats in a public stage wagon, crossed over a level sandy country covered with shrub oaks, and arrived here at six exactly. Ten hours from Boston.”

Although a year before, 1848, he had failed to win the Whig nomination for President, Senator Webster was “still

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 214.

<sup>4</sup> Harry B. Turner, *The Story of the Island Steamers*, Inquirer and Mirror Press, Nantucket, 1910, p. 29. Two dollars in those days was two days' pay for a laborer. Turner gives no information about steamboat service to Naushon, but Webster's letter makes the stop seem routine. Probably the stop was made on request only. We do know that a few years later, the *Eagle's Wing* made stops there.

the greatest public man in New England and he continued to play his ceremonial role with relish."<sup>5</sup>

He had recently come out for compromise with the South on the festering slavery issue, siding with the Whigs rather than joining forces with the new anti-slavery Free Soil party. This had turned northern abolitionists against him, but on the Vineyard, where there were few abolitionists, the Whigs continued to dominate. The Senator sensed that he was in Whig country, as word quickly spread of his arrival:

I thought I knew nobody here, but the hotel was soon full of friends, some of whom I well recollected, all tendering boats, men, tackle, etc., for fishing; guns and company for the plover plains; and carriages, with attendants for the ladies. All sorts of expeditions were planned before we parted at ten o'clock. Among others these, namely: to-day blue fish; to-morrow, shooting on the plains; next day sword fish; the next a party to Gay Head, and so on. The ladies are delighted. . . It is a singular and charming spot. But of this more hereafter. I am going to see the blues this morning; and shall try to get this into mail this morning. You will hear again from me next mail, but I fear there is a mail only every other day.

Yours always, whether blue fish bite or not. But they will bite to-day.<sup>6</sup>

Webster was an early riser, up to watch the sunrise. He was staying at the Edgartown Hotel, the town's leading inn, operated by Andrew Gibbs, on the corner of Simpson's Lane and North Water Street. He did go bluefishing that day, Tuesday, and the fish did bite. He "caught two-thirds of the fish taken, notwithstanding he was accompanied by extra fishermen."<sup>7</sup>

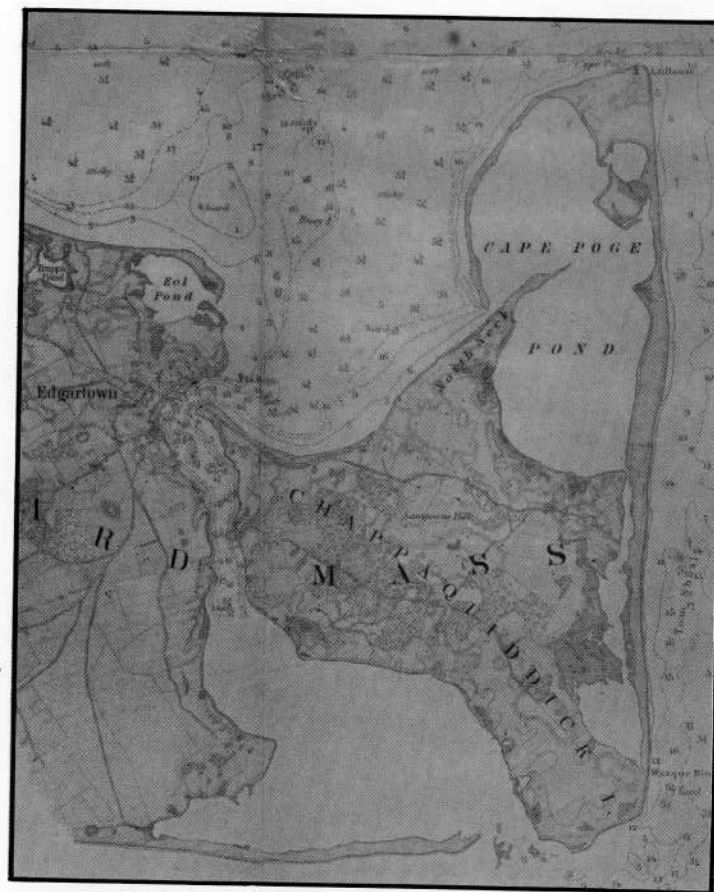
Early the next morning, he took his pen to describe the

<sup>5</sup> Irving G. Bartlett, *Daniel Webster*, W.W.Norton and Co., N.Y., 1978, p. 242. John Murray Forbes, co-owner of Naushon island, explained that the 1845 Webster fund, to which he had contributed, "was largely influential in preventing Webster's reaching the presidency by putting him in the position of a candidate subsidized by rich men." John Murray Forbes, *Letters and Recollections*, Ed. Sarah Forbes Hughes, Houghton, Mifflin, Boston, 1899, v.1, p. 118.

<sup>6</sup> Fletcher Webster, v.2, p. 332.

<sup>7</sup> Vineyard Gazette, Aug. 9, 1849.

From U. S. Coastal Survey.



Edgartown and harbor in 1846, three years before Webster's visit. previous day's fishing to friend Blatchford. He went into considerable detail. The letter is an informative account of sport fishing as practiced 140 years ago:

Yesterday morning I went forth for blue fish. The boatman steered direct for the Sound, five miles north, then doubled the eastern chop of the harbor, Cape Poge, called Pogue, where the light is, and ran along close to the shore on the eastern side of the island. The wind was unsteady and baffling, and much thwarted and perplexed the boatman, who intended to make a great day of it. At half-past nine o'clock we found fish, and practised our vocation



at intervals, as the breeze would allow, till half-past one. We took forty-three fish, I think my takings were twenty-five. The boatman took a few, and a gentleman with us the rest. . . .

In point of size, the fish are not much different from those we found in Duxbury Bay, perhaps a little larger, but this may be owing to the advance of the season. I thought them remarkably fat and plump, and they pulled like horses. Once or twice we saw schools of them above water, leaping and frolicking. I thought as good fishing as any we had was when we lay at anchor, and threw the hook, at the end of a long line, into the foaming and roaring surf.

One thing was new to me. You have seen on the surface of the sea, those smooth places, which fishermen and sailors call "slicks." We met with them yesterday, and our boatman made for them, whenever discovered. He said they were caused by the blue fish chopping up their prey. That is to say, these voracious fellows get into a school of manhaden, which are too large to swallow whole, and they bite them into pieces, to suit their tastes. And the oil from this butchery, rising to the surface, makes the slick. Whatever the cause may be, we invariably found fish plenty whenever we came to a "slick."

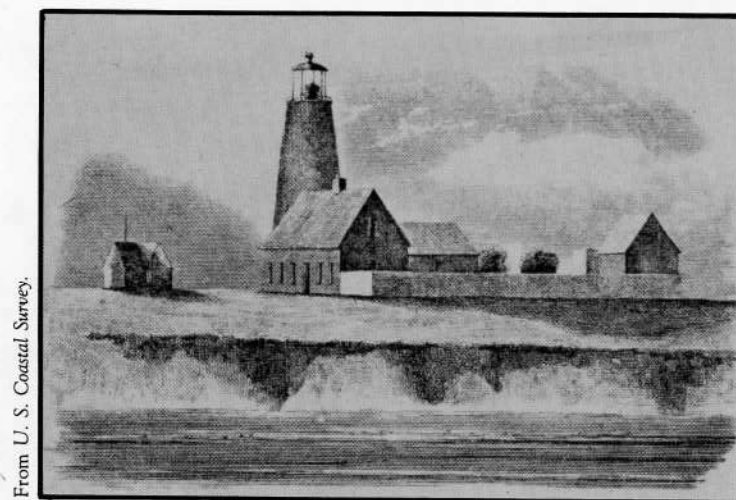
Passing to the southward, we came into the harbor, through an opening at the south end, three miles from the town. In reality, this opening is the best fishing-ground, and we should have done better to have proceeded to it directly in the morning. But our captain was ambitious, and hoped, I believe, to find greater fish outside.

The Island of Chippaquiddick (*sic*) lies opposite the town here, and very near it, and is generally said to be an island in Edgartown harbor. This is not exactly so; you cannot navigate round the island keeping within the harbor, and not going to sea. In strictness, it is not an island, but a peninsula connected with the main land on the seashore, at its southeast corner, by a narrow isthmus. . . .

So much for blue-fish catching at Edgartown, August 7, 1849. Today we have a bright morning, after rather a cool night. I am to try my hand at plover-shooting at seven o'clock.<sup>8</sup>

The day, Wednesday, August 8, was warm and very dry. Diarist Jeremiah Pease tells us that the "corn begins to wilt."

<sup>8</sup> Fletcher Webster, v.2, pp. 332-34.



From U. S. Coastal Survey.

*Cape Poge Lighthouse, as it looked to Fisherman Webster in 1849.*

Not good for corn, it was perfect for plover shooting and Webster was picked up at seven o'clock by Dr. Daniel Fisher, Edgartown's richest man and leading Whig. That evening the Senator again wrote to Blatchford:

I have made a poor hand to-day, among the plovers, though I have had a good deal of pleasant driving over the plains. The mode of shooting is from a wagon, after the manner of Hampstead. My eye is hardly quick enough to see the birds in the grass, and I am a little too much out of play to be sure of them when they rise. . . My companion to-day, Dr. Fisher, a principal man here, is an excellent shot. He killed a dozen birds. To-morrow we go to Gay Head with a number of ladies and gentlemen. It will be long and sandy drive, thirty-six miles, going and coming. . .

His host, Dr. Daniel Fisher was indeed a "principal man" in Edgartown, owner of the town's biggest business, a candleworks and whale-oil refinery. At the moment, he was working on the formation of the Island's first bank, the Martha's Vineyard National Bank, which was to open the next year with him as president. No doubt, between shots at the plovers, the doctor found time to tell Senator Webster about his new venture. It wouldn't hurt to have a friend in the Senate.



*Edgartown Main Street 20 years after Webster's visit. He spoke in the Town Hall, right, but in 1849 there was no lower floor or outside stairs, as shown here.*

The trip to Gay Head the next day went off as planned and the usual letter went to Mr. Blatchford:

We went to Gay Head yesterday, a distance of twenty miles, and returned, tired and covered with dust, in the evening. The eastern end of the island is a sandy plain, the western a region of high, rocky hills. In both the roads are bad.

But Gay Head is a place worth seeing. It is a remarkable promontory, at the western extremity of the island, one hundred and fifty feet high, with a naked face, or escarpment, toward the sea. The cliff is not perpendicular, though nearly so, nor is it smooth or unbroken. It presents alternate ridges and depressions, or ravines, not always running in straight lines. The great peculiarity is the

geological structure, which is exposed to view. The whole hill, generally speaking, seems to be clay, but this clay is of various colors, black, white, red, green, etc. Some of these colors are exceedingly bright, so that they present a very gay aspect; hence the name. In the afternoon sun, and especially when recently washed by rain, the appearance is splendid and gorgeous.

Fossil remains are found, from the water up to the surface, in several of the clay strata. We picked up, or rather picked out, shark's teeth, and the vertebrae of some large fish, besides numerous shell-fish. Whales' teeth have been found very near the surface. Iron is also found, and pieces of charred wood, apparently limbs of trees, being exactly like charcoal. I do not know, or remember, what the geologists say of it, but I think it a great curiosity. It must have been, I imagine, a volcanic origin.

A light-house stands upon the height. When originally built it was found too high. It raised the lantern so far above the horizon, that mariners mistook it for a star. It became necessary, therefore, to lower the building.<sup>9</sup>

If this place were more accessible, it would be much visited. It is what Niagara would be, if instead of one hundred and fifty feet of falling water, it exhibited a perpendicular bank of that height, composed of lines, strata, and sections of various earths, of brilliant and highly contrasted colors. From this place, New Bedford and Newport are to be seen, and even Block Island, in very clear weather.<sup>10</sup>

To-day we have a strong southeast gale, which forbids all fishing, and indeed all riding. I was in hopes of another morning with the blue fish. Yesterday, a gentleman took fifty in two hours, one weighing thirteen pounds. I do not know what is to happen in our waters from the enormous increase of these fish. It is a common opinion that they destroy or drive off several of the other valuable finny tribes. If this be so, it will be the more patriotic in you and me to take as many of them to the land as we can. . .

The evening after the Gay Head trip, the leading Whigs

<sup>9</sup> Webster erred on two points: 1. the clay is not volcanic; 2. the lighthouse was not originally built "too high." Samuel Flanders was keeper of the light at the time and his stories were famous for their imaginativeness (see *Intelligencer*, May 1982). No doubt, he talked to the Senator, his position being a political appointment.

<sup>10</sup> Sounds like a story from Keeper Flanders. Block Island is 40 miles away — well beyond the horizon.

of Edgartown arranged a picnic honoring Mr. Webster. It was, according to Jeremiah Pease, to have been held "in the woods near Mr. John Cleveland's dwelling house, on acc't. or in honor of Hon. Danl. Webster."<sup>11</sup>

The weather did not cooperate. As Webster had written that morning, there was a strong southeast gale. The *Gazette* described what happened:

Owing to the threatening aspect of the weather, the original intention of meeting in one of the adjacent groves, in the afternoon, was abandoned, though not until a goodly number had assembled to do honor to the illustrious guest, whose presence here created an unusual sensation. The committee of arrangement, in this emergency, acted with a promptness and efficiency deserving of all praise, and to the perfect satisfaction of the whole party, in securing the town hall.<sup>12</sup>

With the sudden change in location, there was in that "spacious building . . . instead of the quiet usually found there, an unusual bustle. Tables were suddenly erected and bountifully spread — cartloads of *recherche* cake and delicious chowder were seen wending their way from the grove" to the Town Hall.

Shortly, the distinguished guest was "ushered into the hall, and introduced to the audience by the Hon. Leavitt Thaxter, in a few neat and appropriate remarks."<sup>13</sup>

There was, at the time, an epidemic of cholera on the east coast with many deaths. Mr. Webster began his remarks by stating that he had not been taking part in public gatherings of late because of the epidemic, but he was happy to be here and grateful to those who had worked hard to make this occasion possible.

<sup>11</sup> *Jeremiah Pease Diary*, D.C.H.S. Being a Democrat, Jeremiah may not have been invited to this Whig affair. Even if invited, Jeremiah probably would have declined. He had just been fired as lighthouse keeper of the Edgartown Harbor Light when the Whigs took over the Presidency. His son, Joseph T. Pease, was soon to be fired as Collector of Customs.

<sup>12</sup> *Vineyard Gazette*, Aug. 16, 1849. John Cleveland's grove was just beyond Pease's Point Way on what is now Clevelandtown Road. The Town Hall, where the party was held, is the same Town Hall as today, although it has since then been raised so offices could be built on the ground floor.

<sup>13</sup> The appointment of Leavitt Thaxter as Collector of Customs, replacing Joseph T. Pease, would be announced the next week. He was a leading Edgartown Whig.



Then, in the powerful voice that had made him the nation's bestknown orator, he praised the Vineyard people for being a "hardy, industrious, manly, vigorous race." Europeans, he said, would do well to follow America's example. They were "oppressed and downtrodden, ignorant of the rights of free men" and, his oratory peaking, he urged them to copy our "simple form of representative government."

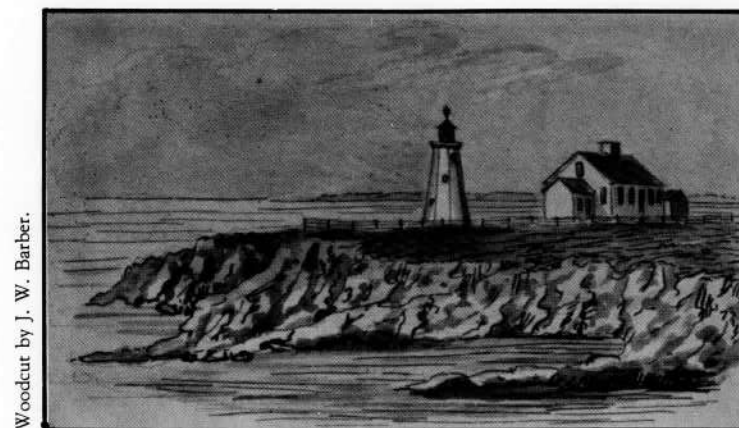
At that moment, those "rights of free men" became unpleasantly apparent as "a disturbance occurred at the door . . . which caused him almost immediately to close. The rogues who created the commotion ought to be brought to justice. This system of rioting and creating disturbances at public meetings, is becoming too common," according to the *Gazette*.<sup>14</sup>

After this abrupt interruption, a blessing of the food was called for and the assemblage "proceeded to partake of the chowder and the other good things under which the many tables groaned."

The next day, August 11, the Webster party left Edgartown very early, boarding the steamboat at Holmes Hole at 8:30 a.m. They arrived at Woods Hole at 10. The Senator had planned to go to Naushon that afternoon to visit William W. Swain, co-owner of the island. Swain, a New Bedford businessman, had purchased Naushon in 1843 in partnership with John Murray Forbes, his niece's husband. Before buying it, Swain had been agent in charge, running the island for James Bowdoin with such a firm hand that he was called "Governor" Swain of Naushon.

The morning was rainy so Webster put off the Naushon trip until Monday. It cleared enough in the afternoon so he could go fishing. He wrote to friend Blatchford the next morning, Sunday, at seven a.m.:

<sup>14</sup> *Vineyard Gazette*, Aug. 16, 1849. The *Gazette* had described four months earlier how a visiting Methodist minister was "shamefully abused . . . while lecturing on Astronomy in the old Methodist Church by a gang of young scoundrels, who ought to be publicly horsewhipped and placed in stocks . . . The worthy gentleman remarked that, he had never before been so shamefully treated."



Woodcut by J. W. Barber.

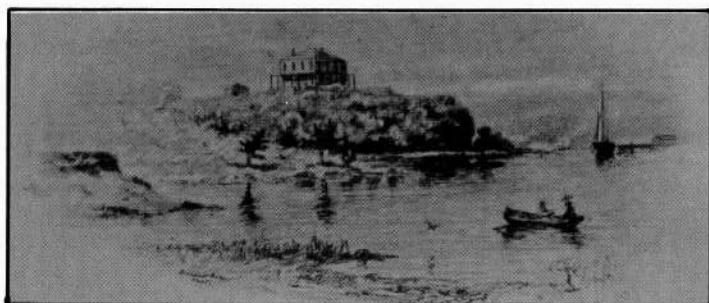
*Gay Head Light and cliffs as they were when Senator Webster came.*

This place, sometimes called "Woodville," is the southern point of Falmouth. . . and is exactly opposite to the eastern end of Nasahwn[again] Island. . . It is a high promontory of some extent, and uneven surface, with a snug little harbor, which causes it to be called a hole. . . In the afternoon, I went out in the boat, and caught some fish, namely, tautog and skippog, the same, I suppose, as are called "Porgie" in New York. They were very small. . . Tomorrow we propose to visit Mr. Swain and on Tuesday proceed either to Boston or Marshfield. . . I think I shall . . . go to New Hampshire early in the week . . . very likely I shall be at Franklin N.H. when my catarrh arrives. . .

From the room in which I write this, I overlook the Vineyard Sound, and see the land of the Vineyard, of course, quite plain; it being but five miles off. The number of vessels which pass up and down this Sound is prodigious. A hundred of them sometimes put into Holmes Hole in a day, if a head wind arise. Nearly all the coasting trade between the East and South, goes through this passage, as do often ships from South America, the West Indies, and India.

I was told that in the height of the late Mr. Gray's business in navigation, five ships of his from China and Canton, were in Holmes Hole at the same time. <sup>15</sup> Ships come this way

<sup>15</sup> The "late Mr. Gray" was a Boston merchant, who dominated the China trade, at one time owning more than 60 square-rigged ships. He was the richest man in New England at his death in 1825.



Mansion House, Hadley's Harbor, Naushon, where Webster met Swain.

to avoid the south shoals of Nantucket, which stretch off fifty miles to the southeast from the visible part of that vast and extensive sand-bank. Of late year, however, since improved chronometers make shipmasters more sure of their longitude in thick weather, it has become more usual to keep to the eastward, and make no land till they see Cape Cod.

You will be glad that I have arrived at length to the bottom of the last page.<sup>16</sup>

We don't know what Senator Webster and Governor Swain talked about at the Mansion House on Naushon the following day, but Webster and Swain were old friends. The Senator, an avid hunter, had been there before. In 1840, when invited by Governor Swain to spend four days hunting on Naushon, he reluctantly turned down the invitation because, he wrote from New York, "if these good Whigs . . . with an expected loss of 4 members in this City, should find that I was recreating in Nashon (*sic*), they would never forgive me." It was a noble sacrifice. He had been hunting there before and "nothing . . . can come up to it, in grandeur and heroism."

In 1843, he had represented James T. Bowdoin in a law suit over ownership of Naushon. James's father had inherited it from his uncle, James Bowdoin, benefactor of Bowdoin College. The college claimed that the uncle's will left the island to it as a residuary devisee upon the nephew's death. Webster's client, James, claimed the island under his father's will. Shortly before the case was to come to trial, in

<sup>16</sup> Fletcher Webster, v.2, pp. 337-38.



From The Private Life of Daniel Webster.

Webster relaxing at home, dressed as he may have been for fishing.

September 1843, the lawyers for both sides worked out a settlement in which the college was given three-tenths ownership and James Bowdoin seven-tenths.

Son James Bowdoin and Bowdoin College then forgot their differences and agreed to sell the island to Swain and his partner, John Murray Forbes, for \$20,000. So there was much that the Senator and the "Governor" could talk over besides hunting and fishing.

Whatever was discussed, the visit was important enough to be mentioned by the Senator, a few days later, in a letter to Edward Curtis, who was organizing a meeting between Webster and the Governor of Massachusetts:

I have been with Mrs. Webster and Miss Downes on a visit to Martha's Vineyard, making a call on our return at your friend Swain's. . .

In seven days, I shall begin to sneeze and blow my nose; and the first week this catarrh is usually most severe. I must be hereabout when the President arrives, if he should live to get here. . . .<sup>17</sup>

Now, write the Governor to name his time, and give me ten days' notice. . . If the Governor prefers Marshfield [Webster's home] we will go to that place, and shut ourselves up in the office in the garden, and do the work right off. We shall find there more means of reference to law-books, etc. Come on. Let me know what you and the Governor have to say.<sup>18</sup>

Apparently, no one on the Vineyard had been willing to promise the Senator that he would not be bothered by hay fever if he stayed. You will recall that he said he would stay longer if such assurance was given. Anyway, the fishing more than made up for it. A week later, he wrote to friend Blatchford: "For blue fish merely, nothing can be quite so good as Edgartown."

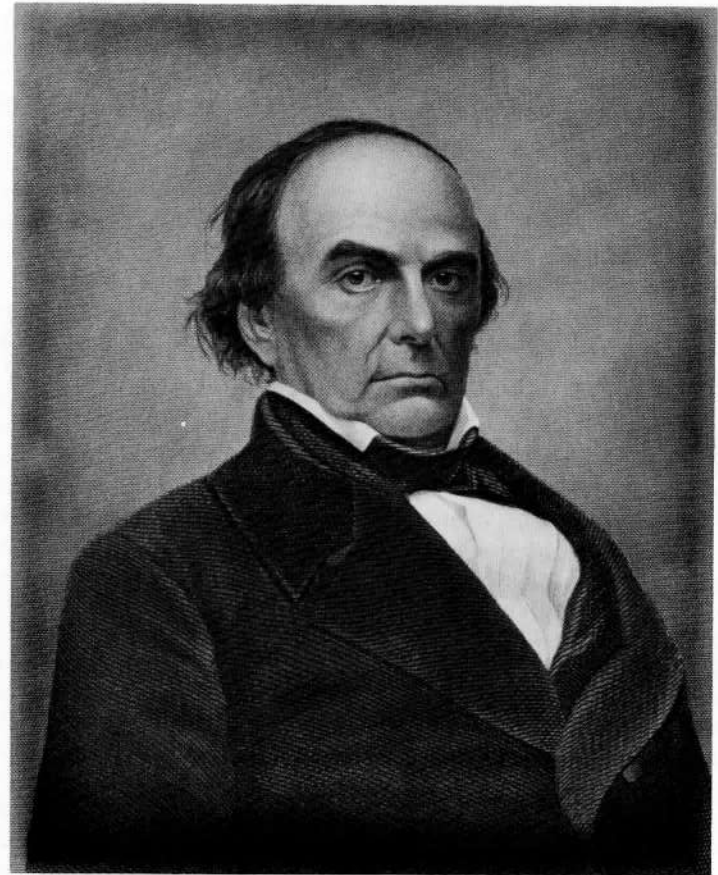
The *Gazette* was pleased that the fish had been good to the Senator. It had just learned that another famous man was on the way. The Hon. Henry Clay "will visit our island in a short time," and it gleefully predicted that "quite a number of pleasureseekers will follow in the wake of these distinguished statesmen."

Mr. Clay had to cancel his trip, due to illness. No doubt,

<sup>17</sup> President Zachary Taylor did live to get there, not dying until a year later, July 9, 1850. He and Webster were not friends. General Taylor favored admitting California as a free state; Webster, more concerned about holding the nation together than in ending slavery, was opposed. When President Taylor died, Vice President Millard Fillmore became President and named Webster, whose views he shared, as Secretary of State. Webster, a few months before, had delivered his famous Seventh of March speech, favoring the Fugitive Slave Act, a most unpopular position in the north, bringing an end to his dream of the Presidency.

<sup>18</sup> Fletcher Webster, v.2, pp. 338-39.

the *Gazette* and the Vineyard businessmen were disappointed. But they need not have worried — "quite a number of pleasure-seekers" have followed "in the wake of" Mr. Webster since that 1849 fishing trip.



From Appleton's Cyclopaedia of American Biography.

A formal portrait of Daniel Webster, looking like a statesman.



## The Lapwing and Other "Small Tokens of Respect"

THE rules for public servants were different back in 1849 when Senator Daniel Webster came to the Vineyard. The code of ethics, unwritten of course, was relaxed and public servants openly accepted money and other gifts from private sources. Today, we would call them bribes, payoffs, or something equally unpleasant. In the 1840s, they were considered tokens of respect, publicly accepted, in both meanings of the word.

Webster accepted generous financial help from New England shipping interests and manufacturers. Representing Dukes County among the contributors were several members of the Forbes family, owners of Naushon island, a favorite hunting and fishing spot for the Senator, and wealthy Boston merchants.<sup>1</sup>

The friendship between Webster and the Forbes's had begun long before his Island visit. Paul S. Forbes was appointed United States Consul in Canton, China, in 1842 by Daniel Webster, then Secretary of State under President William Henry Harrison. Forbes was also the head of Russell, Sturgis & Co., in Canton, a subsidiary

of Russell & Company of Boston, the most powerful American trading house in China.

Paul's cousin, Robert Bennet Forbes, went to Canton in 1849 to head up the Russell, Sturgis office, during his relative's brief return to the United States.<sup>2</sup>

A third Forbes was in the trading company, John Murray Forbes of Milton, who served as merchant consul for the parent company in Boston.

All three of these men were among those making contributions to Sen. Daniel Webster.

John Murray Forbes, who in partnership with William W. Swain bought Naushon island in 1843, was one of those contributing to a \$100,000 endowment fund, the income of which was paid to Webster so he could return to the Senate in 1845 without financial sacrifice. The Forbes contribution was \$500, the equivalent of two years' pay for a school teacher at the time.<sup>3</sup>

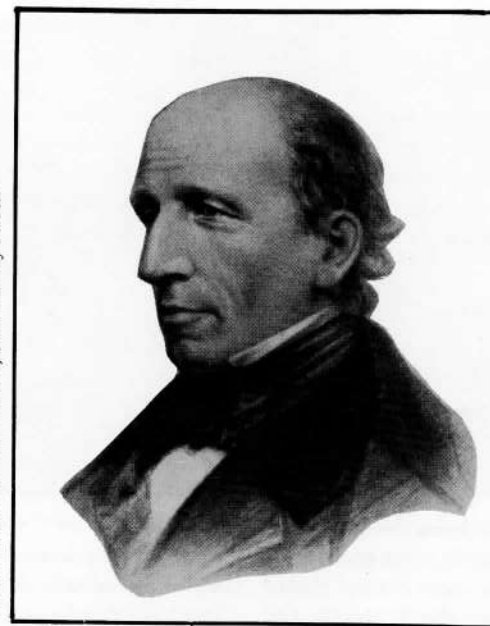
John fell out with Webster in 1850 over the speech the Senator made endorsing the Fugitive Slave Act, in which he argued that to save the Union, the North must be ready to accept even slavery, a position which Forbes opposed. The endowment fund, Forbes wrote later in minimizing the importance of his participation, "was

<sup>2</sup> Robert Bennet Forbes, *Personal Reminiscences*, Little, Brown & Co., Boston, 1882, 2nd Ed., pp. 356-57.

<sup>3</sup> Charles M. Wiltse, Ed., *The Papers of Daniel Webster*, University Press of New England, Hanover, N.H., v.6, pp. 106.

<sup>1</sup> Webster was not the only recipient of Forbes favors. After Governor John Andrews of Massachusetts died, John M. Forbes initiated the collection for his widow of an amount "something like the sum the Governor gave the public by working on a low salary instead of at his profession." Elijah R. Kennedy, *The Real Daniel Webster*, Fleming H. Revell Co., N.Y., 1924, pp. 99-100.

From Letters and Recollections of John Murray Forbes.



John Murray Forbes, about 1851.

largely influential in preventing Webster's reaching the presidency by putting him in the position of a candidate subsidized by rich men."<sup>4</sup>

That charge was frequently made about Webster, who was called "the pensioned agent of the manufacturers of New England." The 1845 fund was only one of several he benefitted from. The first was raised in 1834; another in 1850. When Webster learned in 1852 that he was terminally ill, he asked his benefactors to arrange it so the proceeds from the 1845 annuity would continue to be paid to his widow after his death. The contributors agreed.

But money was not all that Webster

was given by the Forbes men. What more appropriate a gift could there have been for such an avid sportsman as Webster than a boat?<sup>5</sup> So, on May 30, 1849, Robert Bennet Forbes, soon to leave for China, wrote to the Senator from Boston:

I have the pleasure to send under charge of Capt. Morris of the Tow Boat or of Nicholas Berry, a small Schooner to be known as the "Lapwing," which vessel I beg you to accept as a small token of the respect I entertain for your character, as well as in acknowledgement of your

<sup>5</sup> Webster already owned a yacht, *Calypso*, a gift from his "well-to-do friend, Stephen White." Webster's son, Fletcher, later married White's daughter. Maurice G. Baxter, *One and Inseparable, Daniel Webster and the Union*, Harvard U. Press, Cambridge, 1984, pp. 284 and 433.

<sup>4</sup> Sarah Forbes Hughes, Ed., *John Murray Forbes, Letters and Recollections*, Houghton, Mifflin, Boston, 1899, v.1, p.118.

kindness to me and to my cousin, Mr. T. S. Forbes, now in China.

Perhaps Mr. Sam Hall, late ship carpenter now alderman, may go with the craft.

I have been unable to procure from him any Bill for work done on the boat since he learned she was for yourself.

Very respectfully,  
Yr Obed Servant,  
R.B. Forbes<sup>6</sup>

We don't know what "kindness" the Senator had bestowed upon the two cousins, but clearly it had been significant. Perhaps, Mr. Forbes was referring to Webster's appointment of T.S. Forbes as Consul in Canton. Whatever the kindness, the two Forbes cousins were clearly most grateful.

The Senator wrote to Samuel Hall of East Boston, "late ship carpenter and now alderman," a few days before starting out for the Vineyard, expressing his thanks for the gift. On August 11, Alderman Hall responded:

Your favor of 3d instant has been received, expressing your indebtedness to Captain Forbes and myself, for the beautiful schooner Lapwing, which we have fitted up for your enjoyment. If we have accomplished the object we had in view, that is, to give you something as a token of respect to you, both as a public man and a private citizen, it will be gratifying to me, and I am sure it will be to Captain Forbes.

You express a desire that I should visit your place and ascertain how well The Lapwing sails, and also what these waters yield in the way of cod and haddock. Sir, nothing would give me greater pleasure than to pay a visit to your mansion and

<sup>6</sup> Wiltse, v.6, p. 339.

my native town, which is Marshfield . . . but I am doubtful if I shall be able to do it this season, as the business is very pressing, and, together with my private affairs, makes it difficult for me to leave even for a few days.<sup>7</sup>

The first time we learn from Webster that he was using the *Lapwing* is on August 25, 1849, when he wrote to his son, Fletcher, inviting him to go along with him on a sail. The schooner must have drawn so much water as to cause problems in the shallow waters around Marshfield. Webster explained to Fletcher that they couldn't leave early because "we cannot get the *Lapwing* out of the river earlier than ten o'clock. . ."<sup>8</sup>

Ten o'clock must have been high tide. That month, August 1849, was close to high tide for Daniel Webster. The following year, he made his famous Senate speech supporting the Fugitive Slave Act and both he and the Whig party began their decline.

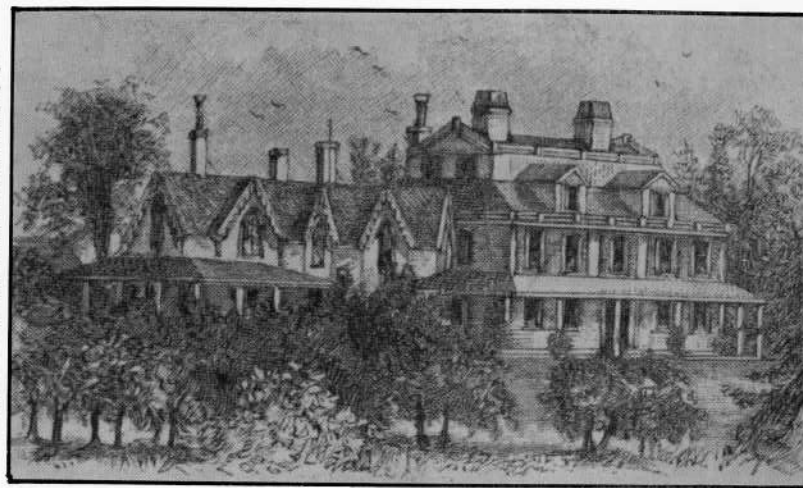
The position he took, placing the continuation of the Union ahead of his opposition to slavery, destroyed his support in New England. Millard Fillmore, who became President that year on the death of Zachary Taylor, was a strong supporter of the Fugitive Slave Act and named Webster Secretary of State. But despite his return to the Cabinet, Webster still felt abandoned by his friends.

John Murray Forbes, former supporter, wrote that "it is notorious that after Webster made his 7th March 1850 speech, which carried the Fugitive

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 336.

<sup>8</sup> Fletcher Webster, Ed., *The Writings and Speeches of Daniel Webster*, Little Brown & Co., Boston, 1903, v.2, p. 284.

From Appleton's Cyclopaedia of American Biography.



Daniel Webster's home in Marshfield, Massachusetts.

Bill and its kindred measures, he would not have had the vote of one-third of his own party for any office in the gift of the people of his adopted State, Massachusetts."<sup>9</sup>

The decline of his popularity and that of his party affected Webster greatly as this letter writer stated not long after:

According to the story told at the time, Daniel Webster never slept more than four hours a night after he spoke out in favor of the fugitive slave law. 'His face showed it; he began to die that day and he knew it.'<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Sarah Forbes Hughes, *op. cit.*, p. 142.

<sup>10</sup> Irving H. Bartlett, *Daniel Webster*, W.W.Norton Co., N.Y., 1978, p. 240, quoting a letter from E.P. Smith, Nov. 28, 1856.

He died two years later, October 24, 1852, at his home in Marshfield. Vineyard Whigs, remembering his visit, paid him tribute. The *Gazette* of October 29, 1852, published a long obituary, using the traditional reverse column rules on its two inside pages to emphasize the sorrow the community felt. The next week's issue told of the meeting of Edgartown Whigs in which a resolution was unanimously passed praising the memory of Daniel Webster. Samuel Osborn, Jr., after passage of the resolution spoke "upon the general grief for the death of Mr. Webster. . . he occupied about 20 minutes."

### More about Capt. James A. Tilton and the Bark *Bowhead*

Since the May *Intelligencer* article on Capt. James A. Tilton and the final voyage of the Bark *Bowhead* was published, we have learned additional details about the skipper and the voyage.

We now know the date and circumstances of the captain's death. It was December 30, 1924, and he died at the Taunton State Hospital, age 61. He had been a patient in that institution, a mental hospital, for about a month, after having been in failing health for a year.

An unsigned and undated manuscript in our archives (believed to have been written by Eleanor Ransom Mayhew) entitled "Chilmark Whaling and Whalemen," contains this mention of Captain Tilton:

When James A. Tilton was in the Arctic, he used to take ether to clear his head, so he said. He was well liked by his men. . . . He went insane over the loss of quite a sum of money that Capt. Cook swindled from him. Finally, as a last resort, he was taken to Taunton for treatment and when he found out where he was, he beat his brains out on the door of his padded cell. It was a shame that he had to die such a death, as he was a fine man, and one well liked in his community. He lived at one time in the house owned by Robert Vincent [of Chilmark].

With the help of Miss Lisa A. Compton, Director of the Old Colony Historical Society in Taunton, we learned that the official cause of his death was Arteriosclerosis (psychosis with cerebral arteriosclerosis) and bronchopneumonia and that he was buried in New Bedford. Miss Compton added: "There does not seem to be evidence of him 'beating his brains out' in this account. I also question the description of 'padded cell.' Taunton . . . was built on a ward system, not a cellblock one. It has always, to this day, been at the forefront of humane and progressive treatment for the mentally ill."

As for his being swindled by Captain Cook, if it did occur, it must have happened some years before his death as he does not seem to have had any direct connection with Cook after the *Bowhead*. Capt. John Cook owned and was master of the *Bowhead* before Tilton took over. Of course, he could have invested some money in one of Captain Cook's ships and lost it, but we can find no other mention of a swindle except in the unsigned manuscript.

It is not so certain that he was well liked by his men, as the manuscript reports. Readers of the *Bowhead* log in the May issue will recall that there were numerous desertions and a number of instances of men being placed in irons, hardly a humane treatment in the year 1908. There was also a murder, about which we have received a news account published in the San Francisco Call, December 3, 1908, just a month after the *Bowhead* returned from her last voyage. It discloses some interesting details:

Bellingham, Wash., Dec. 2.

By the capture of John Griffiths and Cal Kaltenbach, deserters from the whaler *Bowhead* at Port Townsend, the witnesses needed to save the life of Joe Gardner, held at San Francisco for the murder of the negro mate of the ship, have been secured.

The men are now held on the revenue cutter *Thetis* and will go south to appear at the trial.

A tale of horrible cruelty on board the *Bowhead* is told by the deserters, who assert that the whaler was a 'hell ship' and that the white members of the crew were brutally bullied and beaten by the blacks, who formed the greater part of her complement.

They state that Gardner struck the mate a heavy blow with a club in self defense after he had been worsted in a fight brought about by his resistance to the ill treatment of [by?] the negro.

In the log which we published in May, the entry describing the murder is very brief:

During the latter part of last night [Aug. 31], Joe Carduso and Gardner got into a scrap and Carduso was hit by a piece of wood by Gardner. He was unconscious at 6 a.m.



## Documents

### Jeremiah Pease Diary

As members know, the *Diary of Jeremiah Pease* is the best contemporary record of life on the Vineyard during the first half of the 19th Century. The Society has those journals in its Archives, thanks to the generosity of his descendants. Last year, we finished the serial publication of the *Diary* in the *Intelligencer*. The years covered were from 1819 to 1857, with a gap between January 1823 and September 1829, a period for which we had no diary.

Thanks to an extraordinary bit of good luck, we now can fill in that gap. Early this year, while household goods were being moved from one Island house to another, an old journal was uncovered. That old journal turned out to be the missing *Pease Diary*! The discoverer quickly recognized it as the treasure it is and brought it to the Society, where it was greeted as a long-lost child. It now has joined the other volumes of the *Pease Diary* and the missing gap in Vineyard history has been closed. Our deepest thanks to those responsible for this remarkable reincarnation.

We begin publication of the newly found *Diary* in this issue.

On the flyleaf of this volume of his journal, Jeremiah has written: "And now my soul another year of my short life is past; Oh, Death, how sure and how little tho't of. It hath pleased Almighty God in the latter part of the year past to give me a hope of a happy immortality after Death, and oh, may I be enabled to be truly thankful for that inestimable blessing."

By "the latter part of the year past," Jeremiah was referring to October 1, 1822, the date on which he was "born again" and began his life anew as a Methodist under the guidance of "Reformation John" Adams, the most successful evangelist in Island history.

The first page of the journal is headed: "This Journal is designed for winds, weather and remarkable occurrences" (sic).

#### January 1823

- 1st. Wind ENE to E, heavy storm with snow and rain.
- 2nd. NNW, pleasant.
- 3rd. WSW, pleasant. Uriah Coffin's son, an Infant, dies.
- 4th. NE to ENE, storm at night.
- 5th. SE, rainstorm. WNW at night, cold.
- 6th. NW, high wind, cold.
- 7th. NW to ENE, cold.
- 8th. SW, pleasant, cold.
- 9th. Same and calm, went eeling, caught 40 dozen, 2 of us.

For the rest of the diary, we will omit entries that only report the weather: Editor.

- 13th. NNW, very cold at night. Harbour frozen all over.
- 15th. Calm and light breeze to W, went eeling caught—<sup>1</sup>
- 22nd. SW, calm to W, very pleasant. Went Eeling, caught 60 dozen eels.

<sup>1</sup> As regular readers know, Jeremiah often left blanks, intending to fill them in later, but more often than not he forgot.

29th. W to NW. I went to meeting E. side, H. Hole.<sup>2</sup>

30th. WNW. I set a finger for Thos. Stewart's Grandson.

31st. SE to ESE, snows at night. This has been the most moderate Winter so far for 40 years. There has not been 3 inches of snow at any time since it commenced. The weather has been very moderate. Set a sholder for Mrs. Martha Vincent and set a sholder very badly out for O. Norton's Son.

#### February 1823

6th. N, very cold. Upper part of the harbour all frozen over.

7th. NNW, very cold. Thomas Cooke Esq. professes Religion.<sup>3</sup>

10th. ESE to ENE, pleasant. Harbour all frozen over.

11th. ENE, moderate. Harbour begins to break up.

15th. E to NE, storm with snow and rain. Matthew Fisher's child dies.

16th. SW to W, fresh breeze, moderate. Above child buried.

17th. NNW to N. Went to Cuttahunk to the wreck Brig *Two Brothers* of Boston from the Bay of Honduras for Boston, Ebenezer A. Shaw Master. Remained there until the 27th when I returned with Mr. Hardin of H. Hole. The weather was very severe during my absence, nothing remarkable

<sup>2</sup> The meeting was at Eastville, where Jeremiah was the unpaid lay Methodist preacher and exhorter. His religious work here led, in a dozen years, to the creation of Wesleyan Grove Campground, adjacent to Eastville.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Cooke Jr., was Collector of Customs and Jeremiah's superior. We are not told which church was involved, but Cooke is listed as a member of the Congregational Church in 1828, five years later.

transpired.<sup>4</sup>

28th. WNW, very cold. Went to Brig *Neutrality*, Capt. Thompson, on shore on Tom's shoal, took a load of molasses out of the Brig into sloop *Fair American* and went to H. Hole. Could not get into the harbour on account of the Ice. Returned home March 2nd. Brig from Martineco[Martinique?] This has been a very severe Month.

#### March 1823

1st. W, very cold. The sound and this harbour full of Ice.

2nd. SSE to S, moderate. Murder committed at Gayhead. See the other page.<sup>5</sup>

3rd. WNW, very cold. Attended the discharging of sloop *F. American* and put her cargo into Mrs. Coffin's and Osborn's Store. Went to Capaquiddick, etc.

5th. SW, pleasant. This evening a Meeting was held in the Congregational Meetinghouse. Revd. Dr. T. Henderson preaches. Revd. Mr. Thaxter being unwell. The Meeting spoken of . . . was the first evening meeting ever held in the Revd. Mr. Thaxter's meetinghouse. The congregation was very large, altho the ground was very wet, and much water standing in ponds, yet there was tho't to be over four hundred people in the house. The sermon delivered was highly pleasing to the people. Mr. Thaxter being unwell could not attend. May the Lord make the meeting a

<sup>4</sup> As Inspector of Customs, Jeremiah had to make sure that the cargo on wrecked vessels from other nations was declared for customs purposes.

<sup>5</sup> Several pages later, on May 3, he tells us more.

blessing to many souls.<sup>6</sup>

17th. SW, pleasant. Elijah Stewart, John Thaxter and myself being surveyors of highways took down the piazza built by Jonathan Pease in front of his late dwelling house, it being upon the Street or highway.<sup>7</sup>

19th. WNW to N, very high wind. Attended an evening meeting held by Rev. Thaxter.<sup>8</sup>

23rd. ENE to N. Joseph Simpson's daut. Dies.

24th. SW to W, pleasant. Hired a pew in the Baptist Meetinghouse for W.B.Fisher.

31st. NNE to NNW, violent storm. This has been a very severe month, much damage done in this last mentioned gail to Vessels near this Coast.

#### April 1823

1st. SW to WSW. Went to the wrecked Brig *Union* of Dresden, stranded on Cuttahunk, arrived there the next day, the 3rd.

7th. SW, pleasant, high wind. Finished discharging Brig and came to H.Hole. This day closes another year of my short life. I have reason to bless and

<sup>6</sup> Under Rev. Joseph Thaxter, the Congregational Church did not hold evening meetings, a Methodist practice he frowned on. The large turnout would seem to indicate that he was out of step with his membership.

<sup>7</sup> Jonathan Pease (c.1746-1818) had been married three times: Beulah Coffin; Hannah Coffin; and Mrs. Sarah Wass. He had died five years before. We don't know where the house was located.

<sup>8</sup> Rev. Thaxter seems to have changed his views on night meetings. It is significant that Jeremiah attended as he had left the church to join the Methodists six months before.

praise the Lord that my unprofitable life has been continued until this year.<sup>9</sup>

8th. WSW, fresh breeze. Arrived at Edgt. from the Brig at Cattahunk.

9th. ENE to E. Discharged Schr. *M. Star*, being cargo of Brig *Union*.

14th. NNE, very pleasant and warm. Put up spouts for Thomas Cooke Jr., Esq.<sup>10</sup>

17th. SW, foggy. Fresh breeze. Planted Peas.

23rd. S. A severe Thunder Storm. T. Cooke's Saltworks struck with lightning. Watched with Thos. Jernegan Jr., being sick.

25th. N to SW. Planted potatoes at Chapaquiddick.

26th. SW, fresh breeze. Planted potatoes at Chapaquiddick.

27th. NW to W. Quarterly meeting of the Methodists.

29th. SW. Mr. Joseph Fisher dies very suddenly. aged —<sup>11</sup>

30th. S. Mr. Fisher is buried. This month has been very cold and blustering.

#### May 1823

1st. E, rainy. Went a seining, caught 300 Eng. herrings.

3rd. Calm AM, PM S to SW. Surveyed a piece of Land for Zadock Norton, which he bo't. of Saml. Osborn, and then went to Barnstable with I.D.P. Sheriff<sup>12</sup> to carry Richard Jonson who

<sup>9</sup> Tomorrow is Jeremiah's 31st birthday.

<sup>10</sup> A sign of spring. He had taken the spouts down in December, the sun having dropped too low to evaporate the salt water.

<sup>11</sup> Another blank left unfilled. Mr. Fisher was 67.

<sup>12</sup> I.D.P. was Isaiah Dunham Pease, Sheriff, and Jeremiah's brother.

was committed to Jail on suspicion of having murdered Mary Cuff of Gayhead. Arrived at Falmouth at 5 PM, remained there.

4th, 5th. Set out for Barnstable and arrived at the Jail about 5 o'clock PM, where Jonson was put in.

6th. Remained in B.

7th. Set out for home at 4 PM.

8th. Arrived at H.Hole at 2 AM.<sup>13</sup>

16th. SW, pleasant, heavy rain at night, ground very wet. Commenced guaging (sic) the cargo of Brig *Union* with Wm. Cooke, 1 Day. Watched it at night.<sup>14</sup>

17th. ESE to SSW, rainy. Engaged in rooling [rolling?] the above cargo into the store, etc. 1 Day.

19th. SW, pleasant. Engaged in gaging rum, etc., etc.<sup>15</sup>

20th. NE, warm. Engaged as above 1/2 Day. Revd. Mr. Whittlesy arrives.

25th. SW, pleasant. Revd. Mr. Whittlesy preaches.

26th. NW. This day was called upon by Valentine Pease to take notice that he, as one of the Select Men, warned Barcus Cortney to leave this Town.

27th. SW. Sloop *Superb* arrived from Charlestown. Lost a man on her passage — Smith.

29th. SE, stormy. This day became a member, etc.\*<sup>16</sup>

<sup>13</sup> They must have sailed across from Falmouth in darkness.

<sup>14</sup> This was the brig wrecked off Cuttyhunk that he had visited on April 3. Her cargo had been brought to Edgartown and Jeremiah was responsible for it.

<sup>15</sup> The cargo seems to have been rum.

<sup>16</sup> On very personal occurrences, Jeremiah omits the details and marks the entry with an asterisk, indicating perhaps that he kept another, more intimate, diary. This was probably the day when he officially joined the Methodist Church. On

30th. NNW, pleasant. Surveyed 2 lots of land for Ebr. Smith.

#### June 1823

4th. SW, pleasant. Class Meeting was very pleasant this Evening.

5th. SW. Brother John Adams, the late Methodist Preacher, leaves Edgt. for Conferance, having Laboured 2 years on this Island and I think has been an Instrument in the hand of Almighty God of awaiking a vast numer of the Inhabitants of this Isle to a sence of their situation in the Light of their Creator; may God reward him for his labour of Love.<sup>17</sup>

6th. SW. News of the Death of Capt. Martin Arey, master of Ship *Apollo* of Edgartown bro't. by ship *Brothers* of Nant. Solemn news. Capt. Arey was one of my particular Friends from our Infancy until the last day I ever saw him. He died in Valpariso, Coast of Chili, on the 21 day of January 1823 of the dropsy after a long sickness. He has left an amiable Wife and three children to mourn his early loss. His age was 3—. My God, prepare me to follow him, which must at longest be soon.<sup>18</sup> Surveyed Land for Thos. Smith & Benjamin Davis at the head of the pond, so called.

10th. NNE AM, PM E. Engaged in hoeing corn at Chapaquiddick.

Nov. 28, 1822, he had become a member of the Methodist Class, preparing for membership.

<sup>17</sup> It was Rev. Adams, later known as Reformation John Adams, who had converted Jeremiah (and many others) to Methodism. See *Intelligencer*, Nov. 1980, for more about this interesting period in Vineyard history.

<sup>18</sup> True to his name, Jeremiah is too pessimistic. He lived another 34 years.

11th. SW. Hoeing corn.  
 12th. SW. Hoeing corn.  
 13th. SSW. Ship Apollo arrives with the loss of Capt. Arey and two of his crew (coloured men). It is a solemn day to the Inhabitants of this Town and especially to his Widow, Connections & Friends, which were many. Alass, what is Man - - -

14th. WSW, rainy. Sailed for Providence in Schr. *Surprise*. 15th. Arrived. The Methodist Conference set there and I was present 2 days. This was a very pleasant interview, there were present about 100 Members many of which were men of Great Spiritual and natural understanding as well as liberal education.<sup>19</sup>

19th. SW. Stopped at Wickfort on 19th. and arrived home same day.

25th. SSW, light rain. About 5 o'clock

<sup>19</sup> Among those attending was Rev. John Adams.

Friday I was requested by Mr. Ebenr. Smith to go into Mr. Timo. Coffin Jr.'s Shop which I did, and was there requested to take notice of the conversation. I then heard Mr. Smith request Mr. Coffin to give him his Bill, which he paid, being \$5.78. Mr. Smith then requested or rather demanded his name from the Bond which Mr. Smith signed for Mr. Coffin as Postmaster.<sup>20</sup> 29th. SW, warm. Mr. Matthew Pease of Nantucket married to Miss Sally N. Pease of Edgt.

30th. SW, pleasant. Jared Coffin's house raised this Month. Mr. Barcus Cortney breaks his Leg by a fall from T.Cooke Esqr.'s saltworks pump frame very badly.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Coffin was Postmaster from 1819 to 1838. There must have been a falling out of some sort between Smith and him.

<sup>21</sup> Mr. Cortney seems to have ignored the Selectman's order on May 26 that he leave town.

## More about Capt. James A. Tilton and the Bark *Bowhead*

*Continued from page 37.*

and after the boats come to the ship at 10:20 a.m., he died. The Cap't. examined him but could find nothing broken. Buried him in the sea. Put Gardner in irons for safe keeping.

First Mate Mulligan, who kept the log, never mentions any black white conflict or even that there were blacks in the crew, which apparently was not unusual at the time.

The murder entry is his only mention of Carduso, who was listed on the crew list as Jose Cardosa, Boatsteerer, although the news account identified him as a mate.

It is a bizarre story and we would like to know more. We have written to the National Maritime Museum, Fort Mason, California, asking if more information on the trial is in their files. We have received no answer.

## Books

### EISENSTAEDT Martha's Vineyard

Text by Polly Burroughs

Oxmoor House, Birmingham, AL, 1988,  
 illus., 167 pp., \$35.

This handsome collection of photographs of Martha's Vineyard by one of the world's most famous photographers, Alfred Eisenstaedt, is no history book. But there's history in it, in its text and its pictures. One-fifth of the more than 150 photographs go back at least 40 years, providing views of the Island of our youth (well, for some of us!).

Eisenstaedt first came to the Vineyard in 1937, on assignment from his employer, Roy Larsen, publisher of *Life* magazine. *Life* was then only six months old, but already a sensation. It brought to print journalism by photography the same excitement that TV brought to radio a generation later.

The Island was enjoying a ferry strike, a news story, *Life's* editors thought. Even so, getting here was no problem for *Life*. Publisher Larsen, who summered on Nantucket, raced over to New London in his speedboat to pick up Eisenstaedt. A fast boat ride back east ended in Edgartown harbor where Photographer Eisenstaedt disembarked, camera ready. That was Larsen Lifestyle back then.

Eisenstaedt had been in this country less than two years and what he saw delighted him. Like thousands before and since, he fell in love with the Island

and has been coming back ever since. He has captured on thousands of rolls of 35-mm. film, the images of these 50 years. The best of what he captured are in this volume. Most are in color, but the ones that most appeal to this reviewer are the black-and-whites.

There's the one of two fashionable ladies strolling at Menemsha, and another of folks chatting in front of Church's fish market and littleneck bar at Oak Bluffs. Visible on a sign is a reminder of how easy it was to telephone back then: call 920 for car rentals, no dialing needed. Operators were waiting.

Included are photographs of hurricane damage; of Edgartown's Main Street in 1937 when you parked on the right side of the street and could send telegrams from the Western Union office. Eisie, as he is called by friends, has immortalized three ladies chatting outside a campground cottage, looking content beyond measure (my favorite shot).

These Eisenstaedt Vineyettes will shift nostalgia gears into high for those old enough to remember. For others, too young for that, they will send them to their telephones to reserve space on a ferry next summer.

Polly Burroughs has woven into hundreds of lines of captions enough facts to make the words as worthy as the photographs. One word of warning: Under no circumstances should this book get into the hands of any one who has never been here. Addiction is a sure consequence and there are too many of us Vineyard addicts already.

A.R.R.



## Bits & Pieces

**C**HOLERA was in epidemic nationwide when Daniel Webster visited the Vineyard in 1849 and he mentioned it in his address to the Edgartown assemblage (see page 16). It remained prevalent for a long time and nearly a year later, President Zachary Taylor died of the disease.

But there was no epidemic on the Vineyard, the *Gazette* Editor assured his readers: "We hardly know of a case of sickness at the present writing [in Edgartown], the same, we believe, may be said of the island generally." Always a local booster, he urged mainlanders to "drop down" where they would be safe from cholera.

Strangely, in the same issue, only two paragraphs below the invitation to the mainlanders, there was this item:

"THE CHOLERA! A Mrs. Cooper, at Gay-Head, ate the best part of a decayed water mellow, was seized with cholera-morbus, and died. No occasion for alarm." (*Gazette*, Aug. 23, 1849)

Was this evidence that the residents of Gay Head, "colored" as they were called in those days, were less important than those elsewhere on the Island? Had Mrs. Cooper been an Edgartown resident, would he have written "no occasion for alarm"? Or did he mean that "cholera-morbus" was not the same as the cholera epidemic?

Senator Webster's talk was brought to an unscheduled ending by some young men creating a disturbance at the door. There is no explanation of their motivation. Webster was opposed

to the abolitionists. Could these young men have been anti-slavery activists? The news account says nothing about a cause, if there was one:

"There are many very bad boys in this little village of ours. It is a lamentable and mortifying fact. . . These bad boys almost nightly disgrace themselves and our town by their rowdiness. They have not even learned to treat strangers with respect; and ministers of the gospel are not safe from their insults and ruffianisms. . . [they] ought to be publicly horsewhipped and placed in the stocks."

We hear much these days about the failure of our politicians to talk to the issues. Instead, they wrap themselves in the flag and await the cheers, which are always forthcoming.

In 1849, Senator Webster seems to have used the same tactics. His Edgartown talk, although shortened by those ruffians at the door, never mentioned the issue of the moment: slavery. Several new states were soon to be admitted and the question was, should they be free or slave? Less than a year later, he came out in support of the Clay compromise, accepting slavery and opposing abolition. But the Edgartown speech said nothing of that divisive issue, only that the Islanders were a "vigorous race" while Europeans were down-trodden, ignorant of freedom, and would be wise to copy our system (slavery included, one must assume). The crowd cheered.

But even as they cheered, the issue that was soon to split the Union grew more critical.

What is that about the more things change?

A.R.R.

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1 p.m. to 4 p.m.  
Wednesday through Friday  
10 a.m. to 4 p.m.  
Saturday

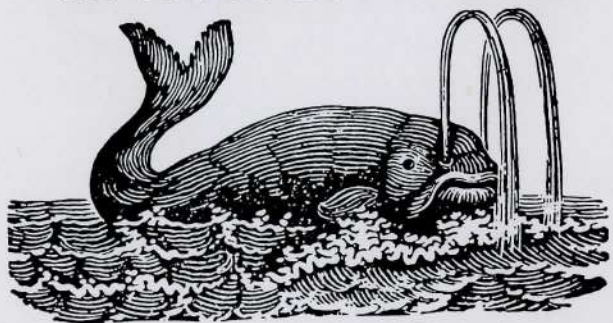
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(June 15 to Sept. 15)  
10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.  
Tuesday through  
Saturday

### Where there's a Will, there's a Way . . .

to help preserve and publish  
Dukes County history.  
When drafting your will, won't  
you please remember to include  
the Dukes County Historical  
Society among your bequests.

# WHALE-HO



See lands of exotic nature  
with

## CAPTAIN ELSEGOOD'S

☞ "Cynthia Margaret" ☞  
mighty hunter of the briney

Sign on Now for Sixty-two Dollar Bonus

Making weigh from Nantucket on

☞ May 24th, 1842 ☞