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Family Tragedy at Cape Poge Light

by JOHN A. HOWLAND

CAPE POGE Light was built in 1802, the second lighthouse on Martha's Vineyard. John Adams, the country's second President, signed the order authorizing a light on the northern tip of Chappaquiddick Island. It was more of a navigation aid to Nantucket mariners than Vineyarders.

Even today a keeper and family would find it a remote place in which to live year round. Although it is within easy sight of Edgartown, the shire town of the county, before four-wheel-drive vehicles it could be as much as a full day's trip to town and back. And on a frigid day in winter, the lonely walk along the wind-swept beach could be dangerous.

Its remoteness brought human problems. One such, in July 1899, contributed to a tragedy that eventually broke up the family of the keeper.

The lighthouse keeper was George E. Dolby, who in August 1898 was transferred from West Chop Light, where he had been assistant keeper. He was, the transfer order read, "promoted and appointed keeper of the Cape Poge Light-Station, Massachusetts, with compensation at the rate of five hundred and sixty dollars per annum, from September 1, 1898, vice Mr. George H. Fisher, resigned." The order was signed by Secretary of the Treasury Lyman J. Gage.

Keeper Dolby, born on a farm in Norton in 1853, apparently had little taste for agriculture and had joined the Lighthouse Service in 1882. Advancing up the ranks from acting 2nd assistant keeper at Cape Cod Light to...
assistant keeper at West Chop in 1885, he now was getting his first command as Cape Poge's eleventh keeper.

In 1892, while at West Chop, he had married Mabel Jane Laidlaw, a spunky Scottish lass twenty years younger than he. She had emigrated, as an orphan, to America at the age of five. By the time George was assigned to Cape Poge, they had three sons.

At best, lighthouse keeping was a lonely, sometimes dangerous occupation, although certain stations, West Chop being one, were close enough to town to make a social life possible. In contrast, Cape Poge Light was as isolated as though it stood on a rocky island off the coast of Maine.

How Mabel Jane accepted her husband's promotion and new station can only be imagined. It was no promotion for her, moving to that remote spot, she certainly must have thought.

But she went and it was there, on Cape Poge, soon after they moved, that tragedy occurred and the family revolt began.

On September 1, 1898, George E. Dolby made this entry in the lighthouse journal: "Having all Government Property on this day turned over to me by the late Keeper Geo. H. Fisher, I now take charge of this station." It was his first command, and he was a proud man. The next morning at 8 a.m. he left for Edgartown, as he wrote in the journal: "Keeper absent from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. for family supplies and mail matter."

That was the way of life on Cape Poge. Once a week, less often in winter, the Keeper spent the day going to Edgartown to pick up supplies and mail, leaving Mabel Jane alone with the children. As far as can be learned from the journal, she rarely left the station that first year.

But they had company of a kind that winter. On November 1, four workmen and a large quantity of lumber and other building materials were brought to the station by the lighthouse supply vessel. The men apparently moved into the house as roomers, being fed and housed by Mabel Jane. They had come to build a new oil shed, a wood shed, and to make some improvements in the dwelling. When a violent storm destroyed the station's boathouse while they were there, they were ordered to build a replacement. Altogether, they were there three months, by which time Mabel Jane must have been happy to have them leave.

The late November storm that blew down the boathouse was a big one. Keeper Dolby, who like most keepers was a poor speller, described its effect on the station:

November 27, Heavy East to N.East Gale, rain and Snow. Bank washing badly. Fences blown down. Boat House Blown down and carried away. Lost one pair of Oars, two double blocks and Fall which belonged with Blocks used for Hauling up Boat, mast, gaff and boom which belonged with old Boat all stowed in Boat House. Steps moved from Tower. Tower rocked very Badly. A three-masted Schurner is ashore Betwene Cape Poge and Edgartown, very heavy Sea on the East Side of Cape Poge.

Watching the cliff in front of the house being washed away, Mabel Jane, the young Scottish emigrant, doubtless wondered why she had ever decided to marry a lighthouse keeper.
February 1899 brought another gale from the northeast, the powerful waves washing away more of the bank atop which the dwelling stood. Then it turned extremely cold and as Keeper Dolby wrote: “Cannot see any water from the west side of Cape Poge Pond to Edgartown. All ice. Steamboat had hard time getting through the ice.” Three days later, another blow drove three schooners up on the shoals just off the point, one being dismantled. “Lots of ice in the Sound,” wrote Dolby.

But they made it through the winter. When spring came, it brought with it another problem. Their well ran dry. In June, the U.S. Steamer Azalea, supply vessel for the Lighthouse Service, delivered “one Kitchen Rainge, 180 gallons of watter and four watter butts.” Clearly, the well had run dry; water had to be brought in.

Solving the well problem wasn’t quick. It wasn’t until two weeks later, that, as we learn from the journal, “Mr. Chadwick of Edgartown at work Driving a well in Keepers Dwelling. Have got 14 feet 6 inches of watter in Pipe. Broak Cuppling on Box. Left Station, pump uncomplete.” On June 30, after four more dry days, Mr. Chadwick returned and finished putting in the pump. Finally, Mabel Jane had the hand pump in her kitchen working: “Capacity 4 buckets per minute.”

July 1899 started pleasantly enough. Warm and dry, only an occasional morning fog spoiled the loveliness of Cape Poge. Mabel Jane may have decided that perhaps being a keeper’s wife wasn’t so bad after all.

Then on July 15, this ominous entry: “Keeper absent from Station from 6 a.m. to 11 a.m. for a Doctor for Child.” There is no hint that a doctor came back with him. Again, three days later, “Keeper Absent from Station from 6 a.m. to 10 a.m. for Doctor. Keepers Child very sick.” On July 20, two days later: “Keeper Absent from Station 12 a.m. to 4 p.m. for Dr. for Children.” None of the three entries states that a doctor returned with Keeper Dolby to examine and treat the child. The next day, he again left the station,

Page from Keeper Dolby’s log telling of that tragic week in July 1899.

this time he was gone from 6 a.m. to 10 a.m. “for supplies.”

That night, the family tragedy occurred. Here is Keeper Dolby’s official journal entry:

Keepers little Boy Arther Died at 1:30 a.m. of Hart trouble, another Boy sick.”

July 22, Dolby again went to Edgartown from 1 p.m. to 6 p.m., leaving Mabel Jane with her three children, one dead and another sick. He explained only that he went “on business.” No doubt the business was arranging for Arthur’s funeral which took place the following day: “Keeper Absent from Station from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Attend Funeral of Child.”

Blaming the isolation of Cape Poge and Lighthouse Service life generally for her loss, Mabel Jane, apparently unbeknownst to her husband, fired off a letter to the lighthouse establishment. She requested, or quite probably
demanded, a change of station. There is no copy of what she wrote, but it was enough to get the Chief of the Lighthouse Service to reply directly to her, not to Keeper Dolby. The Chief suggested that by some shuffling of assignments, the safer, less isolated Edgartown Harbor Light might become open in the future. He closed by writing: “You see I want to accommodate all I possibly can.”

Just what George thought of his wife’s independent action is not known, but it is clear, in a later letter to Keeper Dolby, that the Inspector of the 2nd District of the Lighthouse Service in Boston knew he was coping with a determined and formidable lady whose Caledonian blood was up. He wrote Dolby: “I have heard from Mrs. Dolby and I presume you are or soon will be of the same opinion” (author’s italics).

Unfortunately, the Edgartown Light opening did not work out and Dolby was shortly thereafter offered the keepership of the Cliff Light, Nantucket.

It was then that Mabel Jane’s revolt reached the impasse, both with the Lighthouse Service and with George: family concerns versus career demands, Gaelic determination versus Yankee obduracy. She adamantly refused to stay at Cape Poge and equally adamantly refused to go to what she considered the equally isolated Nantucket Light.

She and her two surviving children had spent the winter after Arthur’s death in Edgartown. Cape Poge in winter was too much for her. She returned to the lighthouse on June 6, 1902. The next day, in the customary terse style of lighthouse keepers, there is this entry in the journal: “Keeper packing up things. Getting ready to move.”

Off to Nantucket went the dutiful Lighthouse Keeper George and off to a house in Vineyard Haven went Mabel Jane and the boys. And there the revolt of Mabel Jane continued for seven years.

George, after his duty on Nantucket and a short tour at Palmer Island, returned to the Vineyard as Keeper at West Chop in 1909. There, in a safe, non-isolated haven, Mabel Jane and family rejoined him. But only for six years.

She had never really recovered from the loss of her child. The other two boys, now in their early teens, had left for jobs on the mainland. The memories associated with the Lighthouse Service, the reassociation with George and, it may be assumed, other family conflicts, led her to take a step fairly extraordinary for those days. Off she went to the divorce court and then off to the mainland where she took a position as matron of the State School for Retarded Children in Wrentham.

Mabel Jane retired in 1945 and always until her death in 1954, according to family recollections, recounted the story of the death of her “little Arthur.” Her son brought her body back to the Island where she was buried beside her lost infant, Arthur, in the Edgartown Cemetery.

George retired in 1919 and lived with a son by a previous
Mabel Jane Dolby, now Mrs. Alger, while a Wrentham school matron in 1935. marriage, who was assistant keeper of Sankaty Light, Nantucket. After 27 years in the lighthouse service, his pension was $485.25 per year. He died in 1932 and is buried in the plot of his forebears in Barnstable.

Cape Poge Light,* although moved back several times from an encroaching ocean, is still there on the remote, lonely cliff where Arthur Dolby, aged 3 years, 11 months

*For the complete history of Cape Poge Light see Intelligencer, v.25, nos.1,2,3.
and 21 days, died with no doctor in attendance, his parents standing by helplessly.

But there will be no more such tragedies in its keeper's family. Today, it is unmanned, fully automated; no keeper, no family, not even a dwelling, remain. Only a beacon.

Acknowledgement

The author is grateful to George L. Dolby Jr., the third generation of the family on the Island, for allowing him to read family letters and documents and for sharing with him the sad events in the lives of his grandparents.

Customs Collectors at Edgartown

John Presbury Norton (1830-1842)

by FLORENCE KERN

JOHN PRESBURY NORTON of Lambert's Cove took office as Collector of Customs for the District of Edgartown in 1830 under strange circumstances. His predecessor, Squire Thomas Cooke Jr., could not believe he had been dismissed from the office he had held for 21 years under three presidents: Madison, Monroe and John Quincy Adams.

Cooke was sure he would be recommissioned even though he was a National-Republican and the new president, Andrew Jackson, a Jefferson-Democrat, was intent on ridding the government of Adams loyalists. It was the young nation's first experience with what soon was called the "spoils system" and the 63-year-old Cooke wasn't prepared for it.

When Jackson was elected, Cooke, eager to keep his post, asked various Edgartown associates to recommend him for reappointment. Many did, bombarding the Treasury Department with letters of remonstrance. Among those he fully expected to endorse him was his Deputy Collector, Jeremiah Pease, who had worked for him both in Customs and privately on his saltworks and farm.

But Pease refused to sign a letter of recommendation. Was he hoping for the appointment for himself? Perhaps. He was, after all, a Democrat who had supported Jackson, and his brother, Isaiah, the County Sheriff, must have had political connections. In any case, his refusal to sign the letter cost

FLORENCE KERN spends her summers on Chappaquiddick, interrupted by many hours in our library on the "big" Island. She has written extensively on the history of the United States Revenue Service, a subject which led to her great interest in Edgartown Customs Collectors. This is the fourth article in this important historical series.
Entry in Jeremiah’s diary tells of being fired by Collector Cooke.

him his job. An irate Collector Cooke, on December 31, 1829, arbitrarily fired him. In his diary, Jeremiah wrote:

This day I have surrendered the Comm. [Commission as Deputy Inspector] mentioned below agreeably to request of T. Cooke Esq., the only accusation bro’t by him against me was that I did not sign his Remonstrance or Recommendation.  

Collector Cooke didn’t have much longer to exert his authority. He was removed from office February 20, 1830, and on that same day President Jackson signed a commission as Collector of Customs for John Presbury Norton, a 48-year-old Democrat. When the news arrived in Edgartown, a feud broke out between Cooke and Norton that was to last for many years. The first round in the fight occurred immediately. Former Collector Cooke refused to turn over the Custom House records to Collector Norton unless he was paid for them.

Norton Moves to Edgartown

It was a prerequisite of the office that the Collector live in Edgartown, headquarters for the Customs District that included the Vineyard, the Elizabeth Islands and Noman’s Land. He was obliged to provide two rooms in his house for Customs purposes, one for himself and the other for his deputy. Where he first lived in Edgartown after moving from Lambert’s Cove is not known, but two years later, in 1832, he rented a North Water Street house from Jeremiah Banning of Nantucket and in 1834 he purchased the house for $1650.

The house had been owned by Jeremiah’s parents, James and Mercy Coffin Banning, who were married in 1774 and may have built the house at that time. There is also the possibility that it had been built earlier and inherited by the Bannings from Mercy’s mother, Jane Claghorn, whose father, James Claghorn, is known to have built a house in that vicinity in 1717.

The house, one of Edgartown’s historic buildings, is at 90 North Water Street and is now the residence of Mr. and Mrs. S. Bailey Norton. Mr. Norton is past-president of the Society. The Normans believe that the ell at the rear of the house may have been added for Customs purposes and that the decorative stars in the door trim in a front room may have had some Federal significance. Carved in an attic beam are the initials “J.B.”, which could be for James or Jeremiah Banning.

John Presbury Norton, the new Collector, was a sixth generation Islander, descendant of Nicholas Norton, who came to the Island in 1657, and of Joseph Norton of Major’s Cove, who was the Island’s first Representative to the General Court of Massachusetts in 1692. He was the first son of Peter Norton, owner of a farm in Lambert’s Cove and of considerable acreage on Noman’s Land.  

In 1810 Norton married Nancy Pease Butler, whose family also had ownership on Noman’s. At the time he was appointed Collector, 1830, John and Nancy were the parents

1 Jeremiah, of course, continued on the Federal payroll as Edgartown lighthouse keeper. Cooke, a traditionalist, saw Andrew Jackson and all he represented as a threat to the nation’s future. On election day, 1832, when Jackson was running for a second term, Pease wrote in his diary: “The last time for voting for President, according to the prophecy of Thomas Cooke.” Similar prophecies were made during FDR’s “New Deal.”

2 It isn’t known who recommended Norton for the post. He was, in 1829-30, the Tisbury Representative in the State House of Representatives, so he had some political connections. Jeremiah Pease was a Jackson supporter and he, having been Deputy, may have expected to get the appointment. A few years before, he had joined the Methodists, having been “born again” during the revival of Rev. John Adams. Methodists were thought of as somewhat peculiar in those days (‘crazy’ Methodists, they were called) and that may have been a factor in his failure to get the position.
of two teen-age daughters, Hannah and Eliza, and a four-year-old son, Francis.

One of the first things the new Collector did was to ask that the indispensable Jeremiah Pease be reinstated as his Deputy and Inspector of Customs. In a letter to the Secretary of the Treasury, he wrote:

Whereas the Inspector of this port has lately been dismissed from office by the late Collector, I do hereby solicit his reappointment to fill the same office of Inspector.

He also brought up the matter of the Custom House records, which were still in the hands of Thomas Cooke Jr.:

I have to inform you that Mr. Cooke, the late Collector, will not deliver the books containing the records of this office without my paying for the same.

The Secretary of Treasury responded quickly and with authority concerning the Cooke matter:

The books which you represent Mr. Cooke withheld are the property of the government and if after demand being made he should persist in holding them, you are instructed to apply to Andrew Dunlap Esq., the District Attorney of the United States at Boston, to institute legal proceedings to compel him to deliver up all the public property in his possession.

Jeremiah may have set the wheels in motion for his recommissioning even before Norton's request. On January 18, 1830, shortly after he was fired by Cooke, he went to Boston, returning on January 23. He does not provide any details in his diary as to the purpose of the trip, but it is possible that he visited the Customs House in Boston to argue his case.

On March 8, 1830, Jeremiah was reappointed Inspector of Customs, receiving his commission from Collector Norton and, as he recorded in his diary, "took charge of the Revenue Boat, etc." Former Collector Cooke must have turned over the records to Norton without a legal fight as there is no record of any such action. He may have insisted that the records be copied before he turned them over to Norton. In Jeremiah's diary we read that from March 10 through March 16, he was "engaged in writing at the Custom House," which may have been the former Custom House in Cooke's residence where the books were being held.

**Busy Days for Customs**

Collector Norton had taken office in one of the most vibrant periods in the history of the Customs District of Edgartown. The three major harbors, Edgartown, Holmes Hole and Tarpaulin Cove, were visited by hundreds of vessels each month: ships that had crossed the Atlantic or Pacific, barks, brigs, schooners and sloops that roamed the East coast, fishing smacks, Revenue Cutters and packets that ran from the islands to the mainland. The Collector was required to keep track of these, foreign and domestic, and to make sure they obeyed Federal regulations. All vessels entering the harbors were obliged to report to the Collector or one of his Deputies: Pease at Edgartown; Henry Pease Worth at Holmes Hole; and, later, Richard Luce at Tarpaulin Cove, whose appointment came a few months after Norton took office. Worth had been serving at Holmes Hole since 1817.

Collector Norton, who had lived at Lambert's Cove directly across Vineyard Sound from Tarpaulin Cove on Naushon Island, recognized the importance of this anchorage and watering place. It had been a favorite haunt of merchantmen, adventurers, smugglers and pirates since Colonial days. Soon after being named Collector, Norton wrote the Secretary of Treasury:

For the further protection of the Revenue in this district, I would solicit your attention to the following subjects. This district is extensive, including a number of small islands and harbours, in which vessels frequently anchor until a favourable wind to proceed to their respective ports of destination, the principal one of which is Tarpaulin Cove, situated in one of the Elizabeth Islands on the north side of the Vineyard Sound, about twenty miles from this Custom House. The importance of this port I think has heretofore escaped the notice of Government. There are frequently from forty to sixty vessels here at anchor. Having
conferred with Capt. Mathers of the Cutter Eagle and Samuel Williams, Collector at New Bedford, on this subject, and knowing that vessels from all parts of the world and different parts of the United States occasionally stop there in bad weather and adverse winds, we are all of the opinion that an Inspector at that port is much wanted.

His request was granted and on Norton's recommendation, Richard Luce was commissioned Inspector of Customs. Luce, Norton wrote, was "well qualified to fill that station" and he recommended a salary of $700, "under the peculiar situation" that existed. His salary, however, was set at $500 a year and he was refused a boat of any kind at government expense, although he was to "use all diligence in preventing smuggling from vessels to the shore," somehow without a boat! It was not until some months later that Norton was authorized to spend $90 to buy a boat for Luce.

The Addlington Letters

The deposed and annoyed Collector Cooke had not given up his struggle to recover his position. He continued to bombard the Treasury Department with complaints about his successor, now using an accomplice to write letters of protest. His accomplice was an Edgartown tailor, born Zadoc Norton, who had changed his name and the names of his wife and children to Addlington (sometimes spelled Addington) in 1826. As Francis Addlington, he sent a series of criticisms to Washington, among them this one dated October 31, 1831:

I have not for the last 3 months seen a Custom House officer on the wharfs, where I am daily, on board of any vessel in this port and I have not seen but in a few instances the Revenue Boat cruising in the Sound or about the harbor although vessels have been daily arriving. The inspector which attends at this port holds two offices under the government, Lighthouse Keeper and Inspector of the Customs which I think is incompatible. He does not, and cannot do both.

He was, of course, referring to Jeremiah Pease who had

The peculiar situation was Tarpaulin's isolation from any real community. It was difficult to get to except by water.
and repair that rocks were placed to protect it in 1848. Many years later, a causeway was built connecting it permanently to the shore.

Doubtless inspired by Cooke, Addlington found another target for his wrath in Richard Luce, the new Deputy at Tarpaulin. He wrote to the Treasury Secretary that Luce had left his station and gone to Salem where he boarded his schooner Oliver Cromwell and sailed her to Holmes Hole. This was contrary to Department regulations on two counts: one, he had left his station without approval; and two, it was illegal for a Customs officer to own a vessel.

The office of the Secretary asked Norton to answer these accusations. The Collector wrote that Luce had brought his boat from Salem to Holmes Hole to sell it in order to comply with the regulations. Regarding Addlington’s criticism of Jeremiah Pease, he wrote:

As it relates to the inspector of this port not doing his duty, I am certain no man could be more faithful in his discharge of that trust. Charges is likewise made of his not paying attention to the lighthouse which he keeps. These are unfounded, and been proved so by good evidence, re. the satisfaction of the Collector at Boston, who had lately received a number of complaints of this nature (lighthouse). The truth of the case is this: Mr. Pease was displaced as Inspector by Mr. Cooke, late Collector, on account of his political views. He has been restored to that office and Mr. Cooke has told me that he would pursue him through life.

Another criticism was made by Cooke, via Addlington, that Norton had failed to charge an Edgartown whaler the foreign tonnage tax when she returned from the Pacific with a British officer working on board. An added tax of 50 cents a ton was due from vessels with foreign officers. Norton countered by saying that the whaler, the Meridian, had been cleared for her voyage as a domestic vessel with the same Britisher on board while Cooke was in office. Besides, in the meantime the foreigner had applied for his citizenship papers. Addlington further charged that the whaler was given preferential treatment because Collector Norton’s son-in-law had a large interest in her. To this, the Collector replied that his son-in-law had invested only $1700 in the $37,000 vessel. He wrote:

A war of extermination is declared against all the officers of the government here by Thos. Cooke (jr.), late Collector in this District for 20 years past. He now employs Addlington as a tool in his nefarious purposes. Addlington has no character, no property, and this same Addlington, alias Cooke, has preferred a number of complaints against Mr. Pease to the Collector at Boston for his neglect of attention to the Light House, all of which the Collector finds false and malicious.

Addlington’s letters, he wrote, were all dictated by the former Collector Thomas Cooke, whom he called “a man of very immoral character.” He described “tool” Addlington as insolvent, adding: “He cannot obtain $5 credit here.”

Sail versus Steam

By far the greater number of vessels in New England waters during Norton’s term of office were propelled by wind, but there was a new type of craft being seen. More often than not, it also carried sail (in case a boiler blew out), but it belched smoke and fiery ashes that often burned holes in its canvas and it blew its whistle loudly and proudly with steam from its boiler.

America’s first steam vessel had gone up the Hudson River in 1807, but it was some years later before Vineyarders heard steam whistles. Although in 1818, a steam ferry began serving Nantucket, it was not until July 1830, a few months after Norton took office, that the Marco Bazar, a steam paddle-wheeler, chugged into Edgartown with a load of 200

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4 The Collector's son-in-law was Capt. Abraham Osborn.
5 Francis Addlington, a tailor, deserves more research. He was born in 1797 as Zadoc Norton. His father, Nicholas, "drowned by falling overboard while piloting a vessel" when Zadoc was about 10 years old. His mother, Love Norton, died in 1830. It is true that from 1830 to 1840 he ran up a large indebtedness to at least one Edgartown shopkeeper, Joseph Mayhew, making it necessary for him to sign a note to Mayhew on Jan. 1, 1841, for $98.87. He seemed never to have any cash, always paying his account by bartering his tailoring. However, by the time of the 1850 Federal Census, Francis owned real estate valued at $850, a house on the corner of Winter and Summer Streets, Edgartown. He had six children. It is not known why he changed his name or why he chose Addlington.
Returning from a voyage, some whalers would unload their oil at the wharves of Dr. Daniel Fisher or Grafton Norton or Samuel Osborn, but most merely tied up or anchored in Edgartown or Holmes Hole to celebrate their homecoming. They would drop off their manifests with the local Collector before sailing to the mainland to unload their barrels and pay their customs duties.

Manifests had to be dropped off at the ship's first port of call in the United States and, unless the cargo was to be unloaded, those manifests were forwarded by the Collector to the port at which the vessel would unload and pay her duties. Hence, while Norton collected and forwarded many manifests of local whalers, he took in little revenue, as his reports for 1837-1838 show:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Gross Revenue</th>
<th>Expenses</th>
<th>Excess</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1837</td>
<td>$195.95</td>
<td>$3081.42</td>
<td>$2885.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1838</td>
<td>155.69</td>
<td>2676.27</td>
<td>2520.38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Edgartown District clearly was not a profitable operation for the Department of the Treasury. The Custom Offices on the mainland, particularly New Bedford, took in huge sums, often in the high thousands, from duties paid by Vineyard whalers.6

Among the whalers registered in Edgartown in 1830-1840 were Almira, Champion, George and Mary, Mary Ann, Loan, Meridian, Pocahontas, William and Joseph, Athalia, York, Planter, Pavillion and Splendid. Though they brought little money to Edgartown's Customs Office, their owners and masters reaped fortunes that were translated into the shire town's lovely churches and imposing waterfront homes.

Other Responsibilities

Another of Norton's duties was to collect hospital dues from all who entered the District's harbors: 20 cents per mouth for each seaman. Since 1785, there has been a small marine hospital in Eastville, near the site of today's Martha's

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6 This contradicts an oft-repeated claim that Dr. Fisher's candleworks were the world's largest and that his oil refinery supplied oil for all the nation's lighthouses. Clearly, the amount of oil unloaded in Edgartown does not support such a claim.
Vineyard Hospital. By Norton’s time, however, the hospital had fallen into disuse and he housed any sick seamen in private homes, sending local doctors to attend them.

Shipboard patients with infectious diseases were not supposed to go ashore. If ashore when they became ill, they were isolated in remote places.

In 1832, the Vineyard learned that cholera was “sweeping America.” A local committee was hastily formed “to stop the importation of cholera and other diseases.” It was up to Collector Norton to make sure that no cholera patient came ashore.7

When asked by the Treasury Department if any money had been paid out in Edgartown for drawbacks,8 Norton replied that the only government money paid out since 1821 was bounty money for fishermen. He sent the following record of bounty payments to Washington:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Vessels</th>
<th>Amount Paid</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1821</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>$777.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1822</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>567.79</td>
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<tr>
<td>1823</td>
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<td>1824</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>731.75</td>
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<tr>
<td>1825</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>413.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1826</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>807.62</td>
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<tr>
<td>1831</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>125.95</td>
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It is not clear whether the new Jackson administration, which took office on March 4, 1829, was responsible for the sharp drop in bounty payments or whether it was simply that Vineyarders had stopped fishing. Since the beginning of the Customs Service in 1789, bounties had been paid to encourage commercial fishing. Obviously this had met with little success in the Edgartown District from 1821 to 1831.

**Lighthouse Superintendent**

In 1834, four years after becoming Collector, Norton was appointed Superintendent of Lights by the United States Lighthouse Service. He was made responsible for all lighthouses between Chatham on Cape Cod and Buzzards Bay. Previously, supervision had been the responsibility of the New Bedford Collector, but criticism of the lighthouse establishment was growing in the nation. It was charged with inadequate inspections, corrupt practices and purchasing obsolete lights. Changes were being made to calm the critics.

The lighthouses Norton was ordered to supervise included Chatham, Gay Head, Cutter Hunk (Cuttyhunk), Dumphrey Rock, Nobska Point, Holmes Hole (West Chop), Tarpaulin Cove, Point Scammon, Cape Poge, Edgartown, Bird Island, Nantucket Harbor, Clarke Point and Monomoy Point, plus the beacon at Nantucket and the Tuckernuck Shoal Light Boat. This was a long list and spread over lots of water. In addition, he was responsible for aids to navigation, such as buoys, in those waters.

He was charged with keeping the lighthouses supplied with oil, with paying the keepers and inspecting the lights. At intervals, usually annually, he was taken aboard a Revenue Cutter to visit each lighthouse. The inspection of his lighthouses took about six days when he made one aboard the Cutter Vigilant in July 1841. Fortunately, he was not on an inspection trip aboard the Cutter McLane when she capsized in Hadley Harbor on Naushon during a severe storm September 1, 1837.

Salaries for his keepers totalled only $1987 in 1834, according to Norton’s report.9 He listed expenses at $300 for replacing buoys, $100 for incidental expenses, and $250

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7 There were exceptions. At least one seaman with an infectious disease, smallpox, was allowed to come ashore and was quarantined in the Edgartown lighthouse (where Jeremiah was supposed to be living). He died there.

8 Drawbacks were sums of money returned to importers for duties or customs paid on goods that were landed but later removed for exportation to some other port. Apparently the Jackson administration was investigating some supposed wrong doings in the drawback handling.

9 Highest paid among Norton’s keepers was Ebenezer Skiff at Gay Head, who had just been given a raise to $350 a year.
for operating his office. When asked in 1840 by the Treasury Department if any reduction could be made in the keepers' salaries, his reply was to the point: "In answer I can readily say I know of none."

It wasn't only the Lighthouse Service that was trying to cut expenses, the same was true in the Customs Service. Norton had to beg for new sails for the boat used by the Deputy Collector at Holmes Hole:

It is necessary that the Revenue boat stationed at the port of Holmes Hole should be supplied with a new suit of sails; the probable expense will be twenty-five dollars.

At about the same time he requested a new boat for Deputy Luce at Tarpaulin Cove, writing:

The Revenue Boat at Tarpaulin Cove is unfit for service in consequence of the Inspector's boarding a British ship while at anchor some distance from the Cove. After reaching the ship, the violence of the wind would not admit of his obtaining the shore. He tied the boat astern of the ship and during the night she was nearly cut in two by some vessel.

The Lighthouse Keeper at the Cove has a fine boat for the service and he has no use for it.

But if Collector Norton and Deputy Luce thought the Tarpaulin Lighthouse Keeper was going to give up his boat they were wrong. Eventually, a new boat was purchased for Luce. By 1836, traffic had increased so much at the Cove that a hand was hired to assist Deputy Luce at a salary not to exceed $12 a month. Salaries of the Deputies came up for review that year and Jeremiah Pease, Deputy in Edgartown, was put on a per diem basis. On March 5, 1836, Treasury Secretary Levi Woodbury wrote Norton:

Your letter of the 18th ultimo upon the subject of the pay of Jeremiah Pease, Inspector of the Customs at your port, has been received. Mr. Pease's compensation will in future be at a per diem rate of three dollars when actually employed, not to exceed Five hundred dollars a year.

**Erosion at Cape Poge**

In 1836, Collector Norton and others on the Vineyard were worrying about the survival of Cape Poge Light on the northeast tip of Chappaquiddick Island. It had been a lifesaver for mariners since 1801 when the United States bought four acres of land for a lighthouse site on the cliff overlooking Nantucket Sound. The government paid $36 for the land, the deed reading:

John Worth, Marshall Jenkins, Martin Pease and Joseph Huxford sell the United States forever 4 acres of land on Cape Poge plus the privilege of passing to and from the land in a direct path to the nearest water in Cape Poge Pond for $36.

The deed may have stated "forever," but wind and water paid no attention and by 1836, only 35 years after the lighthouse was built, two acres of the land had eroded and the tower was less than 40 feet from the edge of the cliff. One storm had washed away 14 feet and the keeper's house had already been moved back. Realizing that something must be done, in 1825 the government had purchased an additional two acres, but it delayed moving the tower back.

Collector Norton, acting on a suggestion of Lott Norton, keeper of the light, proposed a solution. On October 4, 1836, he wrote to Fifth Auditor Stephen Pleasanton, the man...
responsible for the nation’s lighthouses and at the time under intense criticism for their inadequacies:

I find on examination that it will be necessary to build a stone wall under the Cliff at Cape Poge about 30 rods to prevent the sea from washing the Cliff where the Lighthouse stands. The Lighthouse is now about forty feet from the Cliff. I am certain the method will prevent the sea from undermining the Cliff any more and will save the expense of moving the lighthouse the next year. It is proper that the work should commence immediately — I shall wait your order on the subject.

Norton estimated the cost to be $120. The Fifth Auditor wrote back that it could be done "provided the expense is not to exceed $120, as estimated."

The wall proved useless against the sea and in 1838 two more acres were bought and the lighthouse moved "a few yards nearer the keeper's house." 10

Collector Norton continued in office under Democratic President Martin Van Buren (1837-1841), but with the election of William Henry Harrison, a Whig, in November 1840 his days were numbered. The Whigs, who also controlled Congress, were eager to adopt the Jackson spoils system and there was great politicking for such choice positions as Customs Collector. Harrison was inaugurated in March 1841, but died of pneumonia after only one month in office. Vice President John Tyler took over, the first vice president to assume the presidency on the death of a president.

Both the Collector and Deputy Jeremiah Pease were concerned about their jobs and with reason, both being Democrats. On March 26, 1841, Pease was removed as keeper of Edgartown Light, being replaced by Capt. Sylvanus Crocker, a Whig. Now he was concerned about his other job — Deputy Collector.

For months, no word came from Washington about new appointments although leading Island Whigs, like Leavitt Thaxter, Abraham Osborn and Richard L. Pease, were writing to political friends in Boston and Washington asking for their support in getting the Collectorship (see related article in this issue). In January 1842, Collector Norton went to Washington to plead his case. His term was due to expire on February 19. When he returned on February 8, he may have told Jeremiah that things didn’t look promising because two days later Jeremiah "had an interview with Esq. . . he assures me he shall . . ." As was his style, Jeremiah was very cryptic and that’s all he wrote in his diary, but we can guess that the "Esq." was Leavitt Thaxter, leading Whig candidate for the Collector’s post, and that he had assured Jeremiah that he would keep him as his deputy.

February 19, 1842, came and the appointments of Norton and Pease expired without any word of their successors. Then, on April 2, Jeremiah’s diary tells us that "news of the app’t. of L. Thaxter as Collector of the Customs reaches Edgartown. Five days later, the official commission was received and on the following day, April 8, 1842, Jeremiah made this entry in his diary (it was his birthday):

Another Year of my short Life is past . . . This day Leavitt Thaxter Esq. is qualified to the Office of Collector of this District, he commences business by taking into his possession the Books, papers and public property, and at onehalf past 11 o’clock appoints me a Deputy Collector and Inspector of the Customs for the District of Edgartown. Engaged at the new Custom House from about 10 am to 5 pm.

A week later, Capt. Richard Luce was reappointed Inspector of Customs "to reside at Tarpaulin Cove." Worth stayed on at Holmes Hole.

Justice John Presbury Norton

A year after losing his post as Collector, John Presbury Norton was appointed Justice of the Peace "within and for the County of Dukes County" for a term of seven years. As Judge Norton, he continued to live in his Edgartown
house on North Water Street. It is said that he kept up the “tone” of Edgartown by striding impressively up and down the waterfront streets in his fine clothes and high beaver hat.

Misfortune befell Judge Norton in his later years. His only son, Francis, was lost at sea in 1846, age 20 years. His second daughter, Eliza, wife of whaling captain Abraham Osborn, died in 1855, leaving a number of children. His own wife died two years later.

Another daughter, Hannah, who had married Capt. Edwin Coffin, was living next to him in an imposing house they had built in 1840. She and her husband also took over her father’s house at Lambert’s Cove and some of his other possessions, which subsequently led to a serious disagreement between the families of the two sisters. Judge Norton and his brothers, Eliakim and Horatio, owned a large tract of land on Noman’s Land that they had inherited from their father, Peter Norton. It was “almost one-third of eight-ninths” of the southeast part of the small island “suitable for yarding and washing sheep.” Part of it, near what was called Captain Mayhew’s Spring, could be fenced in for a watering place. The Judge was entitled to graze 32 sheep there and his share of the land, about 80 acres, was valued at $3300.

He made his will in 1863, leaving his North Water Street house to Hannah and dividing the remainder of his property, half to Hannah and half to the children of Eliza, his other daughter, now deceased.

Four years later, he was declared “incapable of taking care of himself” and “insane.” By order of the court, a guardian, Constant Norton, was appointed to take care of him, an action which his daughter, Hannah, hotly protested. When he died, July 22, 1869, aged 87, a court battle ensued and Hannah was accused of having “fraudulently received, concealed or conveyed away the money, goods, effects, and other personal estate of said John P. Norton.”

Subsequently Hannah’s son, Edwin, like his father a renowned sea captain, moved into the Judge’s house, next door to his parents. The two Captain Coffins, father and son, were noted for their prowess in Arctic waters, the father during Civil War years, and the son at the turn of the century.

Young Edwin first went to sea as a cabin boy on the whaler Champion, Capt. Thomas Worth of Edgartown. He made many Arctic whaling voyages before switching to the steamer Nome, which carried argonauts to Alaska during the gold rush of 1900.

In 1903, he was named master of the steamer America on the Fiala-Ziegler North Pole Expedition. The expedition came to a sad ending. Captain Coffin was able to get the expedition as far north as Rudolf Island, Franz Josef Land, breaking through the ice for many miles, but could steam no farther. Explorer Ziegler and his party set off across the ice to find the North Pole, but never made it. The steamer, waiting at Rudolf Island for their return, was crushed by the shifting ice and sank on November 22, 1903. All the men, save one, made it to shore on Teblitz Bay.

When Ziegler returned to learn that his ship had sunk, there was nothing the expedition could do but await a rescue party. There was, of course, no way to communicate with the outside world and it was not until the summer of 1905, after two long cold winters at Teblitz Bay, a thousand miles north of continental Russia, that a relief vessel located them and brought them back to the States.
Richard L. Pease Goes Job Hunting
After the Panic of 1837
by ARTHUR R. RAILTON

TIMES were tough in 1840 and the job of Collector of Customs for the District of Edgartown looked mighty good. The Island, like the nation, was in a severe depression following the Panic of 1837, a depression that lasted five years. There were few, if any, positions with the income and prestige of the Collector.

But the job didn’t have much security. It was a political appointment. With no Civil Service to protect office holders, keeping a government job, just like getting one, depended entirely upon political connections.

The hard times had turned the nation against the Democrats and President Martin Van Buren, a Democrat, was denied a second term. General William Henry Harrison, the Whig candidate, was elected on the slogan, “Log Cabin and Cider.” He was the first Whig President to be elected (there was only one other; both died in office). On Martha’s Vineyard, where the Whigs were the party of the proper folks, Harrison’s election was cheered.

A few months earlier, the most influential men in Edgartown had formed the Edgartown Whig Association. It met in the old Baptist Church, Tuesday evening, March 10, 1840. Temporary officers were chosen and they included some of the best-known names in the village: Capt. Timothy Daggett, President; Abraham Osborn and Dr. Daniel Fisher, Vice Presidents; Cornelius B. Marchant and Richard L.

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1 Does any reader know where the old Baptist Church was located?

ARTHUR R. RAILTON is editor of this Journal.
I took it. I have labored five years — the longest time it was ever taught by one teacher — or perhaps ever will be in a population so fickle as this.

He got a temporary teaching post for three months at the North Shore school near Lambert’s Cove. His wife and baby daughter moved into a rented room in Edgartown. It was a sad day, as he wrote in his journal:

Sept. 21, 1839. This day broke up housekeeping after having kept house since July 2, 1836. With many feelings of regret do I give up my “pleasant home,” perhaps not again to be similarly situated for many years!

On Sunday, September 22, he went to Lambert’s Cove where he “commenced boarding with Mrs. Polly Cottle.”

When the three months were over, he moved back to Edgartown and on December 25, 1839, he announced to Edgartown parents that he would open his own school in “the Hall recently occupied by Mr. David Davis.”

His new enterprise seems not to have been a financial success. A fragmentary note in one of his notebooks reads: “1841 April 9th. Closed my school.” Private schools had been run by Leavitt Thaxter, as well as by David Davis, prior to his. Neither had prospered.

Pease seems to have been the intellectual leader of the Edgartown Whig Association as well as its Recording Secretary. He was the member who wrote and proposed resolutions condemning Democratic politics; he was the one who truly believed the Whig philosophy. From his writing (admittedly self-serving) one senses that he had his head as well as his heart in the political struggle, whereas the others saw it more as a way to further their own interests, more financial than philosophical.

His school not doing well, in 1840 he thought he would run for State Representative, but the Edgartown Whigs had other plans. They nominated Capt. Abraham Osborn and

Richard Luce Pease, many years after his job hunt.

he was elected at the same time that General Harrison won the Presidency.

So Richard L. Pease was still in need of income and with Abraham Osborn (1798-1865) married Eliza Norton, daughter of Collector John Presbury Norton. After three whaling voyages as seaman and mate, he sailed as master on two more, from 1821 to 1826. In 1828, on his third voyage as master, he became ill soon after leaving and had to return. He made a brief “trial” voyage in 1831, but once again became ill. After that, he stayed ashore, going into business. He was a ship's agent, insurance underwriter's agent and owner of whaling ships. He served as Edgartown selectman in 1836 and two terms as state representative. At his death, he was one of Edgartown's wealthiest men.
a Whig in the White House, he saw his chance. The post of Collector would soon be vacant and the new President would name a Whig to fill it. Why not him, a loyal, dedicated Whig, in need of a position. But again the establishment had a list of its own and Pease was not on it.

Still determined to go after the job, he wrote a confidential letter on June 26, 1841, to some undisclosed person, perhaps Burnell (now U.S. Congressman Burnell, elected in the Whig victory), inquiring about his chances at the Collector's position:

The uncertainty which seems to hang over the appointment of Collector of the Port of Edgartown is my apology for addressing you at this time.

The applicants for the office, Messrs. [Abraham] Osborn and [Leavitt] Thaxter, come so well recommended to me it seems difficult to determine between their claims. In this case, perhaps an entirely new candidate, if unexceptionable in point of standing, integrity, etc., would best conduce to the harmony of the Whig Party and that of your friends — as has been the case in numerous instances in political life.

I am desirous of knowing if this would not be the case. Messrs. Osborn and Thaxter and Skiff are men in good circumstances, who need not the emoluments of the office; suppose that I should forward a petition for the station. What would be the prospect of success? If you would have the kindness to write me on the subject you would much oblige your ardent friend & humble servant.

P.S. This & yr. answer, which I await, sub rosa.

Pease, in the meantime, decided to run for the office of State Representative. It was to be on the ballot in November 1841. Abraham Osborn had been elected the year before, but was not going to run again, hoping, no doubt, to get the Collector's job. Once again, the establishment did not nominate Pease. As Richard tells the story, he had no chance, it had all been decided a year earlier:

... it was currently reported in 1840, when Capt. A.
Osborn was elected as representative to the Legislature, that

5 Skiff was not from Edgartown. He was probably Stephen Skiff from Chilmark, who had been state representative in 1836.

Dr. Daniel Fisher, a leading Whig, was somewhat sympathetic to Pease.

it was then mutually agreed and fixed upon that A. should go that year and Sam'l. the next. Circumstances confirm the report. For in 1841, strenuous efforts were made to secure the election of S. Osborn, but he was then defeated, and R.L. Pease chosen.

Such heresy as Richard was showing was hardly the way to become accepted by the "clique" that he so often reviled. After winning the Representative's post, he continued to seek his real goal, the Collector of Customs.

The commission of the present Collector, John Presbury Norton, was due to expire on February 19, 1842, and late in 1841 no Whig appointment had come from Washington. Pease wrote in December 1841 to Winslow Lewis of Boston, member of the State Senate and the leading supplier of

6 Richard L. Pease's obituary in the Gazette states that "in 1842 Mr. Pease was chosen, without seeking it, to represent the town in the Massachusetts House of Representatives." Perhaps, but his notebook jottings certainly make it seem that he did try for it.
lighthouses in the nation, an advisor to Stephen Pleasonton, head of the Lighthouse Service:

The long connection subsisting between the Government of the United States and yourself has given you an influence with the Treasury Department which is possessed by few, the aid of which I most respectfully ask in obtaining the appointment of Collector of the Customs for this Port.7

... As I shall spend the winter in Boston, being elected to represent my native town in the Legislature, I hope to have the pleasure of seeing you in a few weeks and paying my personal respects.

"Confidential."

February 19th came and still no new Collector had been named. Pease continued his letter campaign, writing this time to Samuel C. Carter of Amherst, on March 15, 1842. Carter was a member of the State Whig Committee and had become a friend of Pease's while he was at the State House. At the end of the letter he gets to his real point:

And now for a word of business, confidentially... the Collectorship of the Customs in this town is now vacant. The term of John P. Norton, Esq., who has held the commission for the last twelve years, expired on the 19th ult. He is an applicant for reappointment although he has been an active and zealous partisan of the last administration. There are other applicants also. Esquire Norton would prefer my success to that of others.8 A petition in my favor is before the [Treasury] Department. The representative in Congress from this District, Mr. Barker Burnell [of Nantucket] is a friend of mine, and would undoubtedly use his influence in my behalf, but there are other friends who are applicants and he has marked out to himself a strict impartiality, giving no expression of his opinions...

You informed me that you were well acquainted with your Representative in Congress. By your aid, then, I may hope to obtain his influence. Will you have the kindness to write him to the above effect, as soon as possible ... I should wish as much secrecy as consistent — particularly if I am unsuccessful.

7 The Secretary of Treasury was the person who would appoint the new Collector.
8 This seems unusual. Esquire Norton, the present Collector, was Abraham Osborn's father-in-law and, one would think, would be supporting his son-in-law for the position.

On the same day, Pease wrote once again to Winslow Lewis, explaining that he had not called on him, as promised, while he was in Boston because he had learned of a "severe domestic affliction in your family and of your ill health." But now, he continued, the matter of the Collector's appointment was critical:

Since my return home I learn that no appointment has yet been made... There is much uncertainty attending an appointment. From the representations of Esquire [Leavitt] Thaxter, who is an applicant for the office, I was induced to believe that he had been appointed; but more recent advices from Washington prove his representations incorrect.

The whole matter is open and with the aid of one so long and well known as yourself, it is quite probable that I might obtain the appointment... I would most respectfully ask the assistance which may be in your power to afford me in this application.

Two weeks later, April 2, 1842, the news finally arrived. Leavitt Thaxter, son of Rev. Joseph Thaxter and a loyal Whig, had been named Collector of Customs. No doubt, Richard Luce Pease was disappointed, but he had not gone down without a fight.

We don't know whether or not the other candidates knew of Pease's "secret" job hunt. In any case, the Edgartown Whig Association did not seem eager to support him for any position except Recording Secretary. It isn't surprising then that we find among his notebook jottings the following description of the Whig establishment, of which he was a member but not part:

The campaign in this year [1842] has been marked by the greatest venality, corruption, and intrigue ever known in this town. Early in the season every effort that could be made was made, every influence that could be used was used, to secure the election of Samuel Osborn [over himself, the incumbent: Ed.]...

He [Samuel Osborn] was again in the field — a selfmade candidate — supported by the "counting house" influence of his son-in-law, Henry A. Coffin, and that proves too much for the integrity and independence of many. Threats
were made where milder measures could not succeed and resort was had to influence of every kind to obtain support at the polls.

With both Pease and Osborn seeking the Representative's nomination, no decision was forthcoming. Pease, chairman of the Whig county committee, called for the Edgartown Whigs to elect a town committee and to name a candidate. A "secret" meeting of what Pease called "the clique" was held, with only seven members present. Pease knew he had been cut out of the action. Here's what he wrote:

No full meeting of the Committee, it is believed, was ever held. On the 11th of November [some of the committee met... in the "Counting Room" of A.&H.A.C. [Abraham Osborn and Henry A. Coffin], where it was determined to call a Caucus on the next evening to nominate a candidate for Representative! (Rather, to add the sanction of a caucus — and one thus called — a packed one — to what had been determined long before.)

They [the caucus] met. A. Osborn, Chairman, H. A. Coffin, Secretary. Out of 37 votes, S. Osborn had 32, and was thereupon declared elected.

Richard L. Pease, no doubt, was one of the five who did not vote for Samuel Osborn. He wanted the nomination himself.

Defeated on that, Pease offered some resolutions, seconded by Dr. Daniel Fisher, and, he wrote later, "they were adopted, though much against the wishes of the clique, who said it was not a suitable time, etc." The two resolutions called for public meetings of the Whig party, with due notice given to all and strongly disapproved "all attempts to influence public opinion by secret, covert movements in favor of any man..."

Pease may have lost the nomination, but he wasn't about to give up the battle against the clique. Two weeks later, at a lecture meeting featuring a New Bedford Whig, Pease demanded the floor (but let him describe what happened):

I took an opportunity, as soon as [the speaker] had closed to offer the following resolutions, accompanied with some few remarks. But such a reception as they met with — poor stillborn bantlings — such another squirming of the clique I never yet saw; I was not treated even with common politeness — and the chairman, Esq. Cooke, decided that he could not, as chairman of a meeting called for such a purpose [a lecture], entertain them. They were returned to me.

The resolutions, which were not acted upon, called for, among other reforms, the naming of a Town Committee of fifteen, "who shall pick a chairman by secret ballot."

Pease had lost the battle. The clique continued to rule. But he won the war. He served as County Chairman of the Whigs, Secretary of the Whig State Central Committee, later as Registrar of Probate Court, Clerk of Courts of the County, Postmaster of Edgartown, County Commissioner,
holding, it would seem, just about every political position the Island had to offer.

But he won in another way, one much more important than his job hunting. By his dedication to history, by his voluminous notes of old town records, by his genealogical research, he influenced what we know about our past. All historians from Charles E. Banks on, leaned heavily on his research. Thus, though he may have lost the battle of the day, he won the war. It's his account of history that has become ours, to a large degree.

When he died on September 16, 1888, he was 74 years old. His obituary states that he "strongly adhered to the old Whig Party, although in doing so he had to dissent from all his near relatives."

And, it must be said, from many of his peers.

Richard L. Pease lived here at Main St. and Pease's Point Way, Edgartown, in the latter years of his life.

Documents

Jeremiah Pease Diary

For those members who had followed our earlier serialization of Jeremiah Pease's diary, there may be some difficulty in adjusting to this new series, which covers the years 1823 to 1829. When we ended our previous series, it was 1857 and he was an old man. Now, in this new series, he is much younger, not yet the pillar of the community that he was when we left him in 1857.

In this new volume of his diary, which was lost for many years and now is safely in our Archives, he is only 31 years old. His occupation is Deputy Collector of Customs, a job he has had since 1817. He also works as a cordwainer, a trade he learned as a youth. Another of his skills is bone setting, taught him by the Rev. Joseph Thaxter, parson of the Congregational Church, where he was a member until 1822.

He is living at this time, we believe, in the small house on South Water Street next to today's Victorian Inn.

Jeremiah's parents were Noah and Hannah Dunham Pease. He had married Elizabeth Worth in 1813. Her father, Jonathan Worth, a highly respected deacon of the Congregational Church, had died in 1817.

Jeremiah and Eliza, as she was called, have six children at the time of this diary, 1823. They are: nine-year-old Joseph Thaxter Pease, named for Reverend Thaxter; seven-year-old Isabel; and three-year-old twins, Cyrus and William Cooke Pease. Eventually, the couple will have ten children.

The year before this volume of his diary begins, Jeremiah's life had undergone a traumatic change. He was "born again" during an intense revival that Rev. John Adams, a Methodist preacher, brought to the Island. Jeremiah, who until then had been an orthodox Congregationalist and a close friend of old Parson Thaxter, became a man totally involved in his religion. Strangely, he did not regularly attend the Edgartown Methodist Church. Instead, he went to meetings at Eastville or, as he calls it, the East Side of Holmes Hole, a long carriage ride from home. He soon became a lay preacher at that church and, in 1835, on a nearby farm, he selected the site of what is now the Martha's Vineyard Campground, the beginning of Oak Bluffs.

July 1823

1st. SW, pleasant, high wind. Finish harrowing corn.
2nd. Do., foggy, heavy thunder, sharp lightning and much rain at night.
3rd. N, cool. Ship Prince George, G.W. Luce master, arrives from Nantucket, bound to Richmond.
4th. SSW, fresh breeze. Nothing remarkable except the firing of Cannon.¹
7th. SW, pleasant. Engaged in digging Scellar.
9th. Do. Do., very warm. Brig Union arrives from Cutthagunk having ben castaway.
12th. Do., Do. Brig Union commences taking in her cargo. Engaged in

¹ This is the Fourth of July.
assisting repair T.C. Esq.'s SWKs mill and delivering the Cargo above mentioned. This day I settled with the owner of the Brig Union all my bills for cooperating the Cargo and storing the same which amount was $32.30, I paid him one Dollar which for Capt. S.S. Saunders, which he promised to pay him.  

13th. SW. Went to Holmeshole to the Methodist Quarterly Meeting with a number of our Brethren and Sisters. May this Day be ever remembered by me.  

16th. SSW. Went this evening to H. Hole, stay all night.  

17th. SW. Surveyed land for Abr. Smith.  

24th. SW. Watched with Mr. Thomas Steward who died about 1 o'clock m.m., aged 79 years, 9 months. Commenced going to a writing school.  

25th. SE, rainstorm. Mr. Stewart buried.  

26th. NE to E, foggy. This Day a Meeting was held at the Congregational Meeting house for the purpose of employing a Colleague with the Revd. Mr. Thaxter. They could not agree and the meeting was adjourned.  

SWK is saltworks. Jeremiah maintained it for Thomas Cooke (T.C. Esq.). The cargo, you will recall from our previous issue, was barrells of rum from which Jeremiah had brought over from the distressed vessel and stored in Edgartown.  

Again Jeremiah concludes the entry with an asterisk identifying something very personal. Events related to his conversion to Methodism are usually so marked. Perhaps he had been chosen as a lay exhorter by the Eastville Society. It is too bad that he is so reluctant to bare his soul to his journal.  

Parson Thaxter, a Harvard-trained Congregationalist in the Unitarian tradition, was losing his flock to the Methodists. Some of the remaining Congregationalists wanted a more vigorous preacher to assist the aging, and failing, Thaxter.  

The "porch" is the kitchen ell which Jeremiah must be adding to the rear of his house. Also called a "summer kitchen," the porch came into favor at about this time.  

Jeremiah often leaves blanks which he intends to fill in later, but usually forgets to. His penmanship has improved noticeably.  

up to the pier and unbends her sails.  

10th. SSW. Sunday. The Funeral of Miss Coffin was attended at her Father's House, the congregation was very large, funeral service by the Revd. William Hubbert.  

11th. S to SW, rainy. Attended arbitration concerning Brig Union. This day I was trusted as one of the owners of Ship Loan, suit by David Look vs. Wm. Stewart. First.  


18th. NE to SW. Ship Loan haws to the Wharf to discharge.  

19th. SW. Attended the wedding of Holmes W. Smith, who was married to Miss Sophia Coffin by Revd. J. Thaxter.  

20th. SW. Attended 2nd part of the wedding.  

21st. SW. Ships Pacific & John Adams, having lost 2 Capt's and 5 men, arrive from Pacific Ocean. Attended as Inspector on board Ship Pacific on account of Passengers Baggage, etc.  

22nd. 24 NE, fresh breeze, cool weather for the season.  

24th. SW. Brother Whittlesley Preaches this day.  

26th. SW. Surveyed a piece of land for Zadock Norton.  

28th. SW. Assisted Thos. Cooke Esq. in taking out Salt.  

29th. NE, light. Attended Meeting concerning Ship Loan.  

This is a strange note. The word "first" stands all alone and is circled.  

Weddings had two parts: 1. the church ceremony; 2. the civil ceremony.  

September 1823  

1st. Wind SSE. Commenced hoeing in rye at Chapaquiddick.  

2nd. Wind Ditto. Dig potatoes, Ditto.  


5th. N to S. Light and calm. Set Shool for Mr. M. Arey's Daut.  

6th. SW. Measured 300 bushels salt for T. Cooke, Esq.  

8th. NE. Attended as one of the committee in choosing an Agent and setting about business for Ship Loan.  

10th. NE to ENE, fresh breeze. Callers commences upon the Loan. This evening I set a man's sholder which was quite badly out. (Stranger) Engaged with Salt works.  

16th. ENE, am, pm SW. Watched with Capt. James Banning, being sick. Elijah Daggett dies of a consumption very suddenly aged.  


21st. Wind NNW, squally. Mr. Peleg Norton & Mr. Harrison Smith's wife dies while I was at Nantucket.  

23rd. NE. Took out 41 bushels salt for T. Cooke, Esq., from saltworks and shut them up. Storm at night with rain.  

24th. NE, storm. Set a small bone in the foot of Henry Merchant's son.  

Jeremiah set bones without charge. This stranger must have been astonished at his generosity.  

Saltworks may had covers, which had to be closed in a rain.
27th. NE. fresh. Set a small bone in the foot of Edward Smith, B. Smith's son. 29th. SW to NW, squalls at night with rain. This evening at about 7 o'clock the Sloop Iris of Nantucket, G. Luce master, bound to E. Hadam was upset in a squall about NNW from Cape Page 7 miles distance with 6 passengers & 3 men, making 9 in all, 2 men and 3 women were in the cabin one of which was Revd. Phineas Crandal, a Methodist Minister, which had been stationed at Nantucket this year, who while his head was so far above water as to admit, continued to exhort those that were living to look to the Lord for divine assistance at the same time rendering all the advice and assistance in his power, & no doubt was instrumental in preserving the Lives of those around him. One of which Miss Eliza Cone [?1] of E. Hadam in a few minutes after the vessel upset was drawn. Capt. Luce's Wife and Miss Susan Cone, sister to the above Elisa, & Mr. Crandal and another man were taken out the next morning by boat and men which went to their assistance, they cut a whole in the stern and took them out. Their situation can better be imagined than described. There were 4 in the cabin confined with but little more than their heads out of water for 12 hours & 4 more were taken from the wreck during the night by Capt. Cary of the Sloop Comet, who heard their dismal cries for assistance for several hours before he could get to them owing to the rough sea, rain & darkness of the night. I went down with a number of others to endeavour to get the body of the unfortunate young woman and after much exertion we succeeded and brought it up to town and had it decently laid out, a coffin made tight, the corps put in with a quantity of salt and sent to her parents by Capt. Cary above mentioned who assisted in taking the body out of the vessel.

October 1823

1st. Wind SW. Sloop Comet sails for E. Hadam with the corps before mentioned and her Sister with a nurse to take care of her, she being much out of health. The sloop Iris is got up and brought up to town from the Sturgeon flat where she drifted after she upset.

This is the day in which, one year ago I date my spiritual birth. Oh, will Almighty God confirm my hope, increase my Faith, and grant that I may live the life of the righteous.


10th. NNW to W. Engaged in gittin corn from Chapadidick.

12th. SW. Capt. Malatiah Pease dies in the 90th year of his life.

13th. SW. Engaged in husking corn. Ship John arrives in Holmshole, next day come to Edgartown, with a full Cargo of Oil from Pacific Ocean.

15th. SW. Ship John haws to the Pier.

16th. NNE, rainy. Set a great toe for Mr. Dexter.

24th SW. This day at 10 minutes past 12 o'clock I was requested by Mr. Wm. Coffin & Capt. Clement Norton to take notice that they had settled all their difficulties, disputes and demands against each other during the late voyage of Ship John, etc., of every name & nature and that they declared themselves to be friends to each other. At half past 3 o'clock Wm. Coffin requested me to write a receipt for him which he was going to give Capt. Norton, which I wrote in the following manner: Received of Capt. Clement Norton the sum of _______ Dollars in full of all demands of every name and nature as witness my hand. Edgartown Oct. 24, 1823, (signed) William Coffin, Witness Jeremiah Pease.

27th. NNW. Ship John commences discharging her Cargo.


November 1823

1st. Wind NE to ENE, wet weather. 7th. NE, stormy. The owner of the Schr. Mercury comes.

8th. NE, clear. Survey upon Schr. Mercury.

9th. SW. Went to British Schr. Bell, of and from St. Johns, Newbrunswick with a Cargo of Plaster and 50 Irish passengers.12 Fancis Marvin, master. had gone on shore near Muskeket, got off by throwing her cargo overboard and came into the Harbour.

10th. SW, pleasant. Court sets.


16th. NNE. Mrs. Love Smith dies, aged 81.


20th. SW, pleasant. Christmas day.

24th. NW. Engaged in weighing and marking cargo of Schooner Mercury of Newburyport, Ephm. Merchant, master.

25th. E. Engaged as above. Storm at night. Gail.

26th. SW to N to SSE, light and foggy. Engaged as above.


28th. NW. Engaged on board Schr. M. nothing discharged. 1 Ship, 3 Brigs and 1 schr. arrives from different ports. 1 Brig on shore on the flats, from Havannah.

29th. NW to SSE, light. Brig gits off the flats, none of the cargo of Schr. M. discharged.

30th. SE, stormy.

(To be continued)

[Jeremiah Pease, sgr.]

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11. For details of Jeremiah's rebirth, see Intelligencer, November 1980.
12. This was very early in the Irish immigration wave, which peaked about 30 years later.
How do you like your history?
Do you take it straight? Or with a bit of sugar? That's a recurring question for a local historian.

Does it make that much difference? Cracker-barrel history survives because it's often more interesting than the truth. It may even make the historical point more effectively. So what's the harm?

Henry Ford, you remember, was blunt on the subject: "History is more or less bunk."

If it is, how did it get that way?

We stumbled on an innocent example of how it may happen while preparing the Cape Poge article for this issue.

Jack Howland, the author, talked to the Dolby family, read the old letters, looked over the documents. The family legend of the death of little Arthur Dolby was dramatic. The day he died was storm-tossed. On the tip of Cape Poge, a gale-force wind rattled the keeper's dwelling. Keeper Dolby couldn't get out the door, the wind was so strong. It was impossible to sail to Edgartown for a doctor. To walk the beach, the only other way to get help, would be suicide. He couldn't even get to the flagpole to hoist the ensign upside-down, the distress signal.

Helpless, the Dolbys watched their baby die. It was a dramatic tale, told and retold throughout her life by baby Arthur's mother, Mabel Jane. Her grandson, George Dolby, and his wife, now living in Vineyard Haven, remember it well.

The tragedy occurred 90 years ago, in July 1899. Not very far back, as history counts time. In our archives is Keeper Dolby's journal. We got it out, hoping to learn more.

What did we find? We found there was no gale that day, or even that month. During the week Arthur died, Keeper Dolby made three trips to Edgartown trying to get help. But no help came. With all due respect for the memory of Mabel Jane Dolby, we changed the story to match the facts.

How did that family legend develop? Who can say? Certainly, the death of Arthur on that isolated point, without medical attention, was tragic enough: a baby dying within sight of Edgartown on a clear July night, as helpless as though he had been miles at sea.

Why Mabel Jane told the story her way we'll never know. Perhaps she felt a sense of guilt, that she had not done all she should have to save her boy. Perhaps. Whatever her reason, she has given us a lesson in historical research.

Sometimes, we can see how history is changed. The death of Richard L. Pease, whose obituary is described in this issue, is an example.

The Gazette announcement of his death in 1888 said he died of cancer. A week later, the Gazette printed a well-deserved eulogy to Mr. Pease, ending with this:

"The family request to have it said: 'The cause of death was overwork, a long and severe mental strain and complete physical exhaustion.'"


A.R.R.
Edgartown a few years after John Presbury Norton was Collector.
Dotted line is today's Pease's Point Way.