

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



THE DUKES COUNTY INTELLIGENCER

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Growing Up in Edgartown In the 1870s

by PRESCOTT F. JERNEGAN

History in a Country Graveyard

by JOHN A. HOWLAND

The Singing Cop Found His Home Here



The Vineyard's Opening Shot In the American Revolution

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Documents: Jeremiah Pease Diary

Bits & Pieces

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you please remember to include
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Society among your bequests.

THE DUKES COUNTY INTELLIGENCER

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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.

Growing up in Edgartown In the 1870s

by PRESCOTT F. JERNEGAN
(1866-1942)

There can be no doubt but that Prescott Ford Jernegan was one of the most interesting men the Island can claim. He went whaling at the age of two. Crossed the continent by train at four. He was a graduate of Phillips Andover, Brown University, Newton Theological Institute, earning much of the costs himself. His life was filled with hard work, adventure, public service plus a dollop of fakery. He authored several books, including a history of the Philippine Islands. He even wrote the words to an unofficial Philippine national anthem.

Yet his talents have been virtually ignored by his home town, written off by family and friends. That dollop of fakery destroyed him. He became notorious, infamous rather than famous. Headline writers called him "The Sea Gold King," a swindler extraordinary. And with reason. Throughout life, that dollop of fakery haunted him no matter how he tried to atone for it by good works. Most of his life was devoted to education, in distant places: the Philippines and Hawaii. Even there, he couldn't escape his past, twice being forced to change positions when recognized as the sea-gold faker.

Even his family shunned him. "I have seen everyone, except my Grandmother, condemn me. . .," he wrote. One of the men he deceived compared him to the devil. Prescott denied that, stating "I was merely a devilish good actor on the stage of real life, deceiving myself at times almost as much as my hearers."

He married three times, the first time to a childhood sweetheart from Edgartown. He had two sons, Lelan Phinney Jernegan, by his first marriage, the other, Prescott Edward Jernegan, by his second. Of the latter he wrote: ". . . a son whose affection has never failed me and whose actions have never shamed me." It was a love he desperately needed.

He retired from teaching in 1924, living in California until he died in 1942.

In retirement, he wrote an autobiography, principally to explain the Sea Water Gold swindle. He tried to find a publisher, but

none was interested. The manuscript, written in the 1920s, survived and thanks to the kindness of Janet M. Phillips and Joanne Jernegan, his great-grand nieces, it is now in the Society archives.

His description of growing up in Edgartown, printed here, occupies only a small portion of the autobiography. For additional details of his family, his life and that dollop of fakery, see *Intelligencer*, November 1986.

EVERY man is, as the French say, three men: the man people think he is; the man he thinks he is; and the man he really is. There is a fourth man who always appears in an autobiography: the man the author wants the public to think he was. No doubt, all four of these men have their say in this book.

I have been known for nearly forty years to millions as "The Sea Gold King," not to mention similar derogatory titles. Most people recall me as merely a get-rich-quick promoter, notorious for the originality, boldness and picturesqueness of his swindle. . . .

I am of the seventh generation of Jernegans born at Edgartown on the Island of Martha's Vineyard, off the Massachusetts coast. My father was a whaling captain who sailed the seven seas for nearly fifty years with success. He was an upstanding, fearless man, scornful of conventions, but a strict Puritan in religion and morals. He boasted of carrying four quarts of whisky with him on a three-year voyage and bringing back the bottles unopened. Four times he was shipwrecked, twenty-two summers he spent in the Arctic Ocean and through storm and wreck he was a man among men.¹

My grandfather Jernegan, a farmer, at sixty, threw down his hoe and said: "I will never do another day's work." Nor did he, proving a successful rebel against the sacred New England doctrine of the virtue of working oneself to death. This lone reminiscence contributed to my own decision to retire at sixty.

My great-great grandfather Jernegan was a "character."

¹ Capt. Jared Jernegan was his father.

Carpenter, farmer, trader, sailor, by turns, he was for many years a member of the Massachusetts General Court and Edgartown's leading citizen. He had little schooling and wrote his unpublished autobiography without painful regard for the rules of grammar or spelling . . .²

There is not a trait or principle of the old man's character and practice that was not handed down to me by blood or tradition, but time and circumstance made me as different from him as though a thousand years had separated us.

My earliest memory is the sight of Cape Horn from the deck of the whaling ship *Roman*, of which my father was captain and part owner. I recall standing on the back of a calf whale which had been hoisted on deck. I saw a big bull sperm whale spouting blood and water as he towed a boat across the bow of the ship while a sailor plunged a lance into him. Spent flying fish dropping from bellying sails, porpoises leaping around the cutwater and always the tossing white winged bark, all linger in my memory. The sea was my first home; in the long voyage from New Bedford to Honolulu I had forgotten the land.

One morning I saw blood stains on the deck. The night before, the foremast hands, more than a score, had mutinied. The *Roman* was anchored near the island of Aitutaki in the far South Pacific. The ship had been watered and provisioned; the sailors had asked and had been refused shore liberty. "Liberty" meant days and nights of drinking and carousing with the natives, followed by delayed sailing and desertions by the sailors. The men straggled back to the forecastle mumbling oaths and threats. In those days the common sailors were a rough gang, while the officers usually came from pioneer New England families. They ruled by force of character and strength of arm, principally the latter. Now they were badly outnumbered.

Near midnight the forward gang rushed aft in a body armed with belaying pins and cutting spades. They mauled

² Much of William Jernegan's (1728-1816) autobiography was published in the *Intelligencer*, November 1981.

the officers badly, tying the second mate to the cabin companionway door so the captain could not shoot them through it. The first mate was found hanging senseless over the mizzen crosstrees where he had crawled and fainted from loss of blood. The mutineers lowered all the boats and pulled ashore threatening to return and burn the ship if the captain tried to sail away. Father did not dare to raise the anchor with the windlass as the noise would have brought the mutineers back, so he slipped his cable and sailed to Honolulu with the officers and boatsteerers who remained loyal, leaving his anchor in the mud and the sailors marooned in the arms of dusky belles.

Honolulu was then the home of three times the number of Hawaiians now living. Drink, white men's diseases and economic competition have fast reduced the race; in time, they will become completely "civilized." Fifty years later, I was to run a big high school in Honolulu, but childhood was spared foresight of that tough job. Looking back on that idyllic childhood in the "paradise of the Pacific" I can guess how the myth of the Garden of Eden originated, but Hawaii is no longer Eden, except in the travel folders. . .

The *Roman* was wrecked in the pack ice north of Point Barrow in the Arctic in the summer of 1871. We made the trip east from San Francisco in the second year of the transcontinental railroad. At Salt Lake City one of our party asked Brigham Young how many wives he had. "At present, sixteen," he replied with gravity and pride.

I used to think those early days on the *Roman* were mere childish memories, of no great significance for my character. I was wrong. Ninety percent of what I was to become and do was settled there. My father was an aristocrat of the sea. From him I learned, wisely or not, to regard myself as the equal in personal worth of any man. Roving too was bred into me; no place has ever seemed thoroughly home to me. The Planet itself merely a port of call. Life has been harder on account of this twist of character, but much more exciting.



Capt. Jared Jernegan, five years before son Prescott was born.

After this glorious entrance into youth from the crests of the Pacific, I was domiciled till sixteen on the Island of Martha's Vineyard, at Edgartown, my birthplace. The old town, founded in 1642, fairly smelled of whale oil, clams and smoked herring; spiritually, of ten generations of dour Puritans. There was a decaying factory where candles were once made from whale oil, five old wharves from which a few whaling ships still sailed and a retired whaling captain in every block of the village of a thousand people.

We boys swam in the harbor naked as we were born,

fished, shot ducks, and listened open-mouthed to the graphic tales of whaling voyages. Once a year there was the County Fair and once a year the circus at New Bedford. In dull moments one listened to the fiery exhortations in the prayer meetings.

The Great Plain, said to be the largest area of perfectly flat land in New England, swept southward to the Atlantic and westward to Great Pond, where while skating I broke through the ice and nearly drowned. Had I known what troubles life had in store for me I would not have bothered to crawl out on the ice, but my best friend, who in later life tried to seduce my wife, pulled me to safety at the risk of his own life.

Another time, again courting death, I hauled out from a wagon a double-barrelled shotgun. The hammers caught and both barrels were discharged between my arm and body. I was silent while my companions ran up in alarm. I was analyzing how it happened; the reflective strain in my nature was already in the ascendant.

For a super sensation I cracked with a hammer the gravestone of the first white settler to die on the Island. The caretaker of the ancient cemetery threatened me with jail and I went home and asked God to spare me that humiliation, which He did, a forerunner of several narrow escapes from that fate later in life.³

It was the day of Bealle's Dime Novels, then excoriated by the godly, now considered relatively moral. One grocery store kept a stock of these delectable yellow and red-covered booklets in a glass case. My appetite for them grew faster than my dimes, so I stole several while the grocer's back was turned. These, with my companions in sin, I read in the security of a cave made in a large heap of old lumber

³ One narrow escape from jail came as he sailed out of New York for Europe only a few steps ahead of the police; another was in France where he switched trains to avoid arrest. Both escapades were related to the gold swindle.

Prescott's memory is inexact. The stone is not for the first white settler, but rather it is a stone "in place of the oldest grave stone on Martha's Vineyard," and it is still there, still cracked.



Stone in Tower Hill Cemetery, Edgartown, thought to be the one Prescott cracked with the sledge hammer.

behind the barn. Later, when I "got religion," I scraped together a dollar and handed it to the storekeeper in restitution. He looked dumbly at me and slowly pocketed the dollar, with an emotion beyond words.

My chum and I voted unanimously that a pirate's life was the ideal calling. However, we always prefaced our imaginary piratical raids with the proviso: "Now if it were not wrong to kill, steal and burn, what fun it would be to steal a ship and go pirating in the West Indies." One day an older youth persuaded me to help him steal a twenty-foot boat to play the pirate. I was about nine, but it was my literal intention to leave home for good, though it was a happy home.

The wharf was deserted at noon, so we made sail and started down the harbor for the broad Atlantic. The sail gybed, the boom caught me under the chin and nearly robbed the world of this narrative. We soon ran aground on Chappaquiddick Island opposite Edgartown. Our sole equipment for this adventure was a handbag, a conductor's ticket punch and twenty-five cents. A searching party soon found us and brought us with our mothers before the grave old justice of the peace. He directed our mothers to pay five

dollars each to the owner of the boat and released us with a warning.

In retribution, and with a false method of reformation, my mother made me stay in the yard for six months, except for necessary visits to store and school. I had to pull up five hundred weeds, one for each cent of the five dollars. This discipline, according to the Puritan code, should have made me repentant, cautious and obedient. It did nothing of the sort. When I was released from bondage, it was mid-winter. I ran out of the yard into the fields, dashing through snow drifts, shouting for joy.⁴ Nothing ever made me hate restraint and punishment more; all I regretted was getting caught. It might have been good medicine for some boys, but not for one who had sailed around Cape Horn and been through a mutiny.

At twelve, I was a tall, active, overgrown lad. I had read about two hundred books of travel and adventure. Instinctively, I kept much to myself, learning early that older folks had little understanding of children. Mother used to make me call on two great aunts, venerable and estimable ladies. They tried to amuse me, but in a dull way, and these compulsory social calls prejudiced me for life against social gatherings.⁵

My earliest "scheme," doubtless invented by many before me, was this: I put several marbles in my pocket and charged the boys a marble each to guess the exact number, winner take all. It was the first step along the road of something for nothing.

I acquired my first honest-to-goodness sweetheart at fourteen. She was my age, a brunette, plump, pretty and passionate — at least in my uncritical eyes. Her parents had sent her from Indiana to Edgartown to kill her infatuation

⁴ To run into the fields in those days didn't take long. About two blocks away from his house on the corner of Davis Lane and South Summer Street, Edgartown, were open fields.

⁵ The two great aunts were Mrs. Chloe Pierce and Mrs. Charlotte Coffin, both from Maine, coming to Edgartown after marrying Vineyard men.



Prescott, the young minister, at about the time of his marriage.

over a fellow student. I was sexton of the Baptist church and we used to spoon in the underground vestry. We would sit in the dark saying little, and doing nothing "immoral." It was enough to float on that silvery sea of calf love, after all the keenest and sweetest of love's memories. An aunt used to let us court in her upstairs bedroom. I have often wondered at the implicit confidence of our elders in our sense of propriety. We did not slip; the Puritan brakes were working overtime. Religion, timidity and honor saved us and my Ideal forgot her former lover and returned unsullied to Indiana.

At fourteen I grew concerned about my "Adamic total depravity," plus the large stock of individual depravity I had added to my "original sin." In a conscience-stricken moment in the old barn I said to myself: "You lie, steal, swear and are ready to commit any sin except murder."

The only way out I knew was "conversion." This was a complicated process. It must be preceded by remorse, repentance, prayer, confession and public profession of faith. Then, if by the mercy of God you belonged to the "elect," an instantaneous change would take place in your soul as

The Vineyard Young Prescott Knew



It was July Fourth and townsfolk lined Main Street Edgartown to watch young men in vests and Sunday best race down to Water Street.



At Vineyard Haven, old whalemens spun yarns about the good old days.



Jailer lived next to the Court House, jail was in back.

The Edgartown that Prescott Jernegan knew was a quiet village with few opportunities for such an imaginative, ambitious youngster. His mother sent him away to school at age 16 and he came back years later as a Baptist minister to marry his childhood

sweetheart. His visits were rare. During one of them, while recuperating from a serious illness in his parents' home on Summer Street, he came up with his gold-from-sea-water scheme that led to his disgrace and semi-banishment.



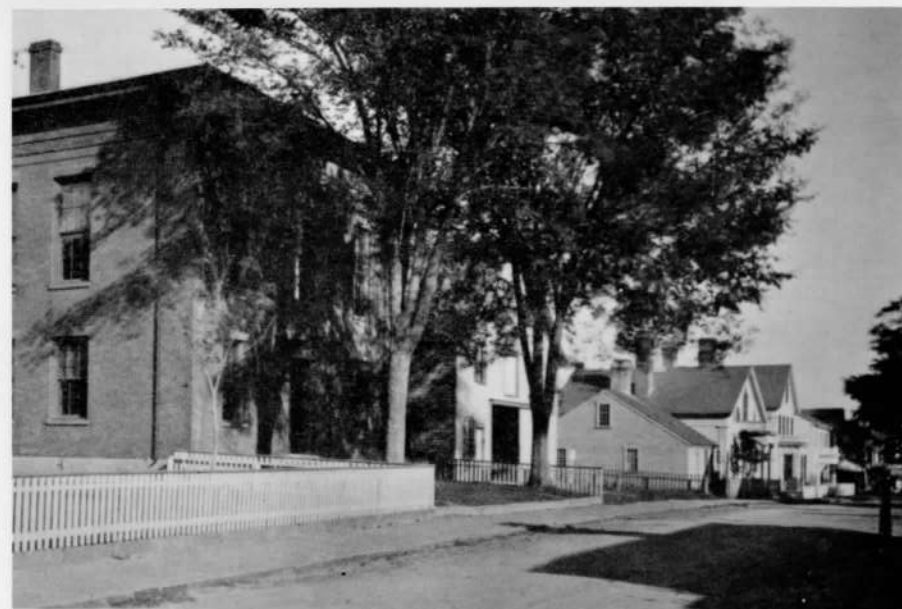
Whaling in decline, coasters jammed Osborn's wharf.



It was duck season and hunters gathered at Willie Mayhew's shop.



In Prescott's day, parking wasn't a problem on South Water St.



Above, by the time Prescott left town, the jail had been moved, the trees were tall in front of the Court House, but the rest of Main Street was unchanged.

The Vineyard Young Prescott Knew

Right, the Baptist Church where Prescott "spooned" in the basement vestry, while serving as the sexton. Later, he became a deacon, the youngest Baptist deacon in the state.



you were "born again." There was some question as to whether you got a brand-new soul or merely a renovated one. All this traditional muddle of theology and psychology I took seriously with tears as infallible truth.

There was a town atheist so abandoned that he would argue in a corner grocery store that there was no God. One of my unregenerate companions adopted this view and swept the air in circles with his open jackknife, calling out for God, if He existed, to strike him dead. Sinclair Lewis gave God ten minutes to strike him dead for denying His existence; Bernard Shaw, a busy man, only one minute; but my young atheist dared instant vengeance. He still lives.

In spite of the fact that no bolt struck him down, I voted with the conservative majority, stood up in the prayer meeting and said: "I want to be a Christian." When an old maid cousin congratulated me I wept and gave her a "holy kiss." Strong men and old were not ashamed in those days to weep over religion. Within three months I was leading prayer meetings and telling my elders how to live.⁶ The thrills of sinning were gone, but religious enthusiasm filled the gap and served me well for fifteen years. Then it failed me and I had to sink or swim alone. I am still afloat and unafraid.

My boyhood God lasted till my junior year in college. He was a mixture of King, Judge and Father, principally Judge. He never smiled. I thought I loved this monstrous figure of my imagination, a bearded monarch on a golden throne, but it now seems to me I loved an ideal of purity, justice and love. The ideal remains, but the Being has vanished.

I was soon appointed sexton, then Sunday School secretary and at sixteen was elected a deacon, said to be the youngest in New England.⁷ Rather against my will, my

⁶ Prescott was baptized, along with two other boys, April 28, 1881, by Rev. W. H. Walker.

⁷ It is true he was elected deacon March 8, 1883, but it wasn't as simple as he makes it sound. Four men were proposed by the committee, two withdrew before the voting. Three deacons were to be chosen, so another name was added, but he, too, asked to be excused. Then, Prescott was proposed and elected.

[illegible]

Old record of owners of pews in Edgartown Baptist Church at about the time that Prescott was baptized. His mother, Helen, shared a pew with Nathaniel Jernegan and Chloe Coffin.

conscience forced me to choose the ministry for a calling, perhaps because the only competing vocations I had considered were piracy and printing. Piracy was now out of the question and flat feet ruled out printing.⁸ My father objected; local preachers were paid seven hundred dollars a year, while he made several thousand a year. But I despised business; besides, Mother assured me that I would have a much greater salary than seven hundred. A thousand a year was my idea of a high salary. From that time till I was immersed in the myriad demands of married life, I never gave a thought to my financial future.

Father was a church member, but no fanatic.

"Father," I asked, "why don't you take an active part in prayer meetings?"

Astounded, he replied: "If after the life I have lived, God does not wish to meet me, I do not wish to meet Him."

That was my first insight into the fact that man made God — in his own image. Father had judged God and thus set me on the same road. It was not quite the end of the Believing Age. Confessed agnostics were not numerous. [Robert] Ingersoll was in the prime of his attack on the old theology, but the walls of Jericho still stood firm against the blasts of his horn, and hell-fire preaching was common. I believed it all; at least I believed I believed it.

I was of the elect; the rest were goats, doomed to hell fire. Pathetic simplicity, or egregious cocksureness, as you choose.

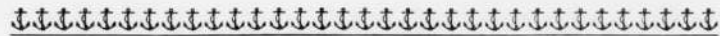
With ministry as his goal, Prescott left the Vineyard to attend Phillips Academy in Andover, Mass., where he did "four years' work in Latin and three in Greek" in only two years. From there, he moved to Brown University in Providence, R.I., from which he was graduated at the age of 22. He writes "at twenty-two, I knew less of life and men than most youths of sixteen today [1925?] and almost nothing of women. Was I

happy? Yes." Prescott was soon ordained to the Baptist ministry and then enrolled at Newton Theological Institution, where he completed the three-year course in two years. He was already an experienced preacher. "During the last six years of my education I preached 242 sermons: 22 for nothing; 8 for my expenses; the rest at an average of \$6 per sermon. I delivered these sermons in 45 different churches belonging to 6 denominations. In addition, I conducted about 700 other religious services; it was honest and enjoyable work, but taught me little about people or life. I visited a church for a Sunday, shot two sermons at them, but what effect they had I never knew. My head was in the clouds."

Having completed his work at Newton Theological Institution, Prescott became pastor of a Baptist Church in Middletown, Connecticut. He married a childhood sweetheart, Betsey Evelyn Phinney of Edgartown, soon after. From Middletown, he went to DeLand, Florida, as Baptist minister there. While in Edgartown on vacation from DeLand he contracted typhoid fever, coming very close to death. During his recuperation, he conceived the scheme that was to become known as the "Sea Water Gold Swindle." Once the swindle was exposed, he went abroad. He returned to the United States for a brief period before going to the Philippines, but avoided Edgartown. His autobiography contains little about the Vineyard after the excerpt printed above.

For him, Edgartown had ceased to exist. And once the swindle was made public, for Edgartown, Prescott F. Jernegan ceased to exist as well.

⁸ Printers stood up all day setting and justifying type, feeding hand presses, hence flat feet disqualified one for the job.



The Vineyard's Opening Shot In the American Revolution

by ARTHUR R. RAILTON

CAPTAIN Wemyss Orrok, master of the British ship *Harriot*, had no intention of getting involved in the rebellion of the American Colonies in 1776. He was just a salty mariner, earning a living as "a constant trader from London to Jamaica," hauling commercial cargoes between those ports.

But he did get involved and because of a sudden, violent coastal storm on March 7, 1776, he became the first "enemy" to be shot and taken prisoner by the inhabitants of Martha's Vineyard.

That violent storm was unfortunate for Orrok, but it was a bit of good luck for George Washington and the infant rebellion. It was, according to one historian, "one of the most crucial events in the entire American Revolution."¹

The storm was crucial because it saved General Washington's infant army in Boston from almost certain disaster. Of course, Wemyss Orrok, his ship driven aground on Nantucket Shoals by the storm, was too busy trying to get free to care about the fate of George Washington or the rebellion. It was his own fate he was worried about and, no doubt, he cursed his decision to take a shipment for Boston, a decision that was pure happenstance.

He had made the decision in London a few weeks before while awaiting a cargo to Jamaica, his regular port of call. None coming available, he was persuaded to take a "cargo of coal, Porter, potatoes and Live Hogs" from London to

¹ James Thomas Flexner, *George Washington in the American Revolution*, Little Brown and Co., Boston, 1967, p.76.

ARTHUR R. RAILTON is editor of this journal.

Boston to supply the British troops there. The Revolution was in its infancy; the Declaration of Independence still six months in the future.

General Washington was in Cambridge, across the Charles River from the occupied city, with an army of about 15,000 men, newly assembled and scarcely trained. They were without artillery until late in January when Col. Henry Knox arrived with 43 cannon and 16 mortars that had been captured by Ethan Allen at Fort Ticonderoga on Lake Champlain. Now, with his new fire power, Washington could make plans to attack the British forces. His plan was a bold one, as we shall see.

None of this was known to Captain Orrok, as he sailed across the Atlantic with foodstuffs for his country's troops stationed in Boston to quell a rebellious population of Colonials. He was no military man, simply a master mariner, hauling supplies. What was going on in Boston as far as he knew was not a revolution, simply a disturbance by a few hotheaded rebels. The troops were, in today's terms, a peacekeeping force.

On March 5, as the *Harriot* approached the New England coast, waters unfamiliar to Orrok, she was hit by that sudden violent storm and driven up onto Nantucket Shoals. For two days, Orrok and his crew struggled to get off the bar. On March 7, she floated free, with "very little Damage."

Once in deeper water, Captain Orrok anchored the 250-ton *Harriot*, awaiting a fair wind to head eastward to Boston. That was not, he soon discovered, going to be easy.

His presence had been reported, perhaps by a passing vessel, to Edgartown residents. Col. Beriah Norton, head of the Vineyard Militia was not in town that morning, but as he wrote a few days later in his report to James Otis, President of the Colonial Council at Watertown, his men were ready, eager for a fight:

... ther was Information in town that there was a transport ship at anchor near Nantucket sholes. I not being in town myself till the Afternoon when I found there was about 37

men gon of to Ingage the ship with a small sloop, about 23 of our men ware those of the sea corst [Sea Coast company] under Capt. Benj: Smith, the rest ware of the Militia, they Ingaged hur and after a smart scurmig the Capt of the ship Being shot three [times] they then struck to [surrender to] our Yanke sloop and are Brought in to the old town [Edgartown] harbour. The Capt is in a fare way of recovery, hur Cargo is about 100 Charldron of Coll [coal], 100 Butts of Porter, 30 hoges, Sower Crout, Puttators and Sundry outhar artacals, the officers and sea men are ordered to had [head] Quarters By the Sea Corst Capt under the care of Second Lieut. James Shaw. I shall not Inlarg any further in this subject as I expect to Be at Court within 15 days . . .²

Colonel Norton, as he reported, had not taken part in the capture. Two men who did, Capt. Peter Pease and Gamaliel Merchant of Edgartown, wrote another account in a long petition to the Council a few weeks later. They described it somewhat differently from Colonel Norton. In their version, it was not an action of the Sea Coast Defense Company or the Militia; rather, it was a spontaneous action by a group of Edgartown citizens, "thinking it our Indispensable duty to prevent all Supplyes Bound To the Ministerial Army then in Boston."³

They, their petition stated, enlisted the sloop *Liberty*, owned by William Richie of New York, which happened to be in Edgartown harbor, and sailed out to "pursue, engage, and at the Hazard of their Lives" to capture the *Harriot*. The sloop was "not fitted out as a Vessel of Force," but the eager Vineyarders carried small arms and were ready for a fight.

² Mass. Archives, CXCIV, p.275, quoted in Charles E. Banks, *History of Martha's Vineyard*, v.I, pp. 405-6. A chaldron is a measure equalling 32 bushels; a butt is 36 gallons; porter is a dark brown ale.

³ Petition, Peter Pease et al, April 5, 1776, D.C.H.s. The term "Ministerial army" was in common use at the time. It was what the Colonists called the British army as did George Washington, who "could not bring himself to think of the invaders as the army of the English nation. Surely, they represented only the Tory party." Flexner, p.11. The word means, "siding with or supporting the Ministry, as opposed to the Opposition" (OED). The Colonists thought that the British would withdraw if the Whigs took over from the Tories in Parliament.

To His Excellency Geo. Washington
Esq. General of the Continental
Army at Cambridge

Here's how Orrok addressed his letter to General Washington.

Despite the *Liberty's* lack of armament, Pease wrote, "through the Divine Smiles we Took the Ship *Harriot*, Commanded by Whimsorrok, and Brought her into Said Edgartown and secured her." No doubt, they felt that they had made a good catch. But, as often happens, there was trouble splitting up the booty. In their petition they stated:

... to our great Surprize we find that Said Mr. Richie [owner of the sloop used by them] is about, Endeavoring to get a Considerable & unreasonable Part for the Said Service of Said Sloop notwithstanding that he was of But Little Service to us and we are further informed that one Mr. Benjimin Smith, who was with us, is about, Claiming an unreasonable Part under the pretence of Being a Captain notwithstanding we know of no Distinctson But Did really act in Takeing Said Ship as without any one haveing more authority than another.

We beg Leave further To Suggest that a Boat which we had with us was allmoste of as much Service to us in Takeing said Ship as Said Sloop was for without Said bote we Should not Ben able to Have Boarded Said Ship after She struck to us. . .⁴

The wounded Captain Orrok also described what happened:

I was attacted by an armed Vessel from the Vineyard and

⁴ Petition, Peter Pease, et al., April 5, 1776, D.C.H.S.

being not willing to part with my property without makeing some defence, But being unfortunately wounded, was obliged to submit to superrior force. I am very weak at present, but . . . my wound is not mortall. . .⁵

Captain Orrok and his ship were "brought into Edgartown and secured," her cargo seized, and the Captain put into custody. Eager to turn the mate and fourteen crewmen of the *Harriot* over to the authorities, Capt. Benjamin Smith of the Sea Coast Company ordered Capt. William Ritchie of the *Liberty* to take them on board "and to Land Said Crew on the mane Land on any Place from Dartmouth to Falmouth, having Regard to Capt. Peter Pease who is to be your Poilot."⁶

In a later report to the Colonial Council in Watertown, Captain Smith explained that he had directed Lt. James Shaw "to deliver Them to the Honou'ble Counsel." He also stated that he was trying "to secure the property by Giting the ship to the mane," and that he would let the Council know when that had been accomplished.⁷

The story gets less heroic and more mercenary as it continues. Both the ship, a large vessel, and her cargo were of considerable value and the Edgartown marauders, who considered themselves to be privateers, had their eyes on both. They didn't seem to realize that there were rules that regulated privateering, aimed at elevating it above the level of piracy.

Privateering was legal only if the marauding vessel was authorized and bonded by the government. The Edgartown privateers had no such authorization. Their attack had been spontaneous, almost a prank. There was no time to get authority, nor at that early stage in the rebellion would they have known how to go about it. Their prize was the first enemy vessel captured south of Boston.

It wasn't until April 23, 1776, six weeks after the *Harriot*

⁵ Letter, Wemyss Orrok to Gen. George Washington, undated, D.C.H.S.

⁶ Document, Benjamin Smith, March 10, 1776, D.C.H.S.

⁷ Mass. Archives CXCIV, 281, quoted in Banks, id., v.I. p.406.

capture, that the Massachusetts House passed a resolution regulating privateering. The resolution set the official division of spoils this way: one-third to the privateers; two-thirds to the Colony. And only an authorized vessel, properly bonded, could engage in the highly lucrative adventure, which bordered on piracy. The regulation also stated that the personal property of the officers and crew was not to be seized.

It was on this point that Captain Orrok, now alone in Edgartown detention, his officers and crew on the mainland, raised his objection.

A respectful man, he addressed a letter to "His Excellency Geo. Washington Esq., Generall of the Continentile Army at Cambridge," having been told by Col. Beriah Norton that he would deliver it when he went to Watertown, as he was planning to do. Orrok wrote:

Having this oppertunity by Colonel Norton, I must beg have to trouble you with this letter. Tho an intire Stranger, I flatter myself you will take compassion upon me when you hear of my preasent situation. . . .

I have been a constant trader from London to Jamaica for this some years past and, no freight offering this voyage out, I was prevailed upon to take a Cargoe of coals, Porter, etc., by Messrs. Mann & Company, the Shippers, for Boston, where I was to be imediately Discharged & from thence to proceed for Jamaica. . . .

I am very weak at preasent, but as my wound is not mortall, I hope to have the Honner of waiting on you personally in a few weeks. At preasent I have the greatest reason imaginable to expect (without Your Excellency interfiers in my behalf) that my private property [will be taken] . . . and likewise my wearing apparrell, which they are fully Determined to plunder from me. At Preasent I have nothing at my command.

Should your Excellency be so very obliging to permit me to Depart for Jamaica, I should not so much regreat my loss, but if its my lot to be Detained here, I would wish to appear a little Deaseant . . .⁸

⁸ Orrok letter, D.C.H.S.

We don't know what General Washington's response was, if any. Or if he even got the letter. The same storm that had brought disaster to Orrok, had upset his bold plan to destroy the British in Boston. Surely, with such weighty matters on the table, the General's staff would not have troubled him with Orrok's "wish to appear a little Deasant."

On the night of March 4, three days before Orrok's capture, Washington, under the cover of darkness and cannon fire from Cambridge, moved many of his troops, with artillery, onto Dorchester Heights. There they set up a fortified position from which they could fire upon part of Boston and ships in the harbor. His aim was to entice General Howe, the British commander, to invade Dorchester to eliminate this threat. Then, while the main British force was out of Boston, attacking Dorchester Heights, Washington planned to send the bulk of his troops in small boats across the Charles to capture the city, taking the remaining British prisoners.

The plan seemed to be working. Howe, spotting the Dorchester artillery, loaded many of his men into transports which sailed to a spot off the Dorchester peninsula to await the high tide on the night of March 5 when they would invade.

But that was the night of the storm. It was a storm that brought "a wind more violent than anything I ever heard [and] I never felt such cold and distress," according to one British soldier.⁹ The next day, though the storm had passed out to sea, the waves continued to crash against the shore, making any invasion by small boats impossible. The invasion was cancelled and the British troops returned to Boston.

Washington also had to cancel his attack on Boston because of the rough waters of the Charles River so the Americans remained in Cambridge.

Had there been no storm, one Washington biographer believes, half of the American army would have been lost

⁹ Flexner, id., p.76, quoting Rifleman Daniel McCurtin.

in the attempt to invade Boston. The British cannon, still in the city, would have destroyed many of their boats while on the Charles and those troops who made it ashore would have faced heavy British firepower with no way to retreat. While the Americans may have won at Dorchester, because of their location on a hill, they certainly would not have been able to take Boston. And they probably would have lost half of their army in the effort.

As General Washington wrote after inspecting the city on March 18, the day after the British evacuated it, "The town of Boston was almost impregnable, every avenue fortified."

That early in the war, writes the biographer, "when so many Americans were still undecided, [for Washington to have] lost half of his army and with it his own prestige, the cause could either have collapsed or shriveled away."¹⁰

So the storm that brought grief to Orrok, may have saved the Revolution for the Americans.

Miles away, in Edgartown, nobody knew that all this was happening. Captain Orrok, unhappy in his cell, awaited a response from the harried General. But Orrok wasn't the only unhappy man in Edgartown. At least two of his captors felt they were being cheated. They were Peter Pease and Gamaliel Merchant, who claimed to be among the initiators of the *Harriot* affair. They didn't like the way that Capt. Smith and Capt. Richie had taken over; specifically, as mentioned above, they didn't like the plan for dividing the spoils.

Benjamin Smith, whether or not he commanded the raid on the *Harriot*, was Captain of the Edgartown Seacoast Defense Company, and he had been aboard the *Liberty* on the raid. Neither Peter Pease nor Gamaliel Merchant was a member of the Seacoast Company.¹¹ Their account of the

¹⁰ Flexner, id., pp. 77-78.

¹¹ Peter Pease (1734-1829) was an Edgartown master mariner who married three times: 1. Mary Beetle; 2. Mrs. Sarah (Daggett) Cottle; and 3. Bethia Smith. Gamaliel Merchant (1740-1781), also an Edgartown master mariner, was grandfather of Edgar Marchant, founder and first editor of the *Vineyard Gazette*.

capture doesn't even mention the Company or the Militia, making it sound more like a spontaneous armed adventure than an official operation by the local defense establishment. Even the sloop did not belong in Edgartown.

Despite the protest by Pease and Merchant, Captain Smith of the Seacoast Defense Company took over the case as soon as he learned of the one-third, two-thirds division enacted by the Massachusetts House of Representatives. He demanded a fairer division of the spoils. His argument, made in a June 6, 1776, petition to the General Court, was a legal one.¹²

The Colony ruling on spoils had been passed April 23, 1776. Captain Smith knew his law and he petitioned the General Court, claiming that the law could not apply in the Edgartown case because it had not been passed until six weeks after the capture of Captain Orrok's ship. The Edgartown privateers, he argued, were entitled to more than one-third.

Legal matters didn't take long to be resolved in those days. A week after Benjamin Smith's petition, the General Court issued its ruling. It agreed with the ex post facto argument and, furthermore, it wrote, the participants should get more because the "Colony was not at any expence for Vessel, Cannon, etc. . . . and that the Vessel which attacked & took the said Ship was procured by and was at the Risque of the Petitioner."

Therefore, the Court ruled that

After the Charges of Trial, & Condemnation are deducted from the gross Produce of the said Ship, her Cargo and Appurtunances, and the Share of the other Captors have been assigned them, the Colony shall receive One third part, and the said Sea Coast Men two third Parts of the Residue.¹³

So the Edgartown privateers got twice as much as the new law said they should, thanks to Captain Smith's argument.

¹² William Bell Clark, Ed., *Naval Documents of the American Revolution*, Superintendent of Documents, Washington, D.C., 1964, v.4, pp. 395-96.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 490-91. From *Mass. Archives*, v. 35, 40-42, June 12, 1776.

What the Court doesn't mention and what we don't know is what happened to Capt. Wemyss Orrok. Nor do we know whether he got his "wearing apparrell" back so he could once again "appear a little Deasent."

But it does seem clear that, on March 7, 1776, he was the first "enemy" shot and captured by Vineyarders in the American Revolution. As such, he should be remembered.

An armed, well-disciplined Militia. . .

Edgartown May 2nd 1776
 To Capt Benjⁿ Smith
 I hereby inform you By way of Complaint against your Ser^t William Norton he & Norton being on Board a Schooner with a Party of men of your Com^d of Boarded & Seized in a Peacefull manner Capt^d Jam^s Conversation with the Capt^d & asked to see the Papers at which Ser^t Norton Brokeout in a Violant^t Patien & Called to his men amedeatly to Stand to there arms and Comanded them to Blow my Brains out & utered many other words to the Same Purport all which Abuse I Defies you to Inquire into in such a manner as you think Proper to Prevent such Abuse & Disorders for the future It Being one of about the 15th day of march last — From your Hum^l Ser^t Beriah Norton

A few days after the Captain Orrok incident, some Edgartown Militia, led by Sgt. William Norton, prepared to go privateering. Col. Beriah Norton, head of the Island Militia, boarded their schooner, asking "to see the papers." Sergeant Norton then "brock out in a Violant Patien [passion] & Called to his men amedeatly to Stand to there arms and Comanded them to Blow my Brains out & utered many other words to the Same Purport. . ." Colonel Norton's order, above, requests Capt. Benjamin Smith of the Edgartown Militia to take some action in the case. (D.C.H.S. archives.)

State Representative from Tisbury in the General Court, who, among other accomplishments, helped found the Dukes County Academy. Such prominence in such a small village deserves a wrought-iron fence and six-foot stone. Here, too, is poor, sad, eccentric Nancy Luce, who died in 1890 at 79 years, the famed "hen lady" from Tiah's Cove Road, around whose grave some person, touchingly, has placed some miniature chickens and eggs.⁴

In the newer section, in the center of God's Acre as well as to the north, there are newer names, off-Island names, some not Yankee, such as those whose Portuguese ancestors perhaps joined the whaling ships in Fayal and stayed, settling on the Island years ago.

And a man named McNamara whose stone, not far from that of his friend, artist-critic Tom Craven, bears the theater's masques and is inscribed simply: "A Player." He was an Irish cop from Paterson, N.J., friend to everyone, whose career on radio and in films as the Singing Cop made him famous. It was he of whom Jimmy Cagney said, "You know, that may be our immortality, that we were friends of Ed McNamara's."

Nearby, the grave of another of his friends, Charlie Turner, who moved here from Boston to clerk at Sanderson's, the social and retail centerpiece of West Tisbury (originally the S.M. Mayhew Company, now Alley's General Store). He died in 1955.⁵

Non-Island names, to be sure, but all attached to folks who became part of the Island and of its history. Folks who loved the Island so much as to want to rest here for eternity.

West Tisbury's cemetery looks much like other graveyards in other small New England villages. It has changed little through the centuries. There is still room for more Mayhews and Manters, Athearns and Looks, and for those others who will join their ancestors in this small plot of land. Other

⁴ See *Consider Poor I*, Walter Magnes Teller, DCHS, 1984.

⁵ In 1914, he and a partner, Benjamin Woodaman, bought the store from Sanderson M. Mayhew. See *Intelligencer*, November 1985, for the history of this remarkable store.

flags will be added for World War II and Korea and Viet Nam. We must hope there will be no need for new flags to mark veterans of some yet-unfought foreign war.

Fortunately, there will be fewer stones for those dying so young of now-preventable or curable diseases and, happily, it has been years since a new stone has proclaimed "Lost at Sea."

John Donne wrote "no man is an island." And this graveyard, small and intimate in a tiny, closeknit village, tells us that no island is an island. It is part of the whole — of the history and heritage of a nation.

For there are roots here, and peacefulness, as three centuries look out from that sloping field along the Mill Brook, south towards town.

The author is grateful to Leonard and Elmer (Mike) Athearn of West Tisbury for their assistance in grave location and their suggestions and corrections of the author's inaccuracies.

Photograph by Aaron Siskind, from Consider Poor I.



Nancy Luce's gravestone. She was 75, not 79, as the stone says.

The Singing Cop Found His Home Here

EDWARD J. McNamara, the Irish policeman from Paterson, N.J., became famous in films and on radio 60 years ago as "The Singing Cop." Among his many friends was actor and Vineyard resident Jimmy Cagney, who often invited Mac to his farm here.

A big city kid, Mac fell in love with the rural life of Chilmark and West Tisbury and many townfolk made him their friend. In 1944, when he died while en route to California with a load of Cagney's horses, his body was brought back here for burial in West Tisbury cemetery.

He had been a much-loved member of The Players, the New York actors' club, and several prominent members wrote tributes to him in The Players Bulletin of December 1944. One was the author, Clarence Budington Kelland, one of Mac's close friends. Here is an excerpt:

"I think the happiest days of his life were those when we were together — a half dozen of us — on the Vineyard. There he was lord of a little manor. He was the host. The little house was his, a solid, ponderable possession. The only one he ever had known. Somehow it reassured him and gave him a certain confidence. He was a landed proprietor . . . and he basked in this sense of proprietorship. . . . He is buried in a little cemetery where he brushes elbows with the descendants of a Signer of the Declaration of Independence. Somehow this would have pleased him.

Another Player, Ray Vir Den, described the burial:

"As the hearse drew up, one suddenly realized this was for Mac, not for one whose ancestors had lived for generations on the little Island of Martha's Vineyard.

"Bud Kelland and I were there. That was to be expected, as we were his close friends. But it was evident that this was the affair of the townfolk. Mac had come back to stay!

"As the doors of the hearse opened, the pall-bearers stepped forward. They were not his famous friends of stage

and screen, nor big men of affairs whom Mac had known. They were Charlie Turner, the postmaster and general storekeeper; Lindy Lindstrom, the state trooper; Roger Engley . . . and other local residents. As they carried the casket toward the open grave, I shall never forget the feeling of helplessness that came over me, nor how impressed I was by the simple manner of these grand people.

"Finally, the flowers were arranged, the last silent prayers said, and slowly the casket was lowered into the grave. As it came level with the earth, it paused, and Carey Luce, the local banker, stepped forward and selected a single wreath which he placed on the coffin. He then stepped back to where Bud and I stood. 'It was the wreath from The Players,' he said simply, 'I think Mac would have liked it that way.'

"As we walked away, I wondered if perhaps one of Edward McNamara's greatest achievements was not that of winning the hearts of this austere little New England community. As we all know, Mac was proud — and West Tisbury had been proud for generations — so I guess they just understood one another."

Mac, friends said, was someone folks loved to have around the house. He was the perfect guest. He was always welcome, but finally he decided to buy himself a little place on Great Tisbury Pond. Sadly, only a few years later he died.

Heywood Hale Broun, the television sportscaster recognizable by his coats of many colors and famous for his classical descriptions of the Kentucky Derby, was another close friend. He describes Mac's guest appeal this way:

"Mac brought the profession of guest to a high polish. When he stayed at your home — and he used to move regularly from Harold Ross to Clarence Budington Kelland to James Cagney to us and to other lucky people — he did innumerable useful things and made you sorry when he announced that he had told Bud or Harold or Jim that he would be there next week."

Mac's now a permanent guest in one of the Island's oldest cemeteries. He won't be moving on.

Documents

Jeremiah Pease Diary

The years in the first quarter of the 19th century are years of change on the Vineyard. The whaling business on the Island is just beginning. The first whaling ship, *Apollo*, left Edgartown in 1816. By 1824, seven whaling vessels were owned by Vineyarders and the *Apollo* is among them, returning, as we shall read, from a voyage in June. Another ship, the *Almira*, returns from her first whaling voyage her hold filled with sperm oil.

Jeremiah Pease, our diarist, is hired by the county to lay out several roads to replace wagon trails that had developed across the open spaces between Edgartown and the other villages. One road he laid out was from Edgartown to Tisbury (today's West Tisbury); another from Edgartown to both sides of Holmes Hole harbor (today's Vineyard Haven); it isn't clear where the third road he surveyed went. For all this surveying, he was paid \$30.

He also is engaged to survey Indian common lands on Chappaquiddick, in the struggle over land rights, a dispute which will last for years.

The Pease family has a new child, John Adams Pease, born July 12, 1824. His mother, Eliza Pease, seems to have been "awakened" to Methodism during this period. Apparently, the awakening was not permanent as Jeremiah hardly ever mentions her interest in his religious activities after this.

Jeremiah is elected State Representative,

but the town votes against spending the money to send him to Boston.

It isn't as though he needs something to keep him busy. He is Deputy Collector of Customs, surveyor, cordwainer, bone setter, manager of Thomas Cooke's saltworks, active layman and chorister in the Methodist Church, fisherman, farmer, diarist, plus being a sympathetic and comforting bedside sitter for the dying.

December 1823

1st. WNW to SW, pleasant. Frederik Coffin dies at about 1/2 past 3 PM of a consumption, aged 28. Oh, Death! I watched with him last night, his distress was great but had his reason until the last. This day, Jonathan Worth, by agreement, leaves me.¹ Attend Schr. M., the Survey of the cargo. Finishes their business this afternoon.

2nd. NW to SW. Sheriff attaches all the Ivory on board Schr. *Mercury* and Schr. likewise.

3rd. SW. Sheriff takes out the Ivory and stores it. Engaged in marking and discharging Cargo of Schr. *Mercury*. Mr. Coffin buried, funeral service by Revd. Mr. Hubbert.

6th. W, pleasant. Requested to take notice of the Conversation which took place between Esq. _____ and Seaman, relative to Ivory, etc., cargo of Schr. M.²

¹ Young Worth may have finished his apprenticeship under Jeremiah, either in surveying or leather working.

² It would be helpful if Jeremiah would give details. It would seem that the schooner *Mercury* was in violation of some regulation and that some Edgartown person (the unnamed Esquire?) was involved.

7th. SW. News of the failure of T.M.V. spreads among us.³

12th. SSE. Schr. R. takes the remainder of Schr. *Mercury's* Cargo. Finished my attendance and all business with Schr. *Mercury*. Rainy at night.

13th. NW. Went to Chapaqueddick and surveyed the Indian Common, so called, for Cornelius Huxford and others, drew a plan of the same.

15th. SW to NW, squally. Engaged in surveying the line between Thos. Smith and John Smith's woodland near the House of Thos. Smith.

18th. SW. Went to Brig Cuba of Boston, Smith, castaway on Tuckanuck from St. Thomas. Remained on board 2 days then stayed on Misquiket Monday. 22nd. returned home. Gone 5 days. Miss Ann Norton dies, on 19th, very sudden.⁴

25th. SWS to W, pleasant.

27th. S, rainy. Surveyed Indian line fence for H. Pease and others. 28th. W, calm. Mr. Richard Norton and Miss Rachal Pease married. James Buntin and Mrs. Sally Pease, John O. Morse and Miss Joann Pease were married this month.⁵

29th. SW, pleasant. Finished the Draught of Indian line fence, etc.

31st. ENE. A meeting was held in the

³ Who was T.M.V.? The only person with such initials we can find was Col. Thomas Melville Vinson, who in 1814 married Hepsibah, daughter of Cornelius Marchant, longtime Clerk of Courts and Registrar of Probates.

⁴ Being Deputy Customs Inspector is a demanding job. Miss Norton, incidentally, was the daughter of Col. Beriah Norton, who negotiated with General Grey during the Revolutionary War raid.

⁵ The Pease family was busy this month!

Methodist M. House till 1/4 past 12 o'clock. The Year rolls round and steals away the breath that first it gave.

January 1824

1st. SSW.

2nd. ENE, light. We visited Uncle E. [Elijah] Pease with Revd. F. Dane, Brother ADP [Abner Dunham Pease] and wife and Sister [in law] Abigail Worth.

3rd. SSW, pleasant. Ship *Loan* haws off to anchor.

5th. SW. Ship *Loan* Sails for Pacific Ocean, Allen Tilton, master.

9th. SSW. Took down Saltworks Mill veins, spouts, etc.⁶

18th. ENE to E, rainy, light snow storm. 1st snow. Revd. T. Paul preaches in B. Meetinghouse.

19th. ENE, snows a little. Went to Tisbury on probate business for Mother Worth.⁷ Returned same evening. Revd. Mr. Paul preaches this evening at Revd. Mr. Hubbert's.

20th. N, cold. Remarkable Meeting at the Methodist M. house. Brother Upham preaches. Text, If God be God, serve him, etc. Many were awakened by the divine spirit. I have no doubt, My Wife was one of the number.⁸

22nd. N, cold. Eliza was much blessed this Evening.

28th. WSW to SW, pleasant. Went

⁶ You must excuse Jeremiah's poor spelling. By "veins," he means vanes, as on the windmill at the saltworks.

⁷ In the late 1700s, there were two courthouses on the Island, one in Edgartown and another in Tisbury (now West Tisbury). Tisbury court sessions were no longer held by this time, but apparently records were still kept there.

⁸ Eliza's "awakening" seems not to have been permanent as Jeremiah never mentions her religious interest after this year.

eeling with Brother C.P.
31st. ENE to SSW, moderate, cloudy. This Month has been very moderate, the most so that I ever observed. There has not been snow enough to cover the ground yet.

February 1824

9th. SW. Uncle Francis Pease dies at about 1/2 past eleven o'clock a.m. aged 67 years and months. He left the world with a blessed hope in his Soul.⁹
10th. Wind ESE, rainy. Attended the Funeral of Uncle Pease. Service by Revd. F. Upham & Revd. W. Hubbert. "Oh time, how few they value weigh."
13th. ESE, light wind. Surveyed land for Isaiah Pease.
17th. WNW. Settled Ship *Loan's* Acc'ts. with the Agent, being one of the committee.¹⁰
18th. S. Bo't. a small Boat which belonged to Uncle F. Pease. Commenced a singing School at the Methodist meeting house, rains at night.
22nd. ENE, storm, heavy rain, small flight of snow at night. Set a finger for B. Steward.¹¹
24th. N, flight of snow, not enough to cover the ground. Set an Ankle for John Cleveland's wife.
27th. SSW, high wind. Brig *Aurora* arrives from Smyrna.
28th. WNW. Bo't. HHd. Molasses, price 26 cents per Gallon.
29th. Wind NNW. This has been the

⁹ Jeremiah's father's uncle, son of Seth Pease.

¹⁰ Jeremiah seems to have been involved in ownership and financing of several vessels, which was against Customs regulations.

¹¹ "Small flight of snow," a rather poetic image. It must have been a local idiom as Jeremiah was not poetically inclined.

most remarkable winter since the memory of man. The weather has been very moderate, and all the snow that has fell would not be enough to cover the ground 6 inches deep. There has been considerable rain, but very little ice.

March 1824

3rd. NNW to NE. Received the Book from the Methodist Library. Sloop *Hero* and Cargo of Ivory put under my care.
4th. Discharged Sloop *Hero*, put the Ivory into Store. Wind NE.
6th. NNW, rains at night to SSW. Went eeling.
9th. SW to ENE. Engaged in surveying Land for Wm. King and I.D. Pease on the plain.
13th. NW to SW. Assisted in putting up Saltworks spouts, mill, etc. for Thos. Cook Esq.
16th. ESE. Ground is covered with [snow] being the first time during the winter or spring, snow 1 1/2 or 2 inches deep.
17th. E. Snows a little. Cloudy. Thaws.
18th. E. Capt. Obediah Pease's Wife dies at about 12 o'clock P.M., having been in a deranged state of mind for nearly thirty years.¹²
20th. SSE to W, rains a little A.M., P.M. clear. Mrs. Pease is buried, funeral service by Revd. J. Thaxter. Took the bearings of the sun, find the variation of Compass to be six degrees West. Brig onshore in the Bay.
22nd. N to NE to S. Attended discharging British Brig *Lucretia* of

¹² Obediah married Rachel Coffin. Their granddaughter was Mary West Pease, wife of Richard L. Pease, Vineyard historian.

Hallifax from Turks Islands, Sam'l. King Master.

23rd. SSE. Attended the Brig above mentioned.

27th. NE to SSE. Brother Dane Preaches his last Sermons. Schooner arrives with the Blubber of a whale which she found at sea.

April 1824

3rd. NNW. Brig *Lucretia* finishes taking in her cargo of Salt.¹³

8th. N to SW. This day closes another year of my short Life. "How swift the passing moments run." British Brig *Lucretia* closes her business & is ready for sea.

9th. N to SW. Brig *Lucretia* sails for Halifax. Engaged in surveying the lines between Wm. Jerengan Esq. & Thos. Smith in 3d. Division of new purchase, so called.

10th. SW. Methodist Quarterly meeting commences this day. Our Brethren mad coise [choice] of me to fill the station of Stewart. Oh, may I have wisdom from above & be found faithfull.

13th. Being appointed by the Hon. Court of Sessions one of the Committee to layout a road from Edg. harbour to the East and west Side of Holmeshole harbour & to Tisbury, we met at Mr. Charles Butler's tavern

¹³ We don't have salt production data for 1824, but for the year ending June 30, 1828, the district of Edgartown produced 5837 bushels, according to a report by Thomas Cooke Jr., to the Federal Treasurer, Sept. 6, 1828. More could be produced, but the low price discouraged the enterprise. What is not certain is exactly what was included in the Edgartown district at that time. Certainly the entire Vineyard and the Elizabeth Islands were.

agreeable to advertisements at 9 o'clock. Present Wm. Jernegan, Elijah Stewart & Benjamin Allen Esq. & John Coffin & Jeremiah Pease. Proceeded to business by chooseing Wm. Jernegan chairman & Jeremiah Pease Clerk, commenced running the lines of the road to H Hole at the NW end of my Shop and ran to the E & W side of homeshole. Finished the 17th.¹⁴

21st. SSE. Commenced running the lines for Tisbury road, ajourned on acc't. of the weather.

22nd. ESE. Commenced running the lines of Tisbury road agreeable to order of Court. Got to Simon Nucom's Path & adjourned until tomorrow.

23rd. SE storm.

24th. NW to SW. Finished running the lines of Tisbury road. Ran as far as where the Court House formerly stood.¹⁵

25th. Wind SW. Elijah Stewart's Wife dies very suddenly. She sat at the table and eat part of her dinner and died in about 5 minutes having been for two days previous as well and better in health than she had been for some time before.¹⁶

27th. ENE, cloudy. Esq. Stewart's wife is buried, funeral service by Revd. Mr. Thaxter.

¹⁴ We have never established where his first shop was.

¹⁵ As mentioned above, for some years there were two court houses. The one in Tisbury (now West Tisbury) was at the intersection of Old County Road and Edgartown Road, near the Mill Pond. That is where Jeremiah is surveying.

¹⁶ She was Hepsibah (Pease) Pease, widow of Thomas Pease, who had married Elijah Stewart in 1806. They had no children. Elijah had seven children by Jedidah Butler, his first wife, who died in 1804.

May 1824

1st. SW. Commenced laying out the road along shore. Began below Joseph Dunham's well.¹⁷

2nd. SSW. Elder Bonney Preaches this day & evening.

3rd. NE. Engaged in surveying land for Capt. Winthrop Luce.

4th. SSW, foggy. Wid. Dorcas Norton Dies.

5th. SW. Mrs. Norton buried. Funeral service by Revd. J. Thaxter.

6th. SW. Capt. Samuel Coffin arrives from Charleston.

8th. SW. Ship *Almira* of Edgt. arrives, being full of S. oil & with the loss of 2 men, Wm. A. Fellows & a coloured man who died at sea with fevers.¹⁸

12th. NW, calm. This day my Friends hold me as a candidate for a Representative to the State Legislature and many of my Friend assembled at the courthouse for the purpose of voting for me, but it was concluded not to send a Representative this year.¹⁹

13th. W, ESE, rainy, PM NW. Engaged in making out report relative to the roads for the Court of Sessions. Widow Swazey dies with disorders incident to old age.

15th. SNW. Attended Funeral of Mrs. Swazey, service by Revd. Mr. Thaxter.

16th. SW. Revd. John Adams arrives on a visit from Malden & Preaches.²⁰

17th. SW. Attended the weighing 2

¹⁷ We are not sure where this road is.

¹⁸ The *Almira*, Capt. Daggett, had sailed Feb. 6, 1822, for the Pacific. She returned with 2300 barrels of sperm oil, a rich voyage.

¹⁹ Edgartown did not send a Representative to the State House in 10 of the 11 years from 1814 to 1825.

²⁰ Rev. Adams was the Methodist evangelist who had converted Jeremiah two years before.

bags Coffee from Ship *South American* from St. Salvadore.

19th. S to NNW. Present Our Report to the Hon. Court of Sessions relative to the Roads (excepted in part and finally excepted in all its parts, or in full).

22nd. SW. Mr. _____ Cummins moves the house he bo't. of Capt. Saml. Coffin.

23rd. SW. Brother John Adams Preaches (Sunday).

24th. SW. Capt. Clemen Norton's house raised.

26th. SW. Brother Adams leaves Town for Malden.

28th. NW to SE, rains at night. Went to E. Side of Holmshole to survey land for E. Smith.

29th. SW. Returned from H. Hole, Saml. Coffin's house raised.

31st. SW. Court of Common Pleas sits. A Lion and other Animals are exhibited here as a show.²¹

June 1824

2nd. SW. This day, Capt. Peter Pease, Grafton Norton and myself were appointed by the Court of Common Pleas, a Committe to set off to Peter Coffin all his share of Land agreeable to his petition for Partition of land formerly belonging to William Butler. A young man, Wm. Lambert, falls from his house and hurts his head very badly (effects of House raising).

5th. SSW, rains. Court of Sessions sets. This day sworn before C. Marchant Esq. Engaged in business of P. Coffin.

10th. NE. Mr. Ebenezer Smith is bro't. by the Sheriff and his aid before Dr. Fellows & E. Stewart Esq. & has his

²¹ The beginning of the circus?

trial for abuse to his family & neighbours and committed to Prison. 11th. NNW. Went to Chapaquiddic to set off land to P. Coffin with other Committee.

12th. W. Went to Register's office, returned at evening, on P. Coffin's business.

14th. NNW to WSW. Receive orders from S.B. Mayhew to sell his & M. Hatch's shares of Oil which is in my possession at the best advantage, leaving it to me to determin as to price, etc. Engaged in setting off land to P. Coffin.

15th. NNW, cool air. Ship *Apollo* arrives from N. York.

16th. NNW. Engaged in setting off land to P. Coffin.

17th. NNE. Finished [above]. Watched with Hiram Fellows, being sick with a fever.

21st. NNW. Put my oil into the store.

24th. SSW, rainy. Schr. strikes upon the rocks at Washquay, gits off and arrives at the wharf.

29th. SSW. Hiram Fellows dies of a fever, having been sick about 21 days. He was taken sick on his passage from Charleston to N. York after arriving in N. York he returned home in Ship *Apollo*. This is a heavy loss to his parents, they having lost Children and only one remaining who is of a feeble constitution. Hiram was of a pleasant disposition, an affectionate Child, having a good education and great natural abilities.

July 1824

1st. WNW to N, very warm. Attended the Funeral of Hiram Fellows, service by Revd. J. Thaxter.

3rd. SW. Shipped 766 gallons sperm Oil to Nantucket, belonging to S.B. Mayhew & Co.

5th. N to SSW. Much powder burnt here today.²²

9th. SW. Revd. Edward Taylor arrives, being stationed on this circuit this year. May God bless his labours.²³

10th. SSW to E, rainy. Brother Taylor moves his furniture to Brother Matthew Vincent's.

11th. SW. Brother Taylor Preaches, being Sunday.

12th. SW. This evening at 1/2 past 8 o'clock gave Birth to another Son, whose name is John Adams.²⁴

15th. SSW, rains a little. Revd. Jesse Pease Ordained at Tisbury.²⁵

21st. ESE, flattening. Went to Holmshole with I.D.P. [Sheriff Isaiah Dunham Pease, Jeremiah's brother].

24th. ENE. Quarterly meeting commences. Elder E. Hyde preaches.

26th. SW. Commenced cradling rye at Chapaquiddick.

27th. ESE. Capt. Henry Fisher's Wife dies of disentry.

31st. SW. Brothers Chase & A.D. Pease arrive from Killingworth [with] their new Sloop called the *Thomas*.²⁶

²² July Fourth was Sunday, so the fireworks were on the Fifth.

²³ Rev. Edward T. Taylor, 30 years old, was just starting an illustrious career, becoming pastor of the Seaman's Bethel, Boston. See Gilbert Haven and Thomas Russell, *Father Taylor, the Sailor Preacher*, B.B. Russell, Boston 1872.

²⁴ Named for Rev. John Adams, the Methodist evangelist, John Adams Pease was the fifth of 10 Pease children. It would seem that Jeremiah should have written "Eliza gave birth, etc."

²⁵ Jesse Pease, was the first minister of the Four Corners Baptist Meeting house near Scotchman's Lane. He was very distantly related to Jeremiah.

²⁶ These were two of Jeremiah's brothers.

Bits & Pieces

LOCAL history is small potatoes. No pivotal decisions to document, no vast forces. It's a dig for detail, for tidbits that flesh out, that make human, the tidal waves of history.

The local historian studies what ordinary folk were doing while the extraordinary folk were changing the world.

It's surprising what you learn. And how much fun it is. Take the story in this issue about Capt. Wemyss Orrok's capture by the Edgartown privateers.

For years, we have had in our archives three documents which are related, but they didn't seem to tell a complete story.

The first document we have is Orrok's letter addressed to General Washington in Cambridge. Although Orrok was told otherwise, it probably never left Edgartown — that's why we have it. There was some question about his complaint. Was it accurate? How to find proof? Then there is a scrap of paper signed by Benjamin Smith, captain of the newly formed Edgartown militia, ordering Capt. William Ritche to take the captive crew of Orrok's ship to the mainland. The third document is a petition by two disgruntled Edgartown men demanding a larger share of the booty.

Then, while researching off-Island, I came across two items that filled some gaps. Both were in the official records of the Revolution. They put the Orrok incident into context. With the added clues as a guide, I looked through newspapers of the time and discovered

more. Orrok had originally gone to New York, but was told to take his cargo to the British troops in Boston. That's what put him near the Vineyard when the storm hit. By reading diaries of American soldiers at Boston I learned about the intense storm that night. That explained why Orrok ran aground.

Another newspaper story reported that a British ship, captured off Edgartown, was in Dartmouth and had been turned over to the authorities. Orrok's *Harriott*? Probably.

So now our three documents fit into a bigger picture: the evacuation of Boston by the British in March 1776.

But we still don't know what happened to Orrok. Nor how the booty was divided. A lot of money was involved. Was Peter Pease satisfied? Maybe some day we'll learn.

Then there's Prescott Jernegan. Unlike his brother, Marcus, of University of Chicago fame, and his sister, Laura, well known for her Edgartown antique shop and her child's diary aboard the whaler, he's the forgotten Jernegan although his entry in *Who's Who* is longer than his brother's and not a word about gold!

But as a result of research into the life of his father, Capt. Jared Jernegan, the story of Prescott unexpectedly came to light. It was an international story, a big story, not something limited to the Vineyard. A fascinating tale about a talented man, perhaps the most talented of the Jernegans, who made one big mistake and it cost him his place in history — until recently, that is.

Such are the pleasurable tidbits of a local historian.

A.R.R.

High School Essay Contest

There were twelve entries by Regional High School students in the Historical Essay Contest this year. The quality of research and presentation in several of them was very good and the judges had difficulty ranking the three best.

To be considered for an award, the essays must involve Dukes County History and the research must be done, to a significant degree, at the Society library. The purpose of this is to acquaint high school students with the resource material and research assistance available in the Gale Huntington Library.

The Society is pleased to announce the 1989 winners:

First Prize, \$50.

Ellie Finkelstein

Arctic Whaling, 1891, Hartson H. Bodfish

A review of the adventures of Captain Bodfish of Vineyard Haven during the twenty years he spent whaling in the Arctic Ocean at the turn of the century. "Hartie," as he was called locally, was a pioneer in wintering-over at Herschel Island, where whalers were forced to adopt the life style of the Eskimo population.

Second Prize, \$30.

Chris Herr

CSS Alabama, A Confederate Privateer

An examination of the damage done to United States vessels by the Confederate ship *Alabama* during the Civil War. Two whalers, their captains from Edgartown, were among her first victims. A third Island resident, Ulysses E. Mayhew, later proprietor of the West Tisbury general store, was a cabin boy on another of the *Alabama's* victims.

Third Prize, \$20.

Bryan J. Nelson

Diary of Jane C. Beecher Smith

An analysis of a diary kept by Jane Smith during the winter of 1857, with emphasis on the life style of that period. Mrs. Smith and her family lived on the harbor of Holmes Hole, today's Vineyard Haven, and her diary describes the difficulty of life during that exceptionally cold winter.

All participants will receive a one-year membership in the Society, which includes a subscription to this journal.

The Essay Committee is especially grateful to Mrs. Marjorie Harris and the other teachers at the High School for their help in making the contest a success.



Now fitting for a

Privateer,
In the Harbour of *B E V E R L Y*,
The BRIGANTINE

Washington,

A strong, good vessel for that purpose and a prime sailer.

Any Seamen or Landmen that have an inclination to
Make their Fortunes in a few Months,

May have an Opportunity, by applying to

JOHN DYSON.

Beverly, September 17th. 1776.

Privateering was profitable in 1776 as this broadside for a Beverly, Mass., brigantine promises; more so than soldiering.