

**BARTHOLOMEW GOSNOLD**  
**and**  
**MARTHAES VINEYARD**

*An Arrangement of the Narratives  
That Tell of His Landings*

*With Notes and a Commentary*

by  
Warner F. Gookin

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June, 1946

Price, **FIFTEEN CENTS**

## A Prefatory Note

Gabriel Archer's "Relation of Capitaine Gosnol's Voyage" of 1602, supplemented by John Brereton's "Relation" of the same voyage, seems to the writer, contrary to published opinions, to describe the following course. After Gosnold had landed in Cape Cod Bay, and had seen the eastern end of Nantucket Sound from a hill on the lower end of the Cape, the explorers sailed south on May 16, keeping well east of Nantucket Shoals.

Confusion has arisen from the mistaken assumption that he entered the Sound through these shoals; the accounts of Henry Hudson in 1609 and of John Smith in 1614 ought to convince anyone that Gosnold would not have attempted to find his way in. Furthermore, this assumption disregards Archer's statement that while "trending" south, and before reaching "Tucker's Terror", they passed wooded islands.

The explorers rounded Nantucket, passed Tuckernuck, and attempted to double the Southwest Point of Muskeget, "twelve leagues" from Monomoy Point, Cape Cod. Doubling this point, which they named Point Care, ran them into shoal water, which they successfully "quitted", retreating to

deeper waters offshore. However, they "bore up againe with the land", anchoring off the South Shore, within sight of Wasque, which they called Gilbert Point. Rough water on the shoals kept them there throughout the 17th.

The weather moderating on the 18th, they sent out a small boat, which located the safe entrance through Muskeget Channel. That day, Indians from the well populated Chappaquiddick visited them. On the 19th, followed by Indians who ran along the shore, they sailed up Muskeget Channel a league or more, remaining at anchor the 20th. They saw two inlets—the one at Wasque, and the one that separated Capawock from Chappaquiddick.

On the 21st, they made a short circuit of Nantucket Sound. First they sailed "east by south" along the north shore of Nantucket, looking for the island Gosnold "supposed" he had seen. Then they inspected the Nantucket Shoals from the west end, finding them too shallow for further exploration. Finally turning, they followed the mainland shore southwest. From here on, the narratives are given as printed, each in its original sequence, and without omissions.

## The Narratives

John Brereton

Gabriel Archer

Landing of May 21, late afternoon

(Sub-title relocated from the margin.)

THE FIRST ISLAND  
CALLED(:)

MARTHAES VINEYARD

At length we were come amongst many faire Islands, which we had partly discerned at our first landing; all lying within a league or two one of another, and the outermost not above sixe or seven leagues from the maine: but coming to an anker under one of them, which was about three or foure leagues from the maine, capitaine Gosnold, my selfe, and some others, went ashore, and going round about it, we found it to be foure English miles in compasse, without house or inhabitant, saving a little old house made of boughs, covered with barke, an olde piece of a weare of the Indians, to catch fish, and one or two places where they had made fires.

(In the preceding paragraphs, Archer has referred three times to the "supposed Ilands" which Gosnold saw from Cape Cod.)

(The "opening" below is the one which Archer in the preceding sentence identifies as "that which Capitaine Gosnoll descrieth from Cape Cod".)

From this opening the Mayne lyeth South-west, which coasting along we saw a disinhabited Iland, which so afterward appeared unto us: we bore with it, and named it Marthaes Vineyard; from Shole hope it is eight leagues, in circuit the Iland is five miles, and hath 41 degrees and one quarter of latitude.

### A Note on the Omission of the Size and Location of the Largest Island

(At this point, both accounts follow an inconsistent sequence. Both introduce the name Marthaes Vineyard, in mentioning this small uninhabited island, and add (a) physical features that a square mile island could hardly encompass, and (b) the story of Indians presenting them with cooked fish. This parallelism of incongruities is almost certain evidence that both were guided by a common source, presumably the log of the Concord, which somehow occasioned the confusion.

(A simple solution of this might be the deletion of a sentence to conceal from Sir Walter Raleigh the true size of the Vineyard, and its availability for settlement. The sentence deleted

might have read something like this, if given by Archer: "The next day, comming into the middle of a great Sound, we saw that which we had thought another small Iland, was but the beginning of a mighty one, reaching so far into the west as our eye could see, some three or four leagues at the least, with many stately hills covered with verdure not far from the shore."

(The name Marthaes Vineyard above is obviously misplaced, as it is bestowed before they had had an opportunity to see vines, if indeed there were any on the deserted island. The name belongs here, in the missing sentence describing the size of the Vineyard.)



## Landing of May 22

The chiefest trees on this Island, are Beeches and Cedars; the outward parts all overgrown with low bushie trees, three or foure foot in height, which beare some kind of fruits, as appeared by their blossomes; Strawberies, red and white, as sweet and much bigger than ours in England; Rasberies, Gooseberies, Hurtleberies, and such an incredible store of Vines, as well in the wooddie part of the Island, where they run upon every tree, as on the outward parts, that we could not goe for treading upon them: also, many springs of excellent sweet water, and a great standing lake of fresh water, neere the sea side, an English mile in compasse, which is maintained with the springs running exceeding pleasantly thorow the wooddie grounds which are very rockie.

Here are also in this Island, great store of Deere, which we saw, and other beasts, as appeared by their tracks, as also divers fowles, as Cranes, Hernshawes, Bitters, Geese, Mallards, Teales, and other fowles, in great plenty; also great store of pease, which growe in certaine plots all the Island over.

## Landing of May 23

On the North side of the Island we found many huge bones and ribbes of Whales. This Island, as also all the rest of these Islands, are full of all sorts of stones fit for building; the sea sides all covered with stones, many of them glistening and shining like minerall stones, and very rockie: also the rest of these Islands are replenished with these commodities, and upon some of them inhabitants; as upon an Island to the Northward, and within two leagues of this; yet we found no townes, nor many of their houses, although we saw manie Indians,

The place most pleasant; for the two-and-twentieth, we went ashoare, and found it full of Wood, Vines, Goosebery bushes, Hurtberies, Raspices, Eglentine, etc. Heere we had cranes, Hearnies, Shoulers, Geese, and divers other Birds which there at that time upon the Clifffes being sandie with some Rockie stones, did breed and had young. In this place we saw Deere; heere we rode in eight fathome neere the shoare where we took great store of Cod,—as before at Cape Cod, but much better.

The three-and-twentieth we weyed, and towards night came to Anchor at the North-west part of this Iland, where the next morn-

ing offered unto us fast running thirteene Savages appparelled as

which are tall, big boned men, all naked, saving they cover their privy parts with a black tewed skin, much like a Blacksmiths apron, tied about their middle and betweene their legs behinde: they gave us of their fish readie boiled, (which they carried in a basket made of twigges, not unlike our osier) whereof we did eat, and judged them to be fresh water fish: they gave us also of their Tobacco, which they drinke (i. e., smoke) greene, but dried into powder, very strong and pleasant, and much better than any I have tasted in England: the necks of their pipes are made of clay hard dried (whereof in that Island is great store both red and white) the other part is a piece of hollow copper, very finely closed and semented together. We gave unto them certaine trifles, as knives, points, and such like, which they much esteemed.

## Landing of May 24

(Sub-title from margin.)

## ELIZABETHS ISLAND

From thence we went to another Island, to the Northwest of this, and within a league or two of the maine, . . . On the Northwest side of this Island, neere to the sea side, is a standing Lake of fresh water, almost three English miles in compasse, in the midst whereof stands a plot of woody ground, an acre in quantitie or not above: . . . Now the next day, we determined to fortifie our selves in a little plot of ground in the midst of the Lake above mentioned. . . .

aforesaid, and armed with Bowes and Arrowes without any feare. They brought Tobacco, Deerskins, and some sodden fish. These offered themselves unto us in great familiaritie, who seemed to be well-conditioned. They came more rich in copper than any before. This Iland is sound, and hath no danger about it.

The four-and-twentieth, we set saile and doubled the Cape of another Iland next unto it, which wee called Dover Cliffe, and then came into a faire Sound, where wee roade all night; the next morning wee sent off our Boate to discover another Cape, that lay betweene us and the Mayne, from which were a ledge of Rockes a mile into the Sea, but all above water, and without danger, we went about them, and came to Anchor in eight fadome, a quarter of a mile from the shoare, in one of the statliest Sounds that ever I was in.

This called wee Gosnolls Hope; the North banke whereof is the Mayne, which stretcheth East and West. This Iland Captain Gosnoll called Elizabeths Ile, where we determined our abode: the distance betweene every of these Ilands is, viz. from Marthaes Vineyard to Dover Cliffe, halfe a league over the Sound, thence to Elizabeths Ile one league distant. . . .



## A Brief Commentary

"A disinhabited Iland." If not a fiction, this might be Muskeget; the explorers could have returned to it after the circuit of the Sound, but this is improbable. East Chop should be considered; it might have been mistaken for an island, if the explorers assumed that the waters of Squash Meadow Pond and the salt pond north of the Lagoon met behind the screen of the forest. Location, size, absence of Indians, and a suitable place for a weir (the outlet of the pond), all correspond to the description. Landing from the northeast, in the late afternoon of the 21st, they might easily have escaped detection by the Indians of Sengekontacket and the Lagoon.

"Called" in the sub-title, "Call" is the correct Elizabethan verb meaning "to give a name to"; the verb "name" in that sense was not used by good writers. For a similar use, compare Luke 1:62, "how he would have him called." In the sub-title, "called" should be construed with The First Island; the sense is, "The first Island called (or, named) was Marthae's Vineyard."

"The great standing Lake." This was undoubtedly Great James Pond at Lambert's Cove. Location near the sea-side, size, fresh water, fed by springs and small streams, and rocky terrain, all correspond. It is reported that grape vines still survive in the bordering thickets. Indians would not be encountered here, as it was six or seven miles from the nearest villages; and the locality, in the shadow of Manitou's Hill with its sacred Dancing Field, was quite likely taboo.

"Eight fathome neere the shoare." This is the depth of water midway between the points of Lambert's Cove, on government charts.

"Great store of Cod." Joseph C. Allen reports that there have been times in this generation, especially before dredgers worked through the Sound,

when cod were plentiful in the rocky areas of the Lambert's Cove region. The creek of James Pond is a her-ring creek; the cod in the middle of May would be feeding on them, which would account for their excellent quality.

"We weyed, and towards night came to Anchor at the Northwest part of this Island." Here Archer betrays himself; he forgets that he is supposed to be writing about an island five miles in circumference. This second landing was somewhere between Roaring Brook, and Menemsha, which the explorers considered the western end of Marthae's Vineyard (see below).

"An Island to the Northward." Note that nothing is said about leaving a small island to go to a large one to the north, as some have assumed was done. The vines and the red and white clay, mentioned later, are on one and the same island. When they leave Marthae's Vineyard, as reported later, they sail to Elizabeth's Island "to the Northwest of this". Brereton is awkward in expression here, because he is remembering that he must not say how fully populated this large island really is.

"Fast running" Indians. The Indians have seen them from the hills—perhaps Prospect—and come running when they see the ship anchor. In their interest in what they are about to relate, both Brereton and Archer fail to realize that even a small party of thirteen are too many for an uninhabited island.

"Clay . . . (whereof in that Island is a great store, both red and white)." This is the clearest proof that the explorers were on the present Martha's Vineyard. They probably investigated the deposits of red clay near Roaring Brook (brickworks) and the outcroppings of white clay half a mile to the west (kaolin works). Note the explicit statement that the red and

white clay deposits are on an island. This precludes the possibility that the explorers thought this island to be part of the mainland: how any historian could impute that mistake to these skilled explorers passes comprehension.

"Another Island next to it." Whether Gay Head, called Dover Cliffe, at the time was actually separated, or whether the explorers mistakenly assumed so, is immaterial. The distance, given later as "half a league over the Sound", is a chord of the arc of Menemsha Bight, a small "Sound" in itself.

"Then came into a faire Sound." This phrase, which has tripped historians into thinking that in doubling the Head, they sailed from the sea into the Sound, must be understood in the light of the complete suppression of all previous reference to Vineyard Sound, necessitated by the suppression of the size of the Vineyard. Starting from Menemsha, the explorers doubled Gay Head for a look at it, then swung north and re-entered the Sound on the Cuttyhunk side, where it could be briefly mentioned for future reference as the Sound south of Elizabeth's Island, without betraying the secret that it was also the large and beautiful Sound running the length of Marthae's Vineyard. In reading, the emphasis should come on the word then, as it was a separate action, not the result of doubling the Head. They were near Cuttyhunk, as they sent out a

small boat to sound around the reef.

"From thence we went to another Island." Brereton, as usual, is disdainful of the navigational details; but his literary short-cut, directly from the island of red and white clay to Cuttyhunk, shows how absurd is the theory that the explorers were sailing in the reverse direction, rounding Dover Cliffe after leaving Noman's.

"From Marthae's Vineyard to Dover Cliffe, half a league." This is the final proof that the explorers intended the name Marthae's Vineyard to cover the whole island—at least from Lambert's Cove to Menemsha. Putting this in resume, Brereton found himself, in Nantucket Sound, with a semi-circle of islands within sight, those easterly having been seen from Cape Cod; one at the western end of the semi-circle (reached by sailing southwest parallel to the mainland) is named Marthae's Vineyard. The name now appears twenty miles more or less farther to the west, on an island with red and white clay (Roaring Brook, not Gay Head) half a league from the supposed island of Dover Cliffe, and directly across (southeast) from Cuttyhunk.

In between these points where we find the name used, is the large and imposing island which they definitely named Marthae's Vineyard; although an adequate and explicit description of it had to be omitted, lest others seize the richest prize of all for conquest and settlement.

