



## ***The Martha's Vineyard Train***

Did Martha's Vineyard really have a train?

Yes! And it was all because Edgartown was jealous of Oak Bluffs.

### Questions

Where did it go?

Why?

What happened to it?

Today, can you go stand on a spot where it ran?

### Lesson

Read the story (attached)

Match the pictures with the story - there's a lot! (pdf)

Hike the trail at the Farm Institute and stand on a spot near where the train ran 150 years ago.

## ***The Martha's Vineyard Train***

Was there really a train on Martha's Vineyard? There was! And it was all because Edgartown was jealous of Oak Bluffs.

About 150 years ago many, many summer visitors came to Oak Bluffs by ferry. And they tended to just stay in Oak Bluffs and not visit anywhere else because they loved Oak Bluffs. Also, there were very few cars and no busses, so they couldn't really get around the Island anyway. What did people look like then? (pics 1,2,3)

The summer visitors stayed in cute gingerbread cottages (4). Or, they stayed in big, fancy hotels. Some came for religious meetings and some came just to have a break from the cities where they lived. People fished, and boated and swam. Or, they just watched people fish, boat and swim (5,6). They flew kites at the huge green park and had picnics on blankets there too. Sometimes they bought lemonade or ice cream. They ate delicious food in restaurants and in their hotels. Business was great in Oak Bluffs!

August was the best because of Illumination Night. People hung paper lanterns all over their gingerbread cottages (7). They sat on their front steps and porches to watch the people stroll by. It was very special.

Edgartown was jealous. Before Oak Bluffs got so popular, Edgartown got all the attention. It was a busy whaling town. Huge ships with tall masts (8) sailed in to the harbor to stock up before going on whale hunts - all around the world! Whales were hunted for their oil, which was needed to light up people's homes and businesses (9). Lots and lots of interesting people were always coming or going. The town was busy and bustling. Sometimes the whalers brought interesting souvenirs and cool objects from faraway (10) like this ivory fan with peacock feathers from China or this specially carved whale tooth called scrimshaw (11).

But then, someone discovered oil in the ground. Whale oil wasn't needed anymore. Edgartown fell quiet. No more big ships. No more whaling crews stocking up. The town lost a lot of business. The whales were probably happy about this (12) but the people who had businesses were not. The town and the waterfront started to look sad and run down (13). Also, it was very boring. No one came at all.

What could Edgartown do?

Someone in Edgartown had an idea. We could get a train! It can take people from Oak Bluffs and bring them to Edgartown! Tourists can go to South Beach. They can swim and fish

and boat there! And there could be a big fancy hotel. With a bowling alley! And there could be picnics and clam bakes! It will be awesome!

So they got a train (14). It wasn't very big. It picked people up right off the ferry in Oak Bluffs. (15)

And it ran right along the State Beach next to Sengekontacket (16) . Then it went through a special building called a "depot" (17) and turned toward South Beach. It went right along the edge of the cemetery and then to get to the water, it went right across where the Farm Institute is today.

And they built did build a fancy hotel called the Mattakeset Lodge. The train went right up to it (18). They made posters to tell everyone about it (19). It would be awesome! What could go wrong?

Well.... people worried that the horses grazing in the nearby pastures along the route would get upset. People worried that winter storms would wash over the train tracks and ruin them. And what if people just didn't come? What if Oak Bluffs was just more fun?

It turns out, sadly, people didn't want to leave Oak Bluffs to visit Edgartown. And the train tracks sometimes did get washed out. And it had other problems. The train never got popular and never made money.

But, it ran for 22 years. Then it closed, as did the hotel. It was a good idea but it just didn't work. Still, it's fun to think about a train on Martha's Vineyard.

### Take A Hike

Go the Farm Institute and park. Walk on the dirt road towards the airfield to the trail head (20). It's at the intersection of Aero Rd. and Mattakesett Way.

Walk the grass trail until it turns left (about ¼ of a mile). Turn left and walk another ¼ mile until you see a sign (21).

CONGRATULATIONS! You're there. You're standing where the train came down from the depot and made the turn to the bay where the hotel was. Can you see the railroad tracks on the sign? Can you make a Woooo Hooo train noise?

### More Options

- Draw and color a picture for us! All the museum photos of the train are black and white. We would love a colored picture of The Martha's Vineyard Train for our collection. Email [aducharme@mvmuseum.org](mailto:aducharme@mvmuseum.org)
- Email us a photo of your hike.
- Find the site of the old depot in Edgartown. It might be a market that also sells gas.

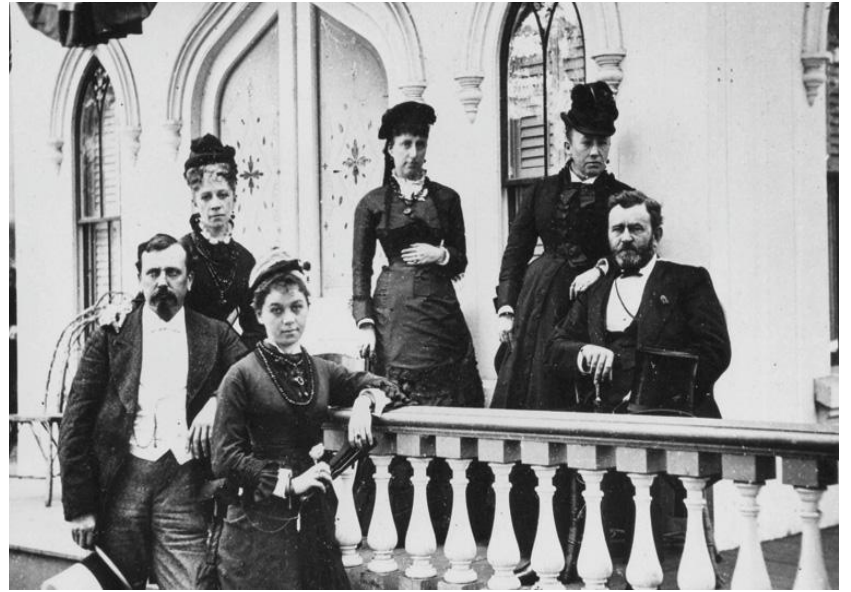
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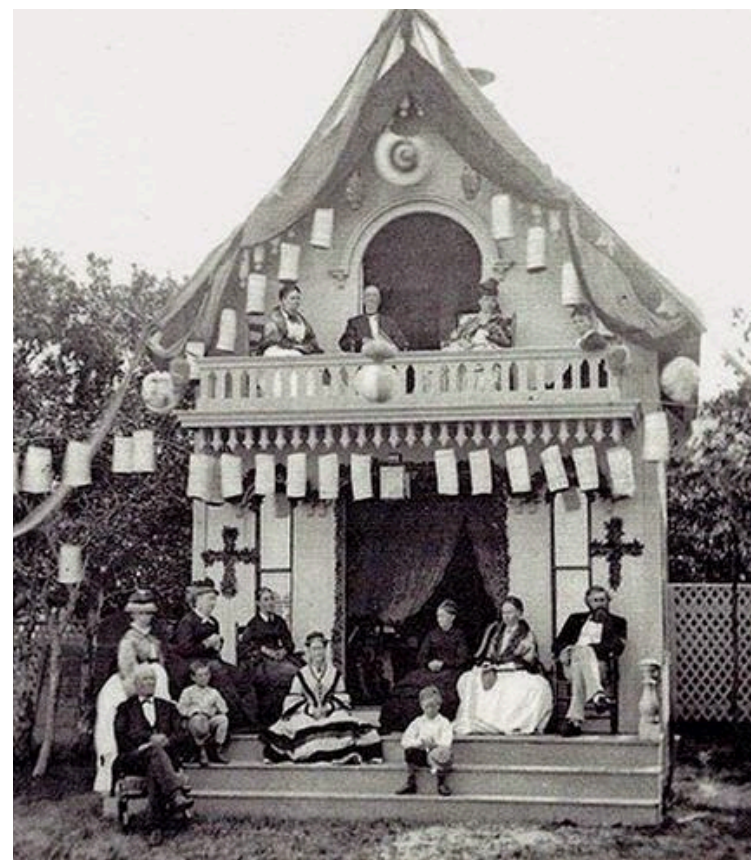


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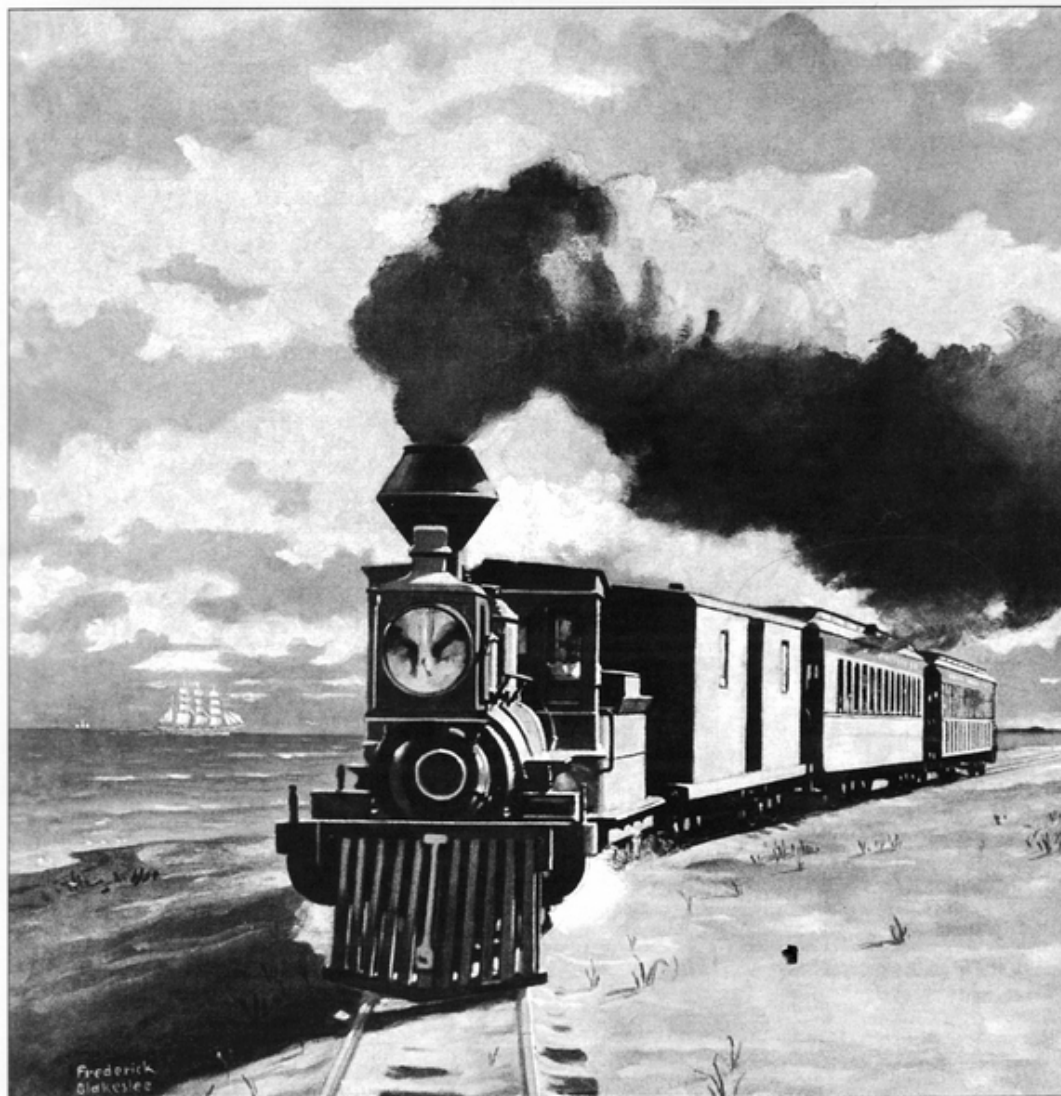






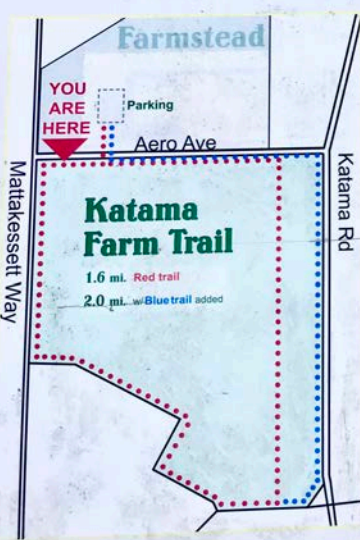
# RAILS ACROSS MARTHA'S VINEYARD

*STEAM NARROW GAUGE AND TROLLEY LINES*



HERMAN PAGE

## Welcome to the Katama Farm Trail



**YOU ARE HERE** Parking Aero Ave Katama Rd Mattakesett Way

**Katama Farm Trail**  
1.6 mi. Red trail  
2.0 mi. Blue trail added

The Katama Farm trail is a place of sometimes competing dreams. As early as 1872, there were plans to turn these fields into hundreds of vacation homes. With some of the best agricultural soils on the island, the fields have been a prized resource for farmers. And for conservationists, this land represents a delicate habitat with rare plant and wildlife species that need protection.

As you walk this trail, you will see how tourism, recreation, agriculture and conservation live together on today's Katama Farm. It is an ever-changing ecosystem. Human decisions—big and small—play a major role in its balance.

In the late 1970's, the balance almost tipped forever. The owner at the time had approval to build some 800 houses on Katama Farm. Streets were mapped out and named.


But when the developer went bankrupt in 1977, a unique collaboration was formed, led by the Vineyard Conservation Society, Representatives from the Edgartown Conservation Commission, the Martha's Vineyard Commission, the Vineyard Open Land Foundation, the Katama Association, private businesses and citizens worked together, calling themselves The Committee-to-Try-to-Do-Something. After two years of negotiations and fund raising, the Town of Edgartown became the owner of Katama Farm, now forever restricted to use for agriculture and recreation. The Farm Institute became the farm tenant in 2005.

As you use this beautiful trail, please pause to thank the Committee-to-Try-to-Do-Something and what they did.

**For your safety and the preservation of this beautiful site:**

- Park at the Farm Institute parking lot.
- **Dogs MUST be leashed on the Katama Farm Trail.** This is the law everywhere in Edgartown. **NO DOGS ARE ALLOWED IN THE FARMSTEAD AREA.**
- Deer ticks and wood ticks are common in this area. Follow posted recommendations.
- Carry in, carry out. There are no trash receptacles on the trail.
- The Katama Farm Trail has mowed and packed grass and a dirt road. While it is rough in spots, it is flat and suitable for use by wheelchairs designed for outdoor use.

*The Farm Institute is grateful to the Edey Foundation for funding the signage for this trail and for all its support of conservation efforts on Martha's Vineyard. Special thanks also to the Vineyard Conservation Society for inspiration and information for this project.*

 **The Farm Institute**  
MARtha's VINEYARD



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## The Train to Katama



Whaling—once Edgartown's chief industry—was dying out in the mid 1800's. The town was looking for new businesses. Cottage City—which later became Oak Bluffs—was a boomtown of summer visitors, with the Camp Meeting as a draw. How could Edgartown lure those visitors from the Cottage City steamship landing over to Edgartown?

The answer was a railroad. A narrow gauge track was built and in 1874 a steam engine ran from Oak Bluffs to South Beach and to the Mattakesett Lodge (in the area of the Winnetu resort) right across from the Katama Farm.


The train had many problems, including blowing sand that frequently covered the tracks.

The dream of drawing all those visitors away from Cottage City never came true. The owners could not cover their costs. The summer of 1895 was the end of the experiment.

Like wildlife and plants, human ideas can also become extinct. The train to Katama is no longer part of our ecosystem. What is left are some rises in the pasture where the tracks once were and an occasional railroad spike for a souvenir.

Courtesy of the Martha's Vineyard Museum

 **The Farm Institute**  
MARtha's VINEYARD

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