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150 Years of Island Industry



Manufacturing Industries
from 1810 to 1960

Commemorating the Great War

Gay Head Shipwreck: A Mystery Solved



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FORGOTTEN STORIES, REDISCOVERED

“There are eight million stories in the Naked City,” an unseen narrator intones over the closing image of Jules Dassin’s 1948 crime-drama film. “This has been one of them.”

Martha’s Vineyard is smaller than New York, of course, but the implication that Dassin’s narrator leaves hanging in the air as the credits roll is as true of this small island as it is of the great metropolis to the west: Wherever there are people, there will be stories, and no matter how many of those stories we tell, there will always be more stories waiting, untold.

The three untold stories explored in this issue were known once, at least partially, but have faded from memory. Revisiting them here, now, allows us to see through fresh eyes, and revisit them from unexpected angles. The stories of some of individual businesses such the West Tisbury woolen mill and the Chilmark paint factory have been told before in these pages, but the larger story of industrial enterprise of which they are part has never been fully explored. The ceremonies surrounding the World War I memorials in Edgartown and Tisbury were reported on at the time (1920 and 1922), but never revisited with the benefit of hindsight and an eye to the larger political context in which they took place. The details of what has long been known simply as the “Gay Head Shipwreck of 1782” faded from memory when the last eyewitnesses died and were never recovered . . . until a new generation of digital tools made it possible to extract them from long-forgotten Revolutionary-era newspapers.

— A. Bowdoin Van Riper

On the Cover: David Look’s grist mill on the Tiasquam River in Chilmark. Look’s conversion of a second mill, in West Tisbury, to process wool was one of the Island’s earliest manufacturing ventures.

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Island Industries: An Overview, 1810–1960

by A. BOWDOIN VAN RIPER



Wamsutta Mills in New Bedford, around 1900, from the pamphlet *Views of New Bedford*. MV Museum Photo Collection, File 1950.

THE WORD “INDUSTRY” calls forth a very specific image: one of vast buildings filled with clattering machinery and surmounted by towering brick smokestacks streaming gray and black plumes. It summons pictures of the stockyards and meatpacking houses of Chicago, the automobile plants of Detroit, and the steel mills of Pittsburgh. Closer to home, it evokes Samuel Slater’s cotton-spinning mill on the banks of the Blackstone River in Pawtucket, and all the outposts of the industry it spawned: the mills of Fall River, Taunton, and the Merrimack Valley among them. We associate “industry” with enterprises on the scale of New Bedford’s Wamsutta Mill or Lawrence’s Ayer Mill and so think of it as something that exists—and *could* only exist—on the mainland. It seems patently absurd that the Vineyard could have industries at all, let alone an “industrial age.” Yet, it has had both.

A. Bowdoin Van Riper is Research Librarian at the Martha’s Vineyard Museum, and editor of the *Quarterly*.

The difference between a family that uses a spinning wheel and hand loom to turn wool into salable cloth, and the vast factories of (say) the American Woolen Company is quantitative rather than qualitative. Both are engaged—albeit at vastly different scales—in the same enterprise: using human labor, amplified by machinery, to transform raw materials into finished goods that (because of the value added by the transformation) can be sold for greater profits. It is the act of technologically aided transformation that makes an industry, and by that standard the Island had a part-industrial economy from the beginning of the nineteenth century to the middle of the twentieth. The industrial history of the Vineyard awaits its historian.¹ What follows is an overview of some of its highlights—a reminder of what once was.

The Whaling Fleet

Nineteenth-century writers referred to “the whale fishery,” implying on one hand that whales were fish and on the other hand that the business of catching them was no different than that of catching cod, had-dock, or mackerel. Neither was true, and although it took a landmark court case to establish that (for legal purposes) whales were not fish,² it was evident to anyone who practiced it that whaling was not fishing. Fish—whether taken by harpoon, line, or net—were preserved intact (or nearly so) until the vessel made port, and then sold intact to dealers on the docks. Whales, because of their size and the products that made them commercially valuable, had to be processed while still at sea: reduced from a great living creature to barrels of oil, casks of spermaceti wax, and bundles of baleen. The development of ships capable of carrying whaleboats and their crews far offshore laid the foundations of the American whaling industry as we know it, but so did the development of tools and techniques for processing whales at sea.³

The ships of the offshore whaling fleet were, for years at a time, places of rest and refuge for their crews, but they were also places of work. Popular depictions of offshore whaling in the Age of Sail emphasize, understandably, the excitement of the chase and the kill, but the crew’s labor only began when the whale they were chasing went “fin out” and died. Cutting the valuable parts away from the rest of the carcass, hoisting them aboard,

1 The most comprehensive attempt to date is Janet Van Tassel’s unpublished Tufts University MA thesis, *The Economic Transformation of Martha’s Vineyard* (1974), a copy of which is in the Museum archives. Janet Van Tassel, “The Vineyard’s First Business Boom, 1815-1860,” *Dukes County Intelligencer*, November 1975, pp. 33-50, is a sample of the longer work.

2 See D. Graham Burnett, *Trying Leviathan: The Nineteenth Century New York Court Case That Put the Whale on Trial and Challenged the Order of Nature* (2007).

3 Edwin R. Ambrose, “Early Whaling and the Development of Onboard Trypots,” *Dukes County Intelligencer*, November 2000, pp. 87-90.



A typical offshore whaling vessel, the bark *Swallow*; the tryworks, used to render blubber into oil, would be located behind the foremast. MV Museum Photo Collection, File 1850a.

and processing them so that they could be stored safely and compactly for the remainder of the voyage was a complex, elaborately choreographed process performed with specialized tools according to established routines.⁴ It temporarily transformed the ship into a factory and the crew into laborers whose jobs—though they had no precise parallel ashore—would have been instantly familiar to the slaughterhouse workers of Chicago or the foundrymen of Pittsburgh. The transformation, however, was always temporary. When the last barrel of oil had been cooled, stoppered, and stowed, the fires that heated the trypots would be extinguished, the butchering tools stowed in their racks, and the decks scrubbed clean of grease, soot, and gore. The vessel, having been temporarily transformed from a ship to a floating factory, would become a ship again . . . until the next whale was taken and the cycle began again.

4 Eric J. Dolin, *Leviathan: The History of Whaling in America* (2008), pp. 265-268 is a concise summary.



Daniel Fisher's mill pond and grain mill in North Tisbury, around 1950. MV Museum Photo Collection, File 1443.

Fisher's Grain Mill (North Tisbury)

The Vineyard's contribution to the offshore whaling industry was, if measured in raw numbers, minor. It is well-known that number of whaling voyages that sailed from Edgartown (let alone Holmes Hole, today's Vineyard Haven) was dwarfed by the number that departed from Nantucket, New Bedford, or (in the last decades of the nineteenth century) San Francisco. What is often overlooked, however, is that Edgartown's roster of ships and voyages *also* paled beside those of, for example, Fairhaven, New London, or Sag Harbor. The Vineyard's involvement in whaling, however, was wildly disproportionate to its modest size and small population. Over the course of the whaling era, thousands of Vineyarders sailed as captains and crews on whaling voyages departing from mainland ports. Hundreds, perhaps thousands, owned shares in whaling ships, and others ran (or worked for) businesses that helped to supply and outfit whalers. Dr. Daniel Fisher, who never voyaged further than New Bedford, did both.

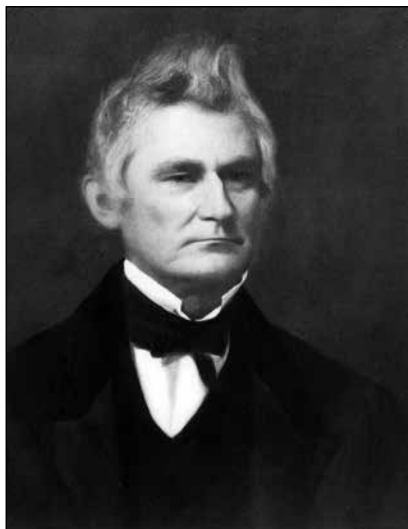
Fisher came to the Island as a physician, but grew rich from his investments in real estate and his involvement in shore-based industries tied to whaling.⁵ One of his early purchases near the Edgartown waterfront was a bakery, which he turned to the production of "hardtack" or "ship's biscuit:" a type of thick, hard cracker that—because of its low moisture

5 For the bigger picture of Fisher's life, see A. Bowdoin Van Riper, "The Mastermind," *Martha's Vineyard Magazine*, September 2019. <https://mvmagazine.com/news/2019/12/01/mastermind>

content—could be packed in barrels ashore and still be (nominally) edible years later when the barrels were opened at sea. Hardtack, along with similarly durable forms of protein like salt beef and salt pork, was a staple of shipboard diets—not just on whaling vessels but on virtually every ship that put to sea—and Fisher set out to be Edgartown’s leading supplier of it. Knowing that making the hardtack he sold was cheaper than buying it from someone else, he extended the principle by building a mill to grind the flour needed to make it.⁶ Located in North Tisbury, at what is now the junction of State Road and North Road, it was powered by a water wheel driven by a stream dammed for the purpose. Undaunted by the lack of a direct route over which to ship his flour from North Tisbury to Edgartown, Fisher had one built.⁷ All his investment in infrastructure could now, however, overcome a more basic problem: The Vineyard was not (and never had been) well-suited to wheat farming, and the land at his disposal could not supply enough grain to meet his needs.

Fisher’s Candle Factory (Edgartown)

Daniel Fisher’s mill and road were part of a scheme to make money off whaling vessels (and other ships) as they fitted out for sea. His oil and candle factory, located on the Edgartown waterfront, existed to serve the needs of whaling ships at the other end of their voyages. Whale oil, like petroleum, was not a single uniform product but a family of closely related products with different properties that suited them for different uses. In the days when lighthouses burned whale oil in their lamps, for example, keepers were supplied with “summer oil” during the warm-weather months and “winter oil” during colder weather. The latter, containing a lower proportion of waxy solids than the former, would remain liquid (and thus usable) at temperatures that would cause the



Portrait of Dr. Daniel Fisher by Cyrus Pease, part of the Museum’s art collection. MV Museum Photo Collection, File 1706a.

6 Fisher thus achieved, on a small scale, the industrialist’s dream of “vertical integration:” buying elements of the supply chain in order to reduce costs. Later in the century, Andrew Carnegie would buy coal and iron mines to feed his steel plants, and Henry Ford would acquire not just parts manufacturers and coachworks but entire rubber plantations in South America.

7 Called “Dr. Fisher’s Road,” it still exists, and is designated one of the Island’s “ancient ways.” See Thomas Dresser, *A Travel History of Martha’s Vineyard* (2019), pp. 34-38.

former to congeal into a gelatinous goo.

Located at the base of the wharf he owned (today's Memorial Wharf) Fisher's "oil factory" was dedicated not manufacturing oil, but to processing it. Fisher bought the oil from incoming ships (paying the owners or their local agents the cash they would then use to pay the captain and crew their allotted shares), strained it, graded it, and repackaged it for sale. Once processed, it was moved up Main Street by wagon and stored at Fisher's "oil pound" at the corner of Pine Street. There, stacked behind a high fence and a locked gate guarded by a watchman, it sat until it could be shipped off-island to Fisher's retail customers: tens of thousands of dollars of portable wealth.⁸ Customers for Fisher's products ranged from the US Lighthouse Board, which sent his oil to light stations throughout New England, to well-to-do homeowners who bought the high-grade candles his factory made from spermaceti, a waxy substance harvested from the massive heads of sperm whales. A superior form of interior illumination that produced a bright light with minimal smoke and soot, spermaceti candles were—because of their expense—also a status symbol: a luxury product for successful captains like Jared Fisher and shipowners like Samuel Osborn, Jr.

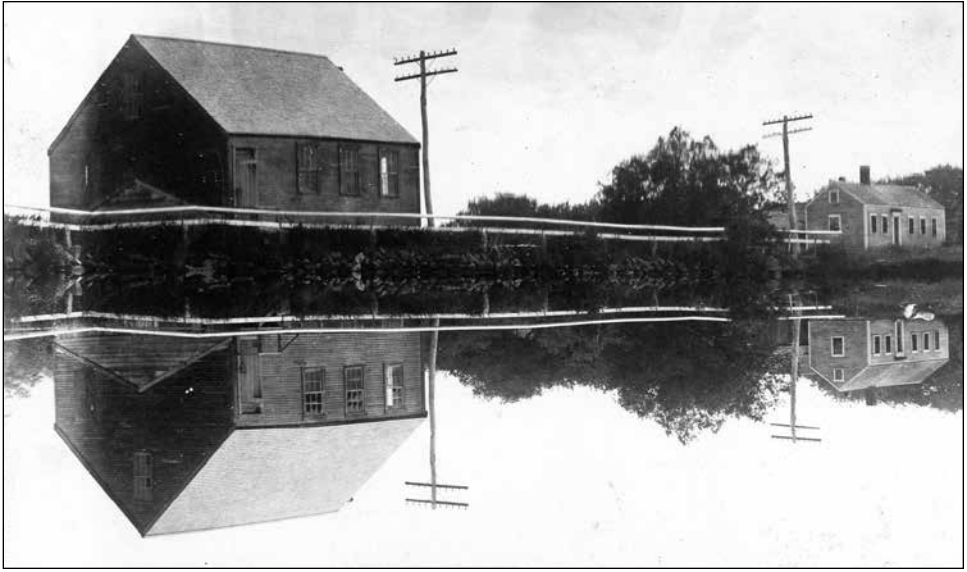
The Woolen Mill (West Tisbury)

Daniel Fisher's grain mill in North Tisbury was one cog in his large and complex capitalist enterprise. Most of the Island's *other* grain mills were more like neighborhood small businesses: Farmers grew their grain, and paid the local miller to process it for them. Limited travel distance was a selling point in a world of bad roads and animal-drawn wagons, and so mills tended (up to a point) to proliferate. There was a grain mill on the Tiasquan River, near today's West Tisbury-Chilmark border, as early as 1668, and Sylvanus Cottle established one on the Old Mill River in (West) Tisbury center sometime between 1730 and 1760.⁹ David Look, who by that point already owned the mill on the Tiasquan, acquired the one on the Old Mill River in 1809. Not wanting to compete with himself, Look converted his new purchase into a carding mill, using the water wheel to drive machines that cleaned and straightened raw wool by combing it between paddles studded with short, stiff wire bristles.¹⁰

8 Fisher got out of the oil business as the availability of cheaper alternatives to whale oil caused prices to fall. The oil pound was torn down and replaced by a private home that eventually became, and remains today, the Dukes County Jail.

9 Tisbury, in the mid-1700s and for many years after, encompassed West Tisbury as well as present-day Tisbury. The present-day village of West Tisbury was the center of political, economic, and spiritual activity in the town; Holmes Hole (today's Vineyard Haven) was, until the Revolution, a growing but still isolated outpost.

10 This section is based on: Charles E. Banks, *History of Martha's Vineyard* (1911), Vol. II, Annals of West Tisbury, pp. 100-105; Dionis Coffin Riggs, "The Old



The Satinet Mill in West Tisbury, around 1900. MV Museum Photo Collection, File 1442.

Look's conversion of the mill was a practical business decision—sheep were central to Island agriculture, and wool was a valuable export—but also a prescient one. The mechanization of the textile industry had been underway for a half-a-century in Britain, but only twenty years in the New England. Whether he knew it or not, Look was placing the Island far closer to the cutting edge of industrial progress than its size and isolation would suggest it would be. Look ran the mill for 28 years, and his widow (after his death in 1837) kept it going for another 8 before selling it to Capt. Thomas Bradley. A merchant captain from Holmes Hole, Bradley had retired from the sea at 40 and invested his substantial earnings in a series of shore-side businesses. He surveyed the nearly century-old mill building and had it demolished and rebuilt, replacing the old wooden walls with brick and the old wooden mill wheel with an iron one six feet in diameter. Bradley was also responsible (probably) for the damming of the Old Mill River, which channeled and intensified its flow, providing more power to the wheel, and (certainly) for the installation of new machinery that enabled the rebuilt mill to not just process wool, but produce woven cloth.

Satinet, a tightly woven wool fabric that—because of its durability and resistance to wind and water—was used in sailors' overcoats, became the mill's signature product, so much so that it was frequently referred to as "the Satinet Mill." A story, probably apocryphal, describes a sailor using

Mill River," *Dukes County Intelligencer*, August 1985, pp. 25-35; Dionis Coffin Riggs, *History of the Old Mill* (undated); and "Reminiscences of the Old Mill" (1980), RU 316 (Martha's Vineyard Garden Club Records), Box 6, Folder 19.

his satinet coat throughout a multi-year voyage, then returning home repurposing it for two years as part of a scarecrow on his farm, all without visible signs of wear. At its peak under Bradley, the mill did \$10,000 worth of business a year—much of it, doubtless, in sales of Satinet. Bradley sold the mill to Henry Cleveland in 1859, and Cleveland kept it going for another fifteen years, but by then it was competing against mainland mills of vastly greater size, which could produce similar products at lower costs. The last batch of satinet, produced at the mill in 1873, was advertised the way a craft beer or artisanal cheese might be today: “far superior to any other goods of their class, as they are made of the best of Vineyard wool after the old-fashioned pound to the yard rule.” No longer able to compete on price, Cleveland relied on quality, and nostalgia. The mill was sold, and shut down, the following year.

Boot & Shoe Company June 11/60	
Assets	
Notes Receivable	2155.88
Bills	3522.08
Shoes on hand	2515.00
Stock & Machinery	1800.20
Shop & Fixtures	251.00
Cash	163.00
Total Assets	11421.24
	<hr/>
	111 00 12
Balance	321.12
	<hr/>
	300.00
	<hr/>
	21 12
Cash paid Women for filling shoes	703.56
" " Men " "	2244.48
Total Paid	2948.04
All which is respectfully Submitted	
Attest W. J. Morgan Pres.	

Inventory of assets of the Dukes County Boot and Shoe Company, 1861. MV Museum, RU 419 (Dukes County Boot and Shoe Company Records), Box 1, Folder 2.

Dukes County Boot and Shoe (Edgartown)

The history of shoe manufacturing in Massachusetts was over a century long when the Dukes County Boot and Shoe Company was founded in Edgartown in 1859. The “ten-footer” system introduced by Welsh immigrant John Dagyr in 1750 organized 1-6 craftsmen in a single small building, where they used standardized methods to produce shoes to order for local merchants. Even without mechanization, the system made it possible for Massachusetts factories to manufacture 15 million pair of shoes and boots a year by 1830. Twenty years later, the development of sewing machines ca-

pable of stitching leather marked the beginnings of mechanization in the industry, which continued to grow steadily until it peaked just after 1900.

The Edgartown operation was located on Dock Street, an industrial district housing pump- and block-makers, blacksmiths, and Daniel Fisher's whale oil plant, among other businesses. An advertisement from July 1859 announced that the new firm would make "men's, boy's and youth's buffs, kips, and split brogans, which they will sell on as favorable terms as can be bought elsewhere. They will also make to order, calf, goat, enameled, imitation goat and patent leather goods..." Under the leadership of president, Nathaniel M. Jernegan, the company manufactured over 16,000 pairs of shoes in its first year. The business had enlisted over 20 investors by 28 March 1859. Members of the board included; S. W. Crosby, Edgar Marchant, Samuel Osborn, Jr., Henry Pease, Kilborn Smith and William Munroe among others. By 1861 it was clear that the company was struggling financially; Jernegan resigned as president and a committee was appointed to settle the affairs of the company. Records indicate that the company's debts were not fully resolved until 1865.¹¹

Roaring Brook Brickworks (Chilmark)

The highlands along the north shore of the Vineyard include rich deposits of clay, most famously at Gay Head but also at other places, as far up the coast as Makonikey Head at the northeast corner of Lambert's Cove. One particularly rich deposit lies a bit north of Menemsha, where a stream known as Roaring Brook runs into the sea and the highlands briefly flatten into a grassy plain and a broad stony beach. Clay has doubtless been dug from the north shore deposits long before written records were kept of the digging, and Chilmark historian Peter Colt Josephs once suggested that Islanders may have been making bricks at Roaring Brook, at least on a small scale, in the early 1700s. The brickworks whose ruins are visible at Roaring Brook today, however, is considerably newer, built by the firm of Smith & Barrows sometime between the mid-1830s and 1850.¹² The plant was large by Island standards, employing a dozen men to dig the clay, press it into molds, fire it in a wood-fueled kiln, and then cool and stack the finished bricks for transport.¹³ The business was seasonal, and oral tra-

11 A small portion of the business records of the company make up RU 419 (Dukes County Boot and Shoe Company Records).

12 Published references to the brick-making operation are a thicket of conflicting information, most of which is presented without citations. A full-length article on the Roaring Brook Brickworks, designed to resolve the conflicts and present as coherent and complete a history of the business as possible, is scheduled for the May 2021 *Quarterly*.

13 Charles E. Banks, *History of Martha's Vineyard* (1911), Vol. 2, Annals of Chilmark, p. 69; Arthur R. Railton, *The History of Martha's Vineyard* (2006), 185.



The Roaring Brook Brickworks in the 1880s, near the end of its operational life. MV Museum Photo Collection, File 1542.

dition suggests that much of the labor was provided by French-Canadian migrant workers who were housed on site in a two-story brick dormitory known locally as the “Frenchman’s Boardinghouse.” The annual output of the brickworks in its mid-nineteenth-century heyday was well over half-a-million bricks per year.¹⁴

Isolated by land but readily accessible by sea, the Roaring Brook Brickworks exported its wares aboard schooners that tied up at their wharf. It’s said that they went into the walls of buildings in Providence, Boston, New Bedford, and Fall River. It seems likely that they were sold locally for use in chimneys, fireplaces, and foundations, and William Waterway speculated that the 1856 brick tower of the Gay Head Light, along with the 1856 keeper’s house (torn down in 1901), were built with Roaring Brook bricks.¹⁵ Three farms in Chilmark, all near Roaring Brook, have unusual brick barns that, according to local tradition, were constructed with bricks that were rejected by the manufacturer and made available at low or no cost.¹⁶

The decline of the Roaring Brook operation had traditionally been attributed to the its progressive deforestation of the surrounding hillsides. Trees for wood to fire the kiln, once abundant, became scarce, and the

14 Banks gives the annual output at 600,000 in the 1850s; Railton quotes a figure of 700,000 from what appears to be an 1859 *Gazette* article (p. 207), and later suggests 800,000 in 1880 (p. 268)

15 William Waterway, *Gay Head Light: The First Lighthouse on Martha’s Vineyard* (2014), pp. 54-66.

16 Peter Colt Josephs, *The Remarkable Brick Barns of Martha’s Vineyard* (1973), pp. 1-3. <https://mvmuseum.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Josephs-1973.pdf>

manufacture of bricks ended soon afterward, though sales continued until existing stocks were used up. A brief attempt to revive operations in the 1890s lasted only a few years, and the site fell permanently into disrepair. The buildings and wharf are long-since gone, but a tall brick chimney, granite sluiceway, and rusted machinery remain.



The Chilmark Paint Mill and its 14 employees, around 1885. MV Museum Photo Collection, File 1543.

The Paint Mill (Chilmark)

“Paint,” in the eighteenth century and much of the nineteenth, was not the premixed, ready-to-use product we think of today, but dry pigment that had to be mixed with oil prior to application.¹⁷ Producing it required digging, drying, and finely grinding clay, then packing it into barrels for shipment—a process made simpler if the processing plant was located near the clay deposits. A small paint mill existed at Gay Head as early as 1764, and a second was established at Roaring Brook in Chilmark by Francis and Hiram Nye of Falmouth, who also owned a paint store in Holmes Hole. The day-to-day operation of the paint mill, which stood a half-mile inland from the sea, was overseen by a Chilmarker: William Manter. It continued into the 1850s, but for reasons lost to history Manter turned his attention to grinding grain and running a general store patronized by local farmers and the employees of the nearby brickworks.

¹⁷ John O. Flender, “Chilmark’s Paint Mill, an Ancient Manufactory,” *Dukes County Intelligencer*, August 2005, pp. 3-19, on p. 3. The following paragraphs are based on Flender’s comprehensive article, which was based in part on the records in RU 418 (Paint Mill Records).

Chilmark's second paint mill—better-known and longer-lived than the first—was founded by Franklin King of Boston, who hired Lindley Moore Wing of Falmouth as his local agent. The mill, powered by a water wheel supplemented by a steam engine, was erected at Howland Brook, just north of Cape Higgon: about a mile-and-a-half north of Roaring Brook. In operation by the fall of 1865, it was designed to supply King's Boston-based firm E. & F. King—importers and distributors of paints, dyes, and chemicals—with a steady supply of pigments: red and yellow in quantity, and smaller amounts of black, white, blue, and umber. It was destroyed by fire in January 1866, but rebuilt on an even larger scale, and became a wholly owned subsidiary of E. & F. King in June of the same year. The mill flourished for nearly a decade, shipping thousands of tons of pigment throughout New England and even overseas. Between 1871 and 1873, the mill sold 6,300 barrels of red ochre pigment (850 tons) to a single customer: A. Sampson and Sons of Hallowell, ME.

As with so many Vineyard manufacturing enterprises, however, the good times didn't last. The mill operated only sporadically after 1875, closing for long stretches between less and less frequent orders. Company records show that a total of 647 barrels (90 tons) of pigment were shipped in all of 1876 and 1877. By 1884, the year before the only extant photograph of the mill was taken, 300 barrels (40 tons) of pigment constituted a large order. Once, the schooners that called at the company wharf would have loaded three times that amount for a single trip to the mainland. The last recorded shipment of paint left the mill in 1893, and in November 1897 Franklin King sold the land, buildings, and machinery to Chilmark attorney Everett Allen Davis. The once-thriving business had been capitalized, in 1870, at \$25,000; Davis got it for \$300.

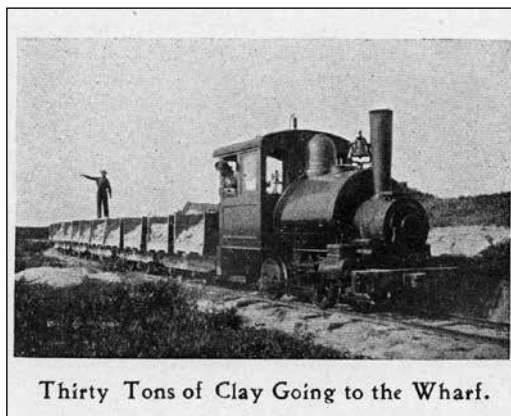
Kaolin and Clay Products Company (Makonikey)

Established in the 1890s in an effort to exploit newly discovered clay deposits at Makonikey, the Kaolin and Clay Products Company put out an impressive brochure to woo would-be investors.¹⁸ The company's site on the shores of Vineyard Sound, it declared, stood atop 9 million tons of kaolin and 6 million tons of fire clay. Blended together in the correct proportions, the brochure promised, they could be used to manufacture fire brick and furnace linings superior to those then in use, as well as "electrical porcelains, sanitary ware, yellow ware, Rockingham ware, C. C. ware, and architectural terra cotta." The site also offered abundant water from wells which also supplied the nearby hotel and its surrounding cottages, and rich deposits of lignite, a low-grade brown coal that could partially

¹⁸ A copy of the brochure is in RU 633 (Martha's Vineyard Businesses Collection), Box 1, Folder 21.

substitute for more expensive bituminous coal in firing the brick kilns. Better yet, the brochure declared, lignite could be processed into a gas that, when burned, would yield more energy than even the best anthracite.

The brochure outlined the impressive facilities that had already been erected: a two-story, 8000-square-foot factory; a kiln, brick-cutting machine, and storehouse; a 500-foot-long wharf; a narrow-gauge railroad to haul the clay to it; and a 2-ton-capacity crane to load clay or bricks onto



Thirty Tons of Clay Going to the Wharf.
An image from the Kaolin and Clay Products Co. brochure, highlighting a key piece of machinery. MV Museum, RU 633 (Martha's Vineyard Businesses), Box 1, Folder 21.

waiting ships. The plant already had the capacity to produce 5,000 to 8,000 fire bricks per day, soon to be expanded to 10,000. As demand rose it could be expanded to 100,000 bricks per day, and remain in operation—paying dividends of 6% or more to stockholders—for over a century. In the end, however, the grand promises failed to materialize. The lignite beds were not the panacea that the company's founders had hoped for, and—starved for fuel, like its predecessor at Roaring Brook—the Makonikey operation quietly shut down operations.

Seven Gates Dairy (North Tisbury)

We tend not to think of farms, let alone the small farms that covered the Island prior to World War II, as industrial enterprises, but Seven Gates in West Tisbury was not an ordinary farm. Nathaniel Southgate Shaler, a professor of geology and physical geography at Harvard, came to the Island to study its glacial terrain and stayed to become a summer resident. He eventually bought up 40 smaller farms, amalgamating them under the Seven Gates name; by the time he died in 1906, he owned over 1600 acres along the north shore. Shaler, like his fellow scientist-turned-farmer Henry L. Whiting, believed in the power of systematically applied knowledge to transform farming, and Seven Gates became a center of agricultural



A worker in the Seven Gates Farm dairy operates a cream separator, c. 1910. MV Museum RU 465 (Basil Welch Photo Collection), Album 29, Photo 146.

innovation in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Willoughby Webb, husband of Shaler's daughter Gabriella, carried on his experiments, and moved to the Island to take over Seven Gates in 1907, the year after Shaler's death.¹⁹

Webb established a model dairying operation at Seven Gates, building a new concrete barn capable of holding 70 cows, and installing the latest in milk-processing, bottling, and sterilizing equipment. He expanded the farm's dairy herd from 50 to 100 registered Jerseys, and distributed their milk in bottles whose caps proclaimed its medically certified pu-

rity and minimum 4% milkfat content. The milk, like that of other Vineyard dairies, was sold locally, but the cheese and butter made from it was shipped to customers across the northeastern United States and Canada. A 1914 *New Bedford Standard Times* article reported that the Seven Gates dairy supplied butter for the tables of the prestigious Chevy Chase Club and Metropolitan Club in Washington. The implication was clear: The clubs, which could afford butter from anywhere, preferred that from Seven Gates. Despite a far-flung customer base, numerous awards, and praise from Secretary of Agriculture David F. Houston, however, the Seven Gates dairy operated for less than fifteen years. By 1920, with labor harder to find and wages rising, it was no longer economically viable.²⁰

19 Elizabeth Bramhall, *Seven Gates Farm: The First One Hundred Years* (1988), p. 33.

20 Bramhall, *Seven Gates Farm*, pp. 33-38.

Priscilla Pearls (Edgartown)

The herring fishery at Mattakeset Creek, which connected Edgartown Great Pond to Katama Bay, had been part of Edgartown's economy for years when Ralph Bodman arrived from Hyannis in 1920. Herring were sold as food, as fertilizer, and as bait for the fishing schooners that sailed from Memorial Wharf to the offshore banks.²¹ Bodman's interest, however, was not in the fish themselves, but in their iridescent scales. Trained as a chemist, but with a background in the jewelry business, he had developed a process for turning herring scales into an emulsion that—when laid over a glass substrate—uncannily mimicked the look of natural pearls.²² Bodman didn't conceive the idea, but in Edgartown in the 1920s and 30s he worked out how to make it commercially viable.

An ounce of emulsion required ten pounds of scales to produce, so Bodman bought herring by the ton. He erected a shack near Mattakeset Creek, and hired forty people to do the scaling. His processing plant was closer to downtown: a building with shaded windows, filled with large barrels and machinery imported from the mainland. It was capable of processing 1,000 to 1,500 pounds of scales—enough to yield roughly a gallon of emulsion—a day. The machines dipped



Jewelry made from Priscilla Pearls, from the MV Museum collection.

high quality glass beads into the emulsion ten to twenty times apiece, allowing each layer to harden before dipping the next, much as earlier generations of Edgartonians had dipped wicks into molten wax or tallow to make candles. Each dip added depth, luster, and durability to the artificial

21 On the history of the Island's herring fishery, see Dorothy Cottle Poole, "A Brief History of Mattakeset Herring Creek," *Dukes County Intelligencer*, November 1978, pp. 81-90, along with RU 504 (Martha's Vineyard Fisheries Collection) and RU 526 (Mattakeset Herring Creek Records) and the Photo Collection.

22 The description that follows is based on Lorraine St. Pierre, "The Fishy Secret Behind Priscilla Pearls," *Martha's Vineyard Magazine*, September 2012, <https://mvmagazine.com/news/2012/09/01/fishy-secret-behind-priscilla-pearls>. See also: Arthur R. Railton, "Mr. Priscilla Pearls: Mattakeset's Mystery Man," *Dukes County Intelligencer*, May 2006, pp. 127-135.

gems, and the end result was indistinguishable from cultured pearls produced at far greater cost. Lina D. Call's gift shop at the corner of Winter and North Water Street became Bodman's showroom and sales outlet. It also sold locally made Priscilla Hancock candies, and the "Priscilla" name was transferred to the pearls and, in time, the gift shop itself.

Popular between the World Wars, Priscilla Pearls shut down in 1938, a victim of competition from overseas manufacturers better able to exploit economies of scale. "The foreign pearls were inferior to Priscilla Pearls," Bodman told a *Vineyard Gazette* reporter in a 1950 interview, "but they sold in great quantity." He continued to make small amounts of the emulsion off-Island—"more for old time's sake than anything else" he admitted—and pearls sold during the company's heyday still rest in jewelry boxes across the Island.²³

Martha's Vineyard Shipbuilding Company (Vineyard Haven)

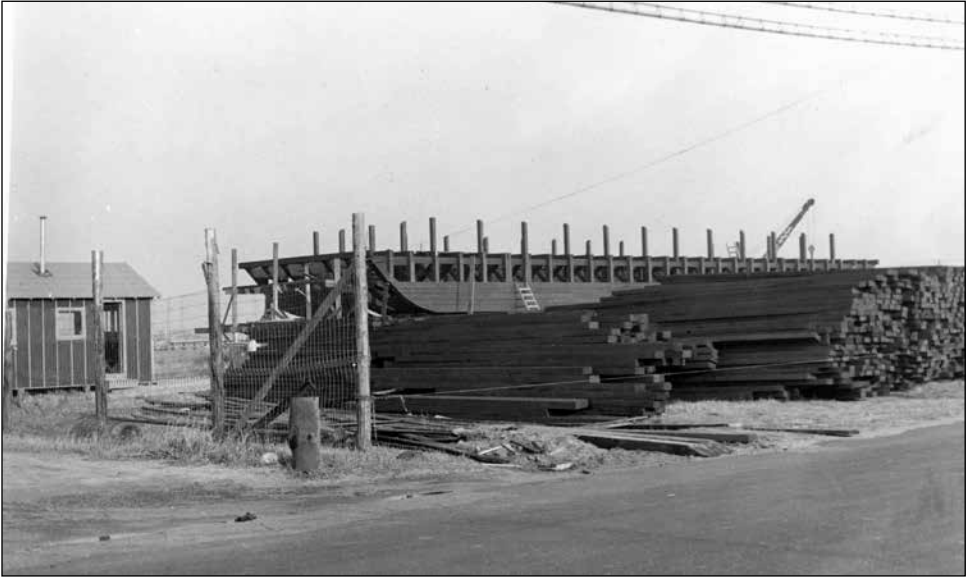
Boatbuilding has always been part of the Vineyard economy, and Island boatbuilders like Manuel Swartz Roberts, Erford Burt, and Gannon & Benjamin are justifiably famous. Island boatbuilding has, however, nearly always been carried out on the smallest of scales, with boats built to order, one at a time, rather than treated as a product and turned out in quantity. For a brief period in the late 1930s and early 1940s, however, the Martha's Vineyard Shipbuilding Company—today's Martha's Vineyard Shipyard—edged across the line between craftwork and small-scale industrial production.

Established in the early 1840s by Capt. Thomas Bradley and his partners (see "The Woolen Mill," above), the Martha's Vineyard Shipbuilding Company was owned, in the 1930s, by William A. Colby.²⁴ It hadn't built a boat from scratch in fifty years when, in 1934, Colby allowed his foreman, West-Tisbury-born Erford Burt, to build a 21-foot racing sloop named *Silverheels* on spec. *Silverheels*, an overnight success, became the prototype for an entire class of boats known (for their waterline length) as Vineyard Haven 15s. The yard turned out five more in the winter of 1935-36, and by the summer of 1940 it had built a total of twenty-four, including ten for a single order placed by the Gross Pointe Club outside Detroit.²⁵ The 15s

23 Priscilla Pearls are among the objects featured in the "Creating" section of the Museum's "One Island, Many Stories" gallery.

24 For an overview of its history, see "The Shipyard at 150," *Martha's Vineyard Magazine*, July 2006, https://www.mvshipyard.com/shipyard_at_150.php.htm

25 The yard turned out thirteen more wooden-hulled 15s between 1945 and 1954. Thomas M. Hale, who bought the yard in the early 1960s, used the worn-out hull of one of the early wooden boats (no. 3) as the pattern for a mold, and produced thirteen fiberglass-hulled 15s between 1964 and 1970. See A. Bowdoin Van Riper and Katharine P. Van Riper, "The Vineyard Haven 15: An Enduring Island Classic," *Martha's Vineyard Times*, August 8, 2012. <https://www.mv-times.com/2012/08/08/vineyard-haven-15-enduring-island-classic-11930/>



US Navy utility craft take shape at the Martha's Vineyard Shipbuilding Company during World War II. MV Museum, RU 301, World War II Collection, Box 1, Folders 11-12.

were a “one-design” class—built to be all-but-identical so that competition between them hinged on the relative skill of the crews—and building them in quantity edged the yard toward mass production. World War II, however, carried it decisively (if briefly) over the line.

The wartime US Navy needed aircraft carriers, destroyers, and submarines, but it also needed more mundane vessels, like scows, barges, and motor launches. These small utility craft—designed to service larger vessels when they rode at anchor—were built of wood, and Navy searched the country for small shipyards capable of manufacturing them in quantity. The Martha's Vineyard Shipbuilding Company received its Navy contract in mid-1942, and Colby formed a partnership with local builder William A. Dugan to fulfill it. Dugan's workers had never built a boat, and Colby's had never built anything as large as the 200-foot scows the contract called for, but they made a surprisingly effective team. Immense stacks of timber appeared on the sand alongside Beach Road, and barges—built in the open air—began to take shape alongside them. Smaller motor launches, used to rearm long-range seaplanes at their moorings, took shape on wheeled cradles in the yard's corrugated metal sheds and, when complete, slid down marine-railway tracks that disappeared into the calm waters of the Lagoon.²⁶

Production, of course, ended with the war. Dugan's workers went back to building houses, and Colby's to building racing sloops and sportfishing

²⁶ See Thomas Dresser, Herb Foster & Jay Schofield, *Martha's Vineyard in World War II* (2014), pp. 104-106.

boats. On the lower level of the Tisbury School, however, four murals—painted during the war for the walls of Colby’s office during the war—capture the brief moment when Beach Road was a small part of what President Franklin D. Roosevelt called “the arsenal of democracy.”²⁷

Van Ryper Ship Models (Vineyard Haven)

A thousand yards or so up Beach Road from where the Martha’s Vineyard Shipbuilding Company made full-size vessels, employees of Van Ryper Ship Models made miniature ones. Founded in 1933 by Charles K. Van Riper (“Charlie” or “C. K.” to his friends), the shop’s business model was built around high-quality, low-cost “Models of Ships on which You’ve Sailed:” souvenirs of ocean voyages at a time when such voyages were the only means of travel between continents . . . or between the Vineyard and the mainland.²⁸ The models, flat-bottomed and ready for display on a mantelpiece or curio shelf, were made from poplar and finished in semi-gloss automotive lacquer. Ranging in size from 7” long (for Island steamers like the *Nantucket* and *Martha’s Vineyard*) to 14” long (for 1930s “superliners” like the *Queen Mary* and *Normandie*) they were sold at prices within the reach of anyone who could afford a ticket on the real thing.

Ship models—precisely-scaled replicas of a specific ship—had traditionally been hand-crafted, one-of-a-kind objects that took hundreds of person-hours to build and had price tags to match. Charlie Van Riper’s first key insight was that nearly all the costs of a hand-built ship model came in the form of labor, and that by using power tools and applying scaled-down mass-production techniques it was possible for skilled craftsmen and -women to build (say) twelve identical *Queen Mary* models in only a little more time than it would take to build a single one. His second key insight was that, to appeal to his target market, the model only had to artfully suggest the appearance of the full-size ship, not recreate every detail of its equipment.²⁹ Van Ryper did offer larger-scale models, custom-built one at a time, in which 1/8 inch of the miniature vessel represented 1 foot of the full-sized one.³⁰ For thirty years and over 15,000 models, however, its

27 The murals, painted by artist Melvern J. Barker, were donated to the Town of Tisbury in 1986.

28 Seaplanes landed at the Vineyard as early as the 1910s, and the airport at Katama opened in the 1920s, but scheduled airline service did not begin until just after World War II.

29 For a more detailed look at the workings of the Van Ryper shop, see Anthony K. Van Riper, “Tisbury’s Tabletop Fleet,” *Dukes County Intelligencer*, November 1994, pp. 51-65 and A. Bowdoin Van Riper, “Toy Boat, Toy Boat, Toy Boat,” *Martha’s Vineyard Magazine*, September 2017, <https://mvmagazine.com/news/2017/09/01/toy-boat-toy-boat-toy-boat>

30 Up to five feet long and meticulously detailed, they were displayed in the boardrooms of shipping lines and the front windows of big-city travel agencies.

bread-and-butter product was beautifully finished 7-12" mass-produced miniatures, inexpensive enough to be marketed as souvenirs and robust enough to be packed in cardboard boxes and shipped across the country by parcel post.³¹

Van Ryper Ship Models marked 25 years in business in the summer of 1958, but its moment in history was about to pass. Pan American Airways inaugurated transatlantic jet service in October, cutting the travel time between East Coast cities and Europe from days to hours. Piston-engine airliners, their ranges extended by



A decorator—responsible for deck hardware, lettering, and other fine detail—works on a batch of six identical freighters at Van Ryper Ship Models. Does anyone know her name? Author's collection.

wartime advances in technology, had been siphoning schedule-conscious passengers from shipping lines since the war ended, and the advent of jets marked the end of routine passenger travel by sea, and of a viable market for “models of ships on which you’ve sailed.” Slowed by a stroke, Charlie Van Riper shut down production in 1960, but kept the showroom open for two more years to sell off the remaining inventory and keep the name alive. The shop closed for good in 1962, but the models—and the name—live on.



Industrial enterprises existed on Martha's Vineyard well before the golden age of offshore whaling commenced around 1810, and persisted after Van Ryper Ship Models ceased production in 1960. The century-and-a-half chronicled here, and the twelve businesses highlighted, are not the whole story. The fact that all the stories told here ultimately end in failure, and that even the successes are relatively short-lived, should not blind us to their larger, cumulative significance. Small-scale industrial production has rarely *not* been part of the Island's economy, and the Island has been bound to the larger regional economy longer, and in more complex ways, than we are accustomed to imagine.

31 Van Ryper models of three Island steamers, among the shop's perennial best-sellers, are on permanent display in the “Escaping” case of the Museum's “One Island, Many Stories” exhibit.

Monuments and Memory: Commemorating World War I In Edgartown and Tisbury, 1920–1922

by A. BOWDOIN VAN RIPER

HISTORICAL MONUMENTS are never *just* about the past and the events they commemorate. They are also about the present in which they are erected, and the individuals who erect them. The memorials to Confederate soldiers that carpet the South, standing watch over public parks and courthouse lawns, were not simply acknowledgements of a transformative historical event, but three-dimensional embodiments of a specific *understanding* of that event: that Confederate soldiers were gallant defenders of their embattled homeland against a ruthless and brutal invading army unleashed on them by a tyrannical government. The statues were—as the timing of their appearance makes clear—a full-throated endorsement of the white supremacist ideology that the Confederate states had seceded, and fought a catastrophically destructive war, in order to preserve.¹ Erected by white Southerners at times when (as in 1860–1861) white supremacy was perceived to be under threat, they were declarations of intent to, once again, defend it tenaciously and ferociously. Closer to our own time, debate over the national Vietnam War Memorial—resulting in the addition of a realistic statue of three soldiers to the abstract wall of polished black stone—mirrored the ongoing national debate over the significance of the war itself.²

The monuments' commentaries on the present are rarely, if ever, inscribed in words on the moments themselves. That is not their function. They are meant, rather, to serve as *aides-memoire*. Human culture is transmitted—within groups, and across generations—by the stories we tell one another, and historical monuments placed in public view are (like flags, religious em-

1 Thomas J. Brown, *Civil War Monuments and the Militarization of America* (2019).

2 See James Reston, Jr., *A Rift in the Earth: Art, Memory, and the Fight for a Vietnam War Memorial* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 2017).

blems, and other non-historical symbols) act both as a perpetual reminder that particular stories exist and as a catalyst for telling them. “What’s that?” a child asks some handy adult as they walk past the monument—or (perhaps more likely) the adult asks “Do you know what that is?”—and the story is told again. Every anniversary, remembrance, or holiday connected to the monument becomes an opportunity to tell the story once more.

Historical monuments are, by nature, prominent and durable. The stories told in their shadow—the ones that “say the quiet part out loud”—are, also by nature, ephemeral. Those shared between individuals are rarely recorded (except in the memories of those involved) and those told in public ceremonies—if recorded at all—are captured only in the pages of local newspapers that may or may not survive. What follows is an exploration of two that *did* survive: the stories told, in the early 1920s, as Edgartown and Tisbury unveiled monuments to what was, at the time, still known simply as “the World War.”

Names on a Bronze Plaque

The Vineyard has hundreds of historical monuments, but only three of them are representative sculptures and only one—the Soldier’s Memorial in Oak Bluffs—depicts a human being.³ The vast majority of the monuments are rectangular plaques (typically made of bronze because of that alloy’s durability) in varying sizes and with varying amounts of text. That category includes all the Island’s monuments to the wars of the twentieth century: the two discussed in this article, the “Shield of Honor” in Aquinah (subject of a forthcoming article in the *Quarterly*) and over a dozen more spread across all six Island towns.

On the outskirts of Edgartown village, a flagpole stands on a small curbed island that divides Pease’s Point Way as it crosses Main Street. Attached to the base from which the flagpole rises, the bronze plaque honoring the Edgartonians who served in World War I is highly visible in principle but all but hidden in practice. Those who pass by it in cars or on bicycles have no chance to do more than note (if that) the existence of a plaque. The far smaller number who pass it on foot—the monument lies in a pedestrian no-man’s land between Edgartown’s downtown and Upper Main Street commercial district—are free to stop and read it, but the tiny triangular island, surrounded on all three sides by constant traffic, offers little incentive to do so.

The handful of passersby who *do* stop to examine the monument find a plain rectangular plaque surmounted by an eagle with spread-but-lowered

3 The other two are the Heath Hen Memorial at the edge of the State Forest, near the Martha’s Vineyard Airport, and the whale-tail sculpture opposite Memorial Wharf in Edgartown, which commemorates both whales and the whalers who hunted them.



The Edgartown World War I monument at the intersection of Pease's Point Way and Main Street, viewed from Upper Main Street shortly after it was dedicated. Martha's Vineyard Museum, RU 359, Postcard Collection, Box 4.

wings, whose oddly outsized feet grip a banner stamped with the words “Honor Roll” and decorated with laurel branches. Immediately below that, four lines of lines of text dedicate the monument “To the Edgartown men who served their country in the World War, 1917-1919.” The date range, to modern

viewers accustomed to thinking of the inclusive dates of World War I as 1914-1918 (and of US involvement as 1917-1918), seems jarring, but it reflects the mental landscape of the era. The armistice that took effect on “the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month” (11:00 AM on November 11, 1918) was, to those living in the war’s immediate aftermath, just that: a suspension of hostilities. The war, for them, *ended* only when the Treaty of Versailles was signed the following June.

The rest of the plaque lists, in double columns, the names of the 45 men from Edgartown who served in the war, divided into sections for the Army (24), Navy (18), and Merchant Marine (3). The surnames on the plaque encapsulate the history of Edgartown: Descendants of the Chappaquiddick Wampanoag (Jeffers), of the first English settlers (Coffin, Norton, and Vinson), and of recent



The Edgartown World War I monument set the pattern for those that came after: a bronze “honor roll” plaque listing the names of those who served. Photo by the author.

Portuguese immigrants (Bettencourt, de Frates, and Sylvia). There is no distinction by rank or term of service, only the letters “A. E. F.” after the names of those who went to France as part of the American Expeditionary Forces.⁴



The Tisbury World War I monument originally stood on the front lawn of the Vineyard Haven Public Library, located at the time in a converted home on the east side of Main Street. Martha's Vineyard Museum, RU 359, Postcard Collection, Box 4.

The Tisbury World War I monument—a bronze plaque mounted on the surface of a granite boulder—originally stood on the front lawn of the Vineyard Haven Public Library when it was located in a converted house in Main Street. It was subsequently moved to the edge of Veteran's Memorial Park (where it stood alongside a similar monument to those who served in World War II), and then—along with the World War II monument—to its current location off State Road, just inside the entrance to Oak Grove Cemetery. Its content is similar—double columns of names in which Look, Merry, and West mingling with Baptiste and Pachico—as is the wording of the title: “Enrolled Here are the Names of the Citizens of Tisbury Who Served in the World War.” The layout, however, is even more austere. The town seal replaces the eagle and banner on the Edgartown plaque, and there is no division by branch of service or indication of AEF membership. The only additional marks are small crosses preceding the names of Jennie E. Norton, Walter D. Rheno, and Martha E. Smith.⁵

4 The AEF was a formation of the US Army, but the designation is attached to names from all three services, suggesting that it may have been used to indicate service overseas regardless of branch.

5 The crosses, though unexplained on the plaque, likely denote service outside the armed forces of the United States. Rheno, for example, flew for the French air corps as part of the *Escadrille de Lafayette*.



Richard G. Shute (top row, L) poses with the Edgartown Band in 1902. A lifelong musician, he was a drummer in the Civil War and, at 76, led the band in the 1920 parade that preceded the dedication of Edgartown's World War monument. Martha's Vineyard Museum, RU 465, Basil Welch Collection, Album 9.

“Here I Am, Send Me”

The Edgartown “World War” monument was dedicated on July 4th, 1920: a hot, sunny Sunday.⁶ A parade, honoring the 45 men whose names were on the plaque, rolled down Main Street and wound through the center of the village—North Water to Morse to North Summer, a block down Main to South Water, then via Davis Lane to Pease’s Point Way and the newly erected flagpole. The line of march, the *Gazette* reported, was lined “not only with flags but with sweet scented flowers of the more delicate tints.” The bright sun was matched by cooling breezes that, the anonymous author declared, rendered it “an ideal day for marching, for anything in fact.”⁷ Richard G. Shute, a highly regarded musician as well as one of the Island’s earliest professional photographers, led the Edgartown Band, which in turn led the parade, “stop[ping] to breathe only when ... absolutely necessary.” Judge Beriah T. Hillman, recently retired from the

6 All descriptions of the Edgartown ceremony are taken from “Edgartown’s Honor Roll Unveiled in Bronze; All the Island Celebrates July 4th,” *Vineyard Gazette*, July 8, 1920. <https://vineyardgazette.com/news/1920/07/08/edgartowns-honor-roll-unveiled-bronze-all-island-celebrates-july-fourth>

7 The author of the piece, though not identified by byline, was almost certainly Henry Beetle Hough, who had taken over the editorship a few months before.

Dukes County Superior Court, served as master of ceremonies for the event and grand marshal of the parade.

Hillman and Shute were living symbols of Edgartown's last brush with martial glory: The former had been a second lieutenant in the 60th Massachusetts Volunteers during the Civil War, and the latter a teenaged drummer in the 40th Massachusetts. Shute wore the uniform of the Grand Army of the Republic, a Union veterans' organization, complete with its broad-brimmed hat and bright red sash. Shute, evoking the past more directly, wore his old Union Army gear. A float sponsored by the Relief Corps—the GAR women's auxiliary—carried the two more of the town's five living Civil War veterans (the fifth, Capt. George W. Pease, was too weak to leave his house). Alonzo D. Fisher, like Shute, wore his old uniform; Rev. Isaac Coombs opted for a black suit and talk silk hat that was, the *Gazette* helpfully explained to readers, “of the style of the sixties.” The two members of the Relief Corps riding on the back of the float were also “appropriately costumed in the quaint dress of that day,” and carried a banner declaring: “In 1862 Edgartown sent 80 volunteers who helped save the flag.”

The presence of Civil War veterans at patriotic observances was hardly unusual, but their role on July 4, 1920, was different. The dedication of the monument was framed as a passing of the torch from one generation of veterans to the next. The photograph accompanying the *Gazette* story showed Hillman and Shute, flanked by Theodore Wimpenny of the Board of Selectmen, standing to the right of the newly unveiled monument, with Capt. George W. Brown, representing the 45 World War veterans, to the left. An informal photograph now in the Museum's collection, taken by an anonymous observer, shows Hillman, in his GAR gear, posing alongside a group of the younger men. The advanced age and dwindling numbers of the town's Civil War veterans—Shute, the youngest, was 76 in 1920, and all five were dead by the end of 1927—made the need urgent. There was no intervening generation. The Island had been insulated by distance from the wars of imperialism in the Far West and the Philippines, and by brevity and limited scope from similar wars in the Caribbean. The World War was the first in sixty years to shape the experiences of a generation.

Selectman Wimpenny, accepting the plaque on behalf of the town from the Women's Auxiliary of the American Legion (which had sponsored and raised funds for it) drew the parallel explicitly in his speech. “The sons and daughters of Edgartown have always responded to the call of duty,” he declared. “Edgartown has more than filled her quota, and in raising money she has ‘gone over the top.’” His use of “quota” was an oblique nod to the Civil War era, when meeting government-imposed draft quotas had been a constant concern for the town, and “over the top” a direct one to World War infantrymen climbing over the rims of their trenches in preparation



Retired judge Beriah T. Hillman, dressed in his GAR uniform, poses with a younger generation of servicemen at the end of the World War. Martha's Vineyard Museum Photo Collection.

for an assault. Warming to the theme, he continued: "The hoisting of the flag today carries me back to the year 1861. I was then a young boy. A liberty pole had been erected in front of the town hall, and after the exercises appropriate to the occasion the Stars and Stripes were hoisted by a ship-master, Captain Jared Fisher, whom many of you may remember."

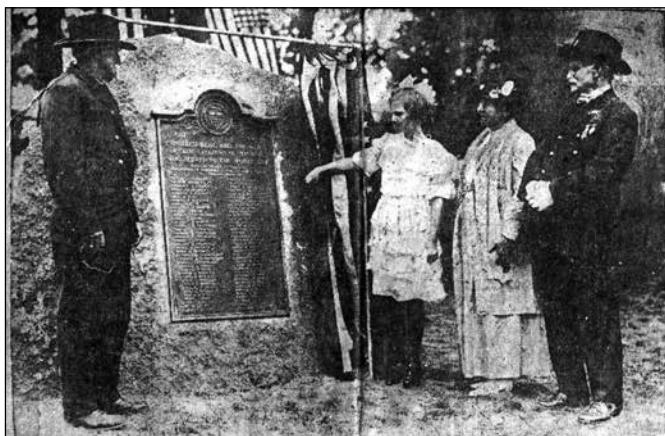
Reminding the audience that ship-masters like Fisher and himself "have hoisted that flag in many a foreign port and have seen and know how it is respected by other countries," Wimpenny reached the crux of his remarks. It is the duty of every American citizen, he declared, to "uphold the dignity and honor of the United States, and the respect for the Stars and Stripes." The men of the Civil War generation had done so in their time, and those names adorned the new monument had done so in theirs. It was incumbent on future generations, he concluded, to honor that legacy: "We hope the tablet unveiled here today may help to perpetuate the patriotism that has existed with our boys in the past and, should our country call at any time to defend the flag, may they be ready and say, 'Here am I, send me.'"

"The Spirit of True Americanism"

Tisbury's World War monument was also sponsored by the Women's Auxiliary of the American Legion, and its dedication on July 28, 1922, was also attended by members of the GAR. A photograph of the event shows 11-year-old Constance Downs pointing at the names on the newly unveiled plaque as John Norton Luce and Harry Castello, two of Tisbury's last surviving Civil War veterans, flank the boulder, stern and erect in

their GAR uniforms.⁸ The teenaged Downs wears a large white bow in her short blonde hair, and is dressed in an elaborately ruffled white summer dress with sleeves that reach to her elbows and a hem that falls to her knees. The visual contrast is, as the photographer doubtless intended, striking: the GAR men representing age, experience, and hard-won wisdom while Downs represents youthful innocence and energy.

Downs' role in the Tisbury ceremony was to draw aside the patriotically decorated shroud in front of the monument and reveal the plaque. Unlike the two small children charged with the job in Edgartown (Julien Vose Weston, age 5, and Louise Thelma Waters, age 3), she is clearly old enough to understand the gravity of the occasion. The men whose names are on the monument, though none are named Downs, could be her older brothers, uncles, or father. She embodies the rising generation to whom Theodore Wimpenny addressed his closing remarks.



Constance Downs, flanked by John Norton Luce (L), Sydna Eldridge (near R) and Harry Castello (far R), poses after the unveiling of the Tisbury World War monument, then located on the lawn of the Public Library. Martha's Vineyard Museum, RU 465, Basil Welch Collection, Box 5.

Sydna Eldridge—who stands between Downs and Castello in the photograph—represents the Women's Auxiliary. Florence Caldwell plays a similar role in a separate photograph of the dedication, turning to beam at the camera as she shakes the hand of General Clarence Edwards, commander of the AEF's "Yankee Division" and the featured speaker at the ceremony. Both Eldridge and Caldwell were doubtless being honored for their roles in the campaign to create the monument, but—like Downs, Luce, and Castello—they also functioned as symbols. Echoing the nineteenth-century doctrine of "separate spheres," in which men exercised sovereignty over the public world of war, politics, and commerce while women presided over the private realm of home, hearth, and family, wartime rhetoric praised women for their resilience in the face

8 Connie (as she was known) went on to a career as a teacher, librarian, photographer, and 25-year employee at Mosher Photo. She was a tireless volunteer and, in retirement, traveled the world with Freeman Leonard, her husband of 76 years. She died in 2009, at 98. "Connie Leonard Loved People and Crosswords," *Vineyard Gazette*, May 14, 2009. <https://vineyardgazette.com/obituaries/2009/05/14/connie-leonard-loved-people-and-crosswords>

of “their” men’s absence and their emotional support of the men at the front. The monument, instigated and brought into being by the collective action of women, was the climactic expression of that support, for which Eldridge and Caldwell functioned as living embodiments.



Wartime commander of the 26th (“Yankee”) Division, General Clarence Edwards used the dedication of the Tisbury World War Monument to speak out against pacifism. Photo by Carol M. Highsmith. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, <https://lccn.loc.gov/2012631378>

General Edwards, in his speech, exhorted listeners of both sexes to exercise a different form of support now that the war commemorated by the monument had given way to peace. The nation, he insisted, must not draw the wrong lesson from the conflict.

*There has been a reaction throughout the country as a result of the war and there are men who are capitalizing the losses. Tomorrow on Boston Common, people will gather to hear propaganda from Washington, honestly conceived by the National Council for the Reduction of Armament. They will say that militarism breeds war, but I know that it is commerce which makes it. It has always been and will always be. Don't let this false propaganda spread. Why those people will even tell you that it was the inertia of the masses which caused the declaration of war. If what they utter is true they don't want the army and navy and are going to make it a crime to teach military subjects. The sacrifices will be worse and the country will be more indefensible than in the last.*⁹

A newspaper article on the ceremony, summarizing Edwards’ speech, described it as a warning “that there is a movement throughout the United States which is capitalizing the horror of the World war and minimizing the dangers of going into another war unprepared.”¹⁰

Similar sentiments about the need for preparedness and the virtues of militarism (the latter not specifically invoked, but heavily implied) had been voiced at the dedication of the Edgartown monument two years before. Theodore Wimpenny summed up the just-concluded war this way:

9 “Edwards Warns of Pacifism at Dedication of Tablet at Tisbury.” Photograph of a clipping from an unknown newspaper. MV Museum, RU 465, Basil Welch Collection, Box 5.

10 Ibid.

*The shot from a pistol in Serbia was the starting of the World's War. All of Europe was aroused, while we of the United States watched at first with curiosity, then with interest, then with concern. After an unwarranted delay, after American lives had been sacrificed, with little or no demand for reparation, we finally entered the war to save ourselves, and in saving ourselves we saved the world.*¹¹

“American lives . . . sacrificed” was a reference to the 128 American passengers lost when—after Germany declared that it considered Allied-flagged merchant vessels legitimate military targets—a U-boat sank the British liner *Lusitania* on May 7, 1915. “Unwarranted delay” was a scolding of President Woodrow Wilson, who not only declined to ask Congress for a declaration of war in response, but campaigned for reelection the following year with the slogan “He Kept Us Out of War.”

It had all ended well, Wimpenny acknowledged—the United States had saved itself (from unspecified threats) and saved the world (by unspecified means)—but his implication was clear. The “dignity and honor of the United States” was upheld, and “respect for the Stars and Stripes” abroad was reinforced, by swift and decisive military action, not delayed or incremental responses to foreign threats. The men and women of Edgartown (more so, implicitly, than the timid Democratic administration in Washington) displayed the spirit of martial zeal that characterized true Americans. C. Lawrence Barry—who had retired from the Marine Corps as a captain, married an Edgartown woman, and served on the local draft board—echoed Wimpenny in his own speech. Praising the men of the town for their willingness to serve and the women for their willingness to sacrifice, he (in the *Gazette's* words) “warned them of the danger ahead during the next ten years, when the spirit of true Americanism must fight and win.”

Sea Change

The messages that Wimpenny, Barry, and especially Edwards delivered to the crowds assembled before them were variations on a shared theme: An exhortation to the people of Edgartown and Tisbury, and by extension to all Americans, not to shy from war. Public opinion in the United States was swinging sharply, in the first years of the 1920s, away from the idea that militarism, stockpiled arms, and readiness for war were the best—let alone only—foundation international power and influence.

Wilson's touting of non-intervention, for all that it annoyed Theodore Wimpenny, had won him the 1916 election. His reversal of that position in 1917 left him deeply unpopular, and his endorsement of internationalism and multilateral alliances like the League of Nations—with the ongoing foreign engagement they implied for the United States—dug the hole deeper. Wilson longed for a third term, but even before a 1919 stroke destroyed his

11 “Edgartown's Honor Roll Unveiled”

health, Democratic Party leaders concluded that allowing him to run would be disastrous. The 1920 election featured the largest voter turnout up to that time—thanks in part to the passage of the 19th Amendment, which gave women the vote in all 48 states. Republican candidate Warren G. Harding, whose campaign promised “a return to normalcy,” won in an unprecedented landslide: taking 60.3% of the popular vote to fellow Democratic candidate

James M. Cox’s 34.2% and 404 electoral votes to Cox’s 127.¹²

The nation’s evident lack of interest in further overseas entanglements—including the projection of military power beyond the Western Hemisphere—was matched by a hunger for peace and specifically for an end to international arms races and reduction of national stockpiles of armaments. One of the Harding administration’s first significant foreign policy achievements was its hosting of the 1921-1922 Washington Naval Conference: a series of multilateral negotiations designed to place diplomatic limits on the expansion of the Japanese Empire and prevent a ruinously expensive naval arms race like the one that had



Woodrow Wilson’s 1916 reelection campaign tapped into a deep well of anti-war sentiment, which the loss of American lives on the Lusitania diminished but did not eliminate. Photograph from the author’s collection.

consumed the time, energy, and treasure of Germany and Great Britain in the decade before World War I. The National Council for the Reduction of Armament, against which General Edwards railed, was founded in August 1921 as a coordinating body for organizations with broadly similar views of foreign policy. Its member groups, including the Foreign Policy Association, the Friends Disarmament Council, and the Fellowship of Reconciliation, were united by a shared conviction that peace was preferable to war, and conflicts between nations should be resolved with words rather than weapons.¹³

Edwards’ real concern, however, was likely not with the stated goals of the Council—which his references to abolishing the army and navy and “making it a crime to teach military subjects” wildly exaggerated—but with the breadth

12 For the broader context, see David Pietrusza *1920: The Year of Six Presidents* (2008).

13 United States Senate, *Hearings before a Special Committee Investigating Expenditures in Senatorial Primary and General Election, Pursuant to S. Resolution 195, 69th Congress, First Session*. Chicago Hearings, July 26-August 5, 1926 (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1926), p. 2208.



Rallies celebrating the Allies' victory in the World War—like this one—gave way, in the years that followed, to large and enthusiastic demonstrations in support of demilitarization and disarmament. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, <https://lccn.loc.gov/2016844529>

and depth of its grassroots support. The “No More War” rally on the Boston Common was one of hundreds scheduled to be held nationwide on that last Sunday afternoon of July 1922. A newspaper story previewing the one scheduled for Wilmington, Delaware, listed nearly thirty different organizations whose local chapters were expected to participate or send delegations. They represented a political, cultural, and religious cross-section of America: The Boy Scouts, Knights of Columbus, and Freemasons . . . the Rotary, Kiwanis, Lions, Elks, and Odd Fellows . . . the Chamber of Commerce, the Methodist Ministers’ Association, and the Patriotic Order of Sons of America. Even the Spanish War Veterans and the American Legion were expected.¹⁴

The list of groups expected at the Wilmington rally also included virtually every significant women’s organization in the city, from heritage societies such as the Colonial Dames of America and the Daughters of the American Revolution to civic-improvement organizations like the Junior League and the League of Women Voters. The Young Women’s Christian Association was expected, along with the Council of Jewish Women. The

14 “Nine Revive Interest for Disarmament,” *Wilmington Morning News*, July 24, 1922, p. 9

College Women's Club, the Professional Women's Club, and the Delaware Federation of Women's Clubs all planned to be there. The same was true at the national level. Listing the National Council's key member-organizations for the benefit of his Senate inquisitors, Frederick W. Libby named the YWCA, the National League of Women Voters, the General Federation of Women's Clubs, and the National Education Association (the official voice of the nation's most feminized profession).

The sheer number of women's organizations aligned with pro-peace, anti-militarist ideas—the ideas that General Edwards decried as “false propaganda,” and that Captain Barry saw as fueling the “danger” looming in the decade to come—should have given both men pause. Women's political activism, both individual and collective, had been a mainspring of Progressive Era reforms for thirty years. The two most recent amendments to the Constitution—the 19th (Woman Suffrage) and the 20th (Prohibition)—had been products of decades-long national campaigns overwhelmingly planned, organized, and led by women. Their enactment, in rapid succession, had blown gaping holes in the once solid barrier between the “separate spheres” of the public and domestic worlds. Temperance campaigns, for example, rested on the idea that *in order to* protect the sanctity of their homes and the safety of their families—that is, to play their traditionally ordained role in society—women had no choice but to band together and take collective action in the public sphere to remove the threat posed by liquor. The battle for Prohibition had largely been won *before* women had direct access to the levers of power. The analogy between strong drink and modern war as mortal threats to the sanctity of home and family—and thus between prohibition and disarmament—was easily drawn. And, if they wished to pursue it, women now had the vote.

Had Edwards and Barry not seen the sea change taking shape around them, and the future it portended for their profession, it could only have been because they were not paying attention. Their rhetoric at the dedication ceremonies—and Wimpenny's too—makes it clear, however, that they *were* paying attention. They saw where the mood of the country was swinging and, using the ceremonies as opportunities, pushed back against it as best they could.

The Normalization of Sacrifice

None of this is to suggest that the Edgartown and Tisbury memorials were intended solely, or even primarily, as contributions to the larger conversation then taking place about war, armaments, and militarism. Those who planned, and raised money for, the monuments saw themselves as honoring family members, friends, and neighbors who had sacrificed for what they believed was a greater good. They saw support for the monuments as support for the individuals whose names were on them, but also as a mark of the town's sol-



Nina Allender's 1917 pencil sketch "Drafted to Fight for Democracy – The Girl He Left Behind Him" captures the convergence of war, suffrage, and American women's emergence as a political force. <https://lccn.loc.gov/2020635507>

idity and its strength as a community. "We thank you all for the way in which you have responded," Bertha Beetle told the crowd at the Edgartown dedication on behalf of the monument committee. "Without the help of each and every one of you this Memorial would not have been possible."

Even if the monuments themselves were intended as purely local gestures, however, the dedication ceremonies deliberately imbedded them in larger contexts and thus tied them to the larger conversation. The central roles accorded to the towns' few surviving Civil War veterans tied the sacrifices of the recent past with those of a more distant past, passing the designation of "hero" and the admiration that went with it to a new generation. The prominence of women in both ceremonies reinforced their traditional roles in war: stoically doing without "their" men for months or years (or, if the worst happened, forever) for the benefit of the nation, and then publicly honoring the men's sacrifice upon their return. The featured speakers—Wimpenny and Barry at Edgartown, Edwards at Tisbury—exhorted their audiences to continue both patterns. They turned the monuments from acknowledgements of past action into models for future behavior.

It was that process—the normalization of sacrifice, the expectation of more wars to come—that all three speakers strove to insulate and protect from the tide of anti-war, anti-militarist, pro-disarmament sentiment sweeping the country in the early 1920s. America’s entry into every war in its history—emphatically including the Revolution—had been fiercely opposed by some segment of the population. The speakers at the World War memorials strove to convince their audiences that the wars to come, and the sacrifices they would demand, would be not only inevitable and inescapable, but necessary and even valuable. To otherwise would, they warned, be a betrayal of those—the men named on the monument—who

they had gathered to honor. When the speeches ended, the monument would remain as a silent reminder.

Looking back from a century hence we know that—for better or worse—it worked. The “No More War” rallies of July 1922 are barely even footnotes to history. The Washington Naval Conference is remembered not for its contributions to world peace, but for its influence on the battlefleets of 1939-1942. The next World War did come, demanding still-greater sacrifices, and the clear-and-present danger posed by Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan made every halting step toward peace taken by the activists and politicians of the interwar years seem, in retrospect, misguided. Other,

smaller conflicts followed, bringing demands of their own. Boulders and bronze plaques have continued to appear in the Island’s public squares, with no end (yet) in sight. Like those erected in the aftermath of what was still *the* World War, they carry on long-established traditions: memorializing wartime deaths, commemorating wartime sacrifices, and quietly normalizing both.



A boulder with a bronze plaque, erected beside the World War I and World War II memorials on the lawn of the Chilmark Town Hall, commemorates veterans of the wars of the late twentieth century.

Too Many Captains: The Gay Head Shipwreck Of 1782

by A. BOWDOIN VAN RIPER

ON THE NIGHT of January 14, 1782, a ship died on the southwestern shore of Martha's Vineyard. Cast adrift when its anchor cable parted, with no time to fill its sails and no room to maneuver, it was driven onto the rocks by a southwest gale and battered apart by waves. Half its crew—fifteen sailors, six of them from Edgartown—drowned or died of exposure. Rev. Joseph Thaxter, pastor of the First Congregational Church, scratched down the names of the six Edgartown men in his ledger and added a grim postscript. They left behind four widows—one about to give birth—and twenty-four now-fatherless children. The bodies of the four who were recovered the morning after the wreck became the first four interments in the town's "New Burial Place" at the corner of Commercial (now Cooke) Street and Pease's Point Way. The bodies of the other two, recovered later and likely suffering from the effects of prolonged immersion or exposure, were buried in Chilmark.

Time passed, and the memory of what came to be called the "Gay Head Shipwreck of 1782" faded. The survivors counted their blessings and went on with their lives, the families and friends of the dead mourned their losses, and the fatherless children grew up. Someone, in the months that followed the wreck, wrote a narrative poem about the wreck. In 21 four-line stanzas, the poet imagined the ship's last moments: the crew divided about whether to try for the open sea or run the ship onto the beach, the captain too incapacitated by illness to take charge, and then—in quick succession—the wrong decision, destruction, and death. When it came time for Dr. Charles Banks to write about the wreck in his *History of Martha's Vineyard* (1911), he had only two sources to draw from: Rev. Thaxter's enumeration of the Edgartown dead and the survivors they left behind, and a handwritten copy of the by-then-anonymous poem.

The Dukes County Historical Society reprinted Thaxter's notes on lives lost at sea during his 47-year pastorate in the November 1968 issue of this

journal.¹ It had reprinted the text of poem nearly five years earlier, in the February 1964 issue, working from a copy in the Society's archives made—by an unknown individual at an unknown date—using a manual typewriter and two sheets of legal-sized onionskin paper.² A century-and-a-quarter elapsed between the wreck and Banks' brief commentary on it, another half-century between Banks' writing and the reprinting of his two sources, and still another half-century-plus since then. Key details of the story remained stubbornly obscure: the ship's home port, its destination, and even its name. The anonymous poet—who seemed to know so much about the ship and its final moments—pointedly avoided mentioning its cargo, the nature of its voyage, and the reason why it would have needed not just *a* pilot, but multiple pilots.

Now, thanks to several new sources—brought to light by a researcher who wound up answering his own question more completely than I could—we *do* know. What follows is the real story of the Gay Head Shipwreck of 1782, and a look at how history is written from the fragments that “time and chance” leave behind.

Searching for Matthew Butler

The name on the email—Dr. Raymond Butler Weiss—was familiar; we'd connected in 2019, when he was seeking information about his distant ancestor, Matthew Butler of Edgartown. He knew—from Banks or elsewhere—that Butler had perished in the 1782 wreck, and knew that he'd been interred in the Pease's Point Way cemetery. He had three questions he was hoping to nail down answers to: 1) What was the name of the ship? 2) Was Butler, possibly, her captain? and 3) Might she have been a whaling vessel? He had also found a reference—in an online guide to one of the Museum's archival collections, a reference to a “memorial” to those lost in the 1782 wreck. Could I make, and send him, a digital copy?

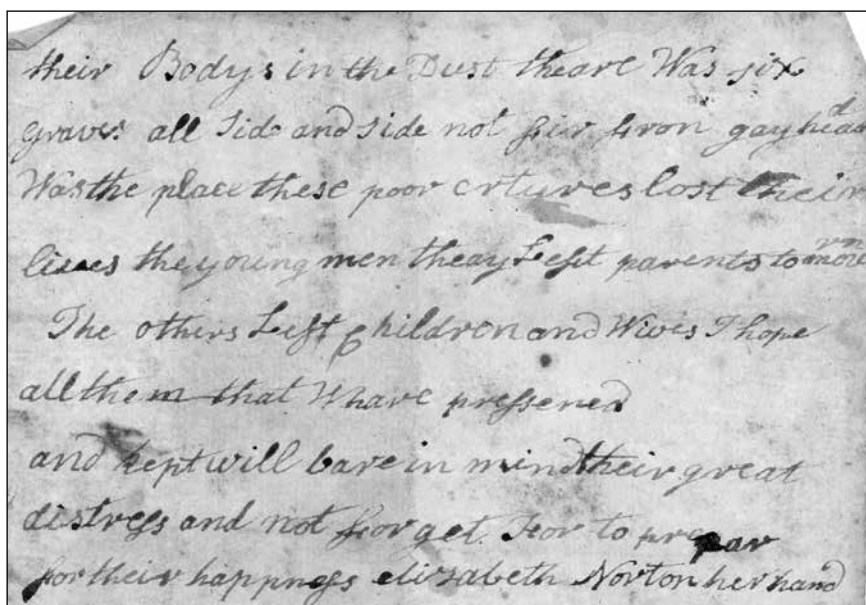
The three questions were easy. As Mark Twain famously said: “I was gratified to be able to answer so promptly, and I did. I said I didn't know.” There were only two period sources, I explained, and the account in Banks, which was drawn exclusively from them. Neither period account mentioned the name of the ship, nor did either name the captain or state the purpose of the voyage. Knowing that Capt. Peter Pease had made the first offshore whaling voyage from the Vineyard in 1765, I explored the possibility that Matthew Butler *might* have been departing for, or returning from, a similar voyage when he died off Gay Head. The American Offshore Whaling Voyages database recorded a single vessel with a departure year of 1782 and no arrival year: the *Dolphin* out of Nantucket. It also recorded a single whaling voy-

1 Joseph Thaxter [from his records], “The Hazards of Seafaring—Martha's Vineyard 1780-1827.” *Dukes County Intelligencer*, November 1968, 167-171.

2 “Two Songs of Shipwreck.” *Dukes County Intelligencer*, February 1964, 75-78. The typescript is in RU 214 (Shipwrecks and Lifesaving), Box 1, Folder 1.

age commanded by a Matthew Butler, in 1762 and also out of Nantucket. It was—just barely—enough to justify a most tentative “maybe” imaginable.³

I passed this on to him, adding two related observations that I flagged as being completely speculative. The first was that the poem—which I had, by that point, sent him a copy of—described “five boats on deck” of the stricken ship: a lot for a merchant vessel but a standard complement for an offshore whaler. The second was that Butler, just short of 45, was the oldest of the Edgartown men who had died in the wreck, and three of the others had also been in their early 40s. An Edgartown captain hired by Nantucket shipowners might, I suggested, have recruited his mates or skilled “idlers” (sailmaker, carpenter, cooper, blacksmith) from his hometown—men whose skills and reputations he knew and trusted. All vague, all far from definitive, and (it soon turned out) all wrong.



Fragment of Elizabeth Norton's memorial poem about the wreck of the *St. Lawrence*, in which her father, Bayes Norton, lost his life. MV Museum, RU 242 (Grafton Norton Collection), Box 1, Folder 4.

I had, by this point located and scanned the “memorial” to the victims of the wreck. It was exactly where the online guide had said it would be: Record Unit 242 (Grafton Norton Collection), Box 1, Folder 4. It was a fragment of a larger document, written in pencil on coarse brown paper,

³ The current edition of the American Offshore Whaling Voyages Database is available at: <https://whalinghistory.org/av/voyages/>. The 1762 voyage commanded by Matthew Butler is designated AV16873, and the 1782 voyage of the *Dolphin* is AV03782.

and ending with the words: “Elizabeth Norton, her hand.” Elizabeth Norton—whoever she was—was evidently the author, and proud enough of both her authorship and her ability to write out the text that she’d added that to the end of the page: “I, Elizabeth Norton, did this.” The words, and the sentiment behind them, suggested a clue to her identity: Even across 200 years, the voice of a proud child declaring “I did this all by myself!” doesn’t change. I could hear my own, now-adult children saying it; I could hear a much, much younger version of *myself* saying it. Elizabeth Norton was, I was reasonably certain, an older school-aged child—old enough to have mastered adult-level handwriting.

From there, the dominoes started to fall. Norton has always been a common name in Edgartown, and the 1780s were no exception. Two Nortons—Bayes and Jethro—were among the crew of the ill-fated ship. A quick check of the genealogical records in volume III of Banks’ *History* revealed that Bayes, 36 when he died, left behind six children, of whom the eldest was a daughter: Elizabeth, called Betsey by her family. She was 11.

I started to transcribe the memorial, and the dominoes kept falling. The text of the “memorial,” with modern punctuation added to make it readable, had a familiar ring:

Their bodys in the dust. Theare was six graves all side and side.
Not far from Gay Head was the place these poor cr[ea]tures lost
their lives. The young men left parents to [mourn?]. The others left
children and wives. I hope all them that whare preserved and kept
will bare in mind their great distress and not forget [how?] to prepare
for their happiness. Elizabeth Norton her hand.

It was, *almost* but not quite, the last two-and-a-half stanzas of the 21-stanza poem about the wreck, written in 1782:

The other six that strangers was
Next day the people did provide
To lay their bodies in the dust
There was six graves side by side

Not far from Gay Head was the place
Where these poor creatures lost their lives
The young men left friends to mourn
The others left both children and wives

I hope all of them that was preserved
Will bear in mind their great distress
And will not forget to prepare
For their eternal happiness.

Each of the differences—“graves side and side” becoming “graves side by side,” for example—worked to smooth out the meter or replace an awkwardly chosen word with a more familiar one. The handwritten copy that Banks had worked from, and the typewritten copy in the Museum archives, were

the final version. This fragment was (part of) the draft. The poem, anonymous for so long, now had an author: eleven-year-old Betsey Norton, drawing on memories of the epic narrative poetry she'd memorized and recited in school as she tried to come to terms with the loss of her father.

The Maritime News

Fascinating—and gratifying—as that discovery was, it dispelled only a small part of the mystery around the wreck. It was, however, enough to serve as the hook for a *Quarterly* article about how progress in historical research is, often, made by a series of such small victories. I was in the process of drafting that article when Dr. Weiss emailed me with news of a very large victory: He had located, in an online genealogical database, snippets from a half-dozen 1782 newspapers that reported on the wreck and that—cross-referenced with one another—provided the critical details that, after 238 years, made the story of the wreck make sense at last.

The Vineyard had no newspaper in 1782, and wouldn't until Edgar Marchant established the *Vineyard Gazette* in May 1846. They came, instead, from the mainland and all (unsurprisingly) from port towns: one from New Haven's *Connecticut Journal*, one from the *Norwich [CT] Packet*, and two from different Philadelphia papers. Published between January 17 and March 6, 1782, they all told, with minor variations, the same story: The ship had been wrecked near Gay Head (or Gayhead or Gay's Head or possibly Gray's Head) on Martha's Vineyard with heavy loss of life. The ship itself was a total loss, and it was not clear whether her cargo had been, or could be, salvaged. "Marine intelligence" like this—passed along by letter, or by word of mouth from the captains of ships that came into port—was a fixture of virtually every contemporary newspaper published along the Atlantic coast. Jonathan Grout would, by the end of the century, build a network of semaphore telegraphs to transmit it north from the Cape and Islands to Boston.⁴

Ironically, the most detailed account of the wreck came from a landlocked paper published in central Massachusetts: *Thomas's Massachusetts Spy, or the Worcester Gazette*. Datelined New London, CT, February 15, the *Massachusetts Spy* article was the eyewitness testimony of a survivor of the wreck. A comparison of the details leaves little doubt that it was also the source of Elizabeth Norton's portrait of the events preceding the wreck: the captain's illness, the crew's indecision, and the debate over whether to head out to sea or drive the ship onto the beach.

The narrative that follows is based on the survivor's anonymous testimony, with a handful of details added from the shorter accounts in other papers, and it needs to be read in light of something that everyone reading

⁴ Chris Baer, "That Was Then: Ten Minutes to Boston," *Martha's Vineyard Times*, July 15, 2020. <https://www.mvtimes.com/2020/07/15/10-minutes-boston/>

those accounts would have known: The story of the Gay Head shipwreck of 1782 took place in the middle of a war.

Great Britain was at war more or less continuously from the outbreak of the War of the Spanish Succession in 1701 to the final defeat of Napoleon at the Battle of Waterloo in 1815. The American War, as the British call it, was an episode in that larger struggle. Like the contests that preceded and followed it, the war pitted Britain against its traditional rivals France and Spain, with the Caribbean as a battleground and its resource-rich islands as a key strategic objective for all three powers. Americans are, for understandable reasons, accustomed to thinking of the Thirteen Colonies' rebellion against British rule as the most significant (if not the *only*) front in the American War, and the Caribbean as a minor sideshow. There's a strong case to be made, however, that for the three European powers involved in the war it was precisely the other way around: the colonial rebellion was the sideshow, and the struggle for the Caribbean the main event. Spain was funneling equipment and supplies to the rebels as early as 1776, and after France threw its support behind the rebels as well (following their victory at the Battle of Saratoga in 1778), Spain declared war on Britain as an ally of France. Neither Spain nor France—both stoutly monarchist—was sympathetic to the rebels' politics, but both appreciated the strategic opportunities created by the fact that the rebellion forced Britain to divide its forces and its attention.

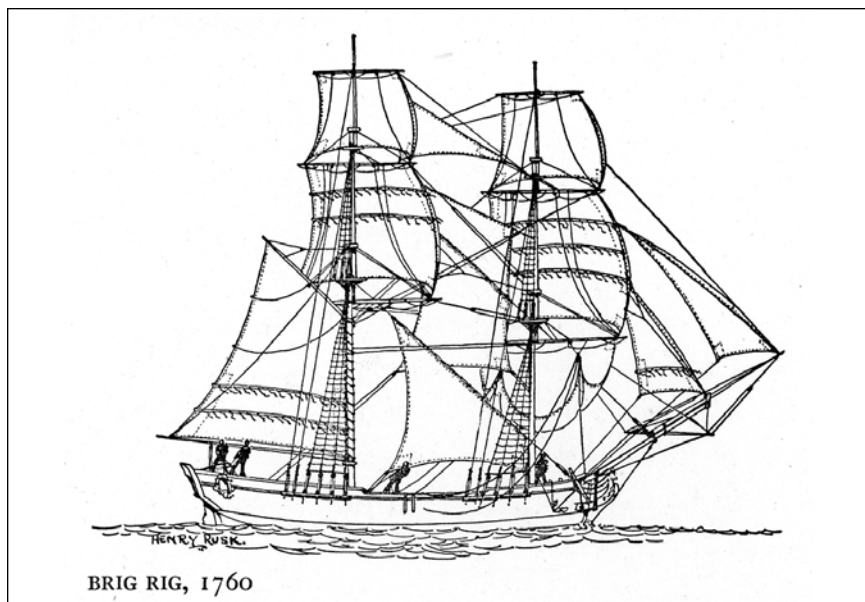
Cornwallis's surrender to Washington at Yorktown in September 1781 made American independence all-but-inevitable, but it did not end the larger war. More than a dozen significant Anglo-French naval engagements, including the massive fleet action known as the Battle of the Saintes, took place in the nearly two years between the Battle of Yorktown and the Treaty of Paris (signed in September 1783). The French capture of Monserrat, the Franco-Spanish recapture of Minorca, and a French expedition into Hudson Bay to raid British fur-trading posts—all supported by naval forces—took place in the same two-year window. The Thirteen Colonies, for the two years between Yorktown and Paris, were caught in a geopolitical no man's land: The shooting had stopped, but the war was still on. The British remained in control of New York City, the Vineyard remained formally neutral, and American privateers remained on the hunt for British vessels that—*because* the war was still on—were still legitimate, and potentially lucrative, targets.

The Twice-Taken Prize

Her name was *St. Lawrence*. At least, that was the name the British gave her. She was Spanish-built and, presumably, carried a Spanish name as she plied the waters of the Caribbean. She was bound from Havana to

Puerto Rico when—probably in December of 1781—two Royal Navy frigates found her, forced her to stop, and captured her. The *St. Lawrence* (perhaps when she sailed under Spanish colors she was the *San Lorenzo*) was a substantial ship, displacing 450 tons, and she carried “a substantial sum of money” in her hold. She also carried “30 carriage guns”—that is, cannon large enough that they were mounted on wheeled carts rather than swivel mounts attached to the ship’s railing—but they were of relatively small caliber. Effective enough against *ad hoc* raids by local buccaneers, they were never intended to hold off purpose-built warships like the British frigates. The captain of what became the *St. Lawrence* likely surrendered without firing a shot, and was relieved of his cargo of currency by the British. The British also claimed the ship itself as a prize of war, putting a British “prize crew” aboard her under the command of a “prize master” (likely a junior officer) and dispatching her toward New York, where she could be refitted as necessary for use by the Royal Navy.

She never made it.



Two-masted vessels with a mix of square sails and fore-and-aft sails, brigs’ combination of power and maneuverability made them popular vessels among pirates and privateers. Drawing from Howard Chapelle, *History of American Sailing Ships* (1936), p. 16.

On January 8, off the “back” (that is, presumably, the ocean side) of Long Island, the *St. Lawrence* once again ran afoul of two armed vessels. They were a pair of American privateer brigs: the *Mary Ann* under Captain Packwood, and the *Resolution* under Captain Eldridge. Manned with a short-handed crew just sufficient to get her safely to a friendly (that is,

British) port, she was even less prepared to defend herself than she had been in the Caribbean. The Americans took the British prize crew off the *St. Lawrence* and put ten of their own men on, under the command of prize master Samuel Cardwell of New London. Other accounts refer to three “prisoners” (presumably Royal Navy sailors from the original prize crew) being aboard, but the author of the *Massachusetts Spy* testimony makes no such distinction between them and his shipmates. Captain Packwood of the *Mary Ann*, in command of the small flotilla, ordered Cardwell (now Captain Cardwell, for as long as he was in charge of the *St. Lawrence*) head for New London or another safe—that is, American-controlled—port. Once there, she and her cargo could be sold, and the proceeds divided between the privateer crews and the government that had licensed them to hunt enemy ships. The three ships proceeded in company for a time and then parted ways, *Mary Ann* and *Resolution* to continue hunting and *St. Lawrence* to make for New London.

Once again, she failed to complete her journey.

New London lies at the mouth of the Thames River, north and just slightly west of Montauk Point, the easternmost extremity of Long Island. Why the *St. Lawrence* didn’t go there remains a mystery. Nor is it clear why—when New London proved untenable as a destination—she didn’t make for Newport, New Bedford, or Rochester (today’s Mattapoisett) instead. The author of the *Massachusetts Spy* account doesn’t say, and (if he was an ordinary seaman) may not have known. He only notes that, “on or about January 11,” she dropped anchor in 7 fathoms (42 feet) of water 8 miles off “Old Town” (Edgartown) on Martha’s Vineyard and fired two guns—the customary means of requesting the services of a pilot.

Captain Cardwell wanted one pilot, but in rapid succession he got two, and possibly three. Samuel Fish arrived first, in a small boat that also held four other sailors.⁵ They climbed aboard and—as was customary—Cardwell turned over command of the ship to Fish. Another pilot boat arrived with five more men as they were getting under way, and then another carrying Capt. Peter Pease and five *more* men. They, too, climbed aboard. The *Massachusetts Spy* sailor does not name the captain of the second boat, or specify whether he offered his services as a pilot, but Matthew Butler, Samuel Wiswall, or Bayes Norton could all plausibly have filled the role. Whatever the arrangements, when the *St. Lawrence* raised anchor and headed westward on the afternoon of January 11, she did so with three more boats and fifteen more men aboard than she had had that morning. She also had a total of three, and possibly four, captains aboard—an arrangement that would lead her into disaster.

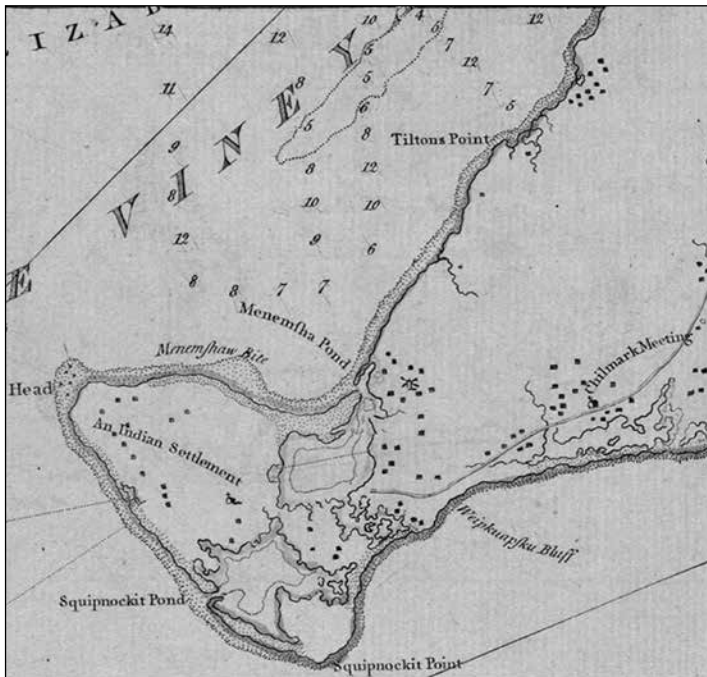
5 The anonymous sailor gives his name as “Henry” Fish, but this seems unlikely: There is no record of anyone by that name living in Edgartown in 1782.

Disaster

Fish, having been given temporary command by Cardwell, headed the *St. Lawrence* down Nantucket Sound and then down Vineyard Sound. Soon, however, things began to go awry. The anonymous sailor recalled:

Capt. Pease persuaded Mr. Cardwell to give the charge of the ship to him, which being done, he brought her to anchor off Gayhead about 4 o'clock in the afternoon. The wind blowing fresh E.N.E. we lay there three days. At length Capt. Cardwell and his people, growing uneasy with their situation, insisted on Capt. Pease's bringing the ship to sail, the wind being fair. Pease accordingly came to sail and stood between Gayhead and Noman's-Land, where he anchored about 8 o'clock. This occasioned great uneasiness among the people, and they complained to Capt. Cardwell, who was sick below.

Four hours passed, with the ships' sails hanging loose and the crews of the pilot boats refusing to take any action to get the *St. Lawrence* underway.



The western end of the Island, as shown on a chart drawn by Royal Navy cartographer Joseph F. W. Des Barres. The exact location of the wreck is unknown, but it was likely on the ocean side of Squibnocket Point.

Viewed on a map, the western end of Martha's Vineyard resembles a lumpy upturned foot with Squibnocket Point forming the "heel" and the Gay Head Cliffs the "toe." The coastline between them—the "sole" of the foot—runs ruler-straight along a SE-NW line, and Nomans Land lies 3-4

miles due south. If the *St. Lawrence* was “standing between Gay Head and Nomans Land” when she anchored, she was somewhere off the southern half of that beach. As long as the wind continued to blow from the East-Northeast, it was a safe anchorage; if the anchor line parted, or the anchor lost its grip on the bottom, the wind would push the ship out to sea, and the crew would have time to set the sails, take stock of their situation, and regroup. If the wind shifted to the west of north, however, the coastline between Squibnocket and Gay Head would become a “lee shore.” If anything went wrong, the wind would drive the hapless ship toward the beach. “Clawing off a lee shore” required sailing the ship almost into the teeth of the oncoming wind: a difficult job in a square-rigged ship at the best of times, and one that severely diminished the efficiency of the sails.⁶

Almost immediately, something *did* go wrong: the ship’s anchor began dragging. Heavy as they are, anchors hold ships not because of their weight but because they are designed to dig themselves into the seabed. Once the anchor is dug in, the pull that the ship exerts on the anchor line as the wind blows just digs the anchor in deeper. Deliberately uprooting the anchor (so that the ship can raise it and sail away) requires pulling on it from a significantly different angle. To do that deliberately, the crew would pull in the anchor line until the ship was almost directly above the anchor, and keep pulling. The pull—now perpendicular rather than parallel to the seabed—would then be enough to dislodge the anchor. When the wind shifted off the Gay Head shore it did something similar: unexpected and unbidden. The ship began sliding toward the lee shore.

Cardwell, Fish, and most of the ship’s company argued for raising the anchor, filling the sails, and trying to make it to sea. Pease and several of his men, however, “raised a great mutiny and refused to go to sea.” The indecision continued until the anchor line parted, at which point “it was then too late to get clear of land.” Pease—still functionally in command—told the man at the helm to run the ship onto the beach. If he was trying for a “controlled crash,” he did not achieve it. The ship struck a line of barely submerged rocks and, in the anonymous sailor’s words, “went immediately to pieces” with “very little of the cargo . . . saved.” Of the twenty-eight men aboard, fifteen died, including prize-master Cardwell and pilot Fish. Peter Pease, who seemingly bore a greater share of the blame than anyone else aboard, survived the wreck and much that followed. He died, presumably in bed, on New Year’s Day, 1829, aged 94.

Thaxter’s notes on the wreck are a brief, concise, almost journalistic paragraph. In its entirety, it reads:

6 Square-rigged sails were optimized for long offshore passage; fore-and-aft sails were preferred for inshore maneuvering. See A. Bowdoin Van Riper, “Ship Shapes: A Reader’s Guide to the Age of Sail,” *Dukes County Intelligencer*, Winter 2016, pp. 37-51.

January 17, 1782. Matthew Butler, Samuel Wiswell, Bayes Norton, Samuel Fish, Jethro Norton, Isaac Bunker. They all perished in a ship cast away at Gay Head. Bayes Norton and Isaac Bunker were not found; the rest were brought to the meeting house and buried in the New Burying Place, which were the first laid there. They left four widows and twenty-four fatherless children, and Mrs. Butler near the time of her lying in. 9 of our people were saved, and three that belonged to the ship. The rest, 8, perished. Bayes Norton and Isaac Bunker were found afterward and buried in Chilmark.⁷

Amid Thaxter's dispassionate accounting of the living and the dead, one line stands out: "They left four widows and twenty-four fatherless children, and Mrs. Butler near the time of her lying in." Thaxter would have had no need to remind the people of Edgartown that, as the *Book of Common Prayer* put it, "in the midst of life, we are in death." Many of the parents in his congregation had buried multiple children before their fifth birthdays, and many of the men had lost their wives to complications from childbirth. Tragic as those deaths might be, they were predictable and expected. The risks attached to childbirth, and the precarity of a child's first five years, were part of lived reality in the 1780s. The hazards of seafaring—drowning, exposure, falls from the rigging—were, in a port like Edgartown, also part of that reality. "Routine" deaths, however, typically came in ones and twos. Six men lost in a single night was—in a town whose thousand residents belonged to sprawling multi-generational families bound by kinship and inter-marriage—a catastrophe. There is more drama, and more overt emotion, in Betsey Norton's poem, but Rev. Thaxter—who had seen death first-hand on the battlefields of the Revolution—captures the tragedy in a few succinct, understated phrases.



The gravestone of Matthew Butler, one of six Edgartonians who died in the wreck, at Pease's Point Way Cemetery. Photo courtesy of Dr. Raymond Butler Weiss.

Open Questions

Thanks to the digital tools available to modern researchers, we now know more about the Gay Head shipwreck of 1782 than anyone in the last two centuries: the name of the ship, the name of her captain, and some of their prior history, for starters. The testimony of the anonymous sailor

⁷ "The Hazards of Seafaring: Martha's Vineyard 1780-1827" [from Joseph Thaxter's records], *Dukes County Intelligencer*, November 1968, p. 169.

quoted in *Thomas's Massachusetts Spy* confirms that Betsey Norton's tale of a captain sick below decks and rival pilots arguing as the ship drifted toward destruction is not poetic license but a fairly accurate second-hand account of the disaster. That is more than enough reason to be grateful, but what we *do* know is also a reminder of what we (still) *don't* know.

We can say with some certainty that we know *what* happened during the *St. Lawrence's* last days, but not that we know *why* it happened. Why did two (or possibly three) rival pilots board the vessel? Why did Peter Pease—who had made the first offshore whaling voyage from Martha's Vineyard in 1765, and was no stranger to the deep ocean—insist on anchoring for three days off Gay Head despite a fair wind, and then anchor *again* northwest of Squibnocket Point over the protests of many on board? Why did he, along with some of his men, protest so strongly against raising sails and departing, to the point where the anonymous sailor described his actions as “a mutiny?” Why did Samuel Fish (to whom Cardwell had granted command) stand for it? Why, illness or not, did Cardwell?

In the absence of documentable answers, it is inviting to speculate. The colonies were still, at least nominally, at war with Britain, and the *St. Lawrence* was, twice over, a prize of war. The ship itself, and the “quantity of brass cannon” she was reported to be carrying, represented significant value to those who could deliver them into the right hands. Martha's Vineyard harbored Loyalists as well as Patriots, and although the politics of the Revolution had effectively disappeared from the public life of the Island after it slipped into a state of formal neutrality after Gray's Raid in 1778 it is at least possible that they resurfaced after Yorktown as the larger war wound to a close. We know that rival fire companies sometimes fought one another with greater zeal than they fought fire; is it possible that the multiple boatloads of Edgartonians who boarded the *St. Lawrence* in January 1782 represented rival political factions? Or did Samuel Fish—just trying to collect his pilot's fee—run afoul of Peter Pease's plan to keep the ship close to the Gay Head shore until he and associates on land could figure out how to take her for themselves? Did Pease, his judgement clouded by greed, linger off a dangerous lee shore until it was too late?

Intriguing stuff, but all based on inference and circumstance; there is, at the moment, not a shred of hard evidence for any of it. That we do not yet *have* such evidence does not, however, mean that it does not exist. Not so long ago, an article like this would have ended with a wistful admission that “we will probably never know,” but I am not prepared to accept that. Historians have only begun to grasp the impact of digital tools, and the last 250-year-old documents have not yet emerged from forgotten trunks and boxes. We don't know what drove any of the principal actors in this tragic drama—Cardwell, Fish, and Pease—to make the choices they did, and we *may* never know.

Then again, a month ago, we didn't even know the ship's name.



The Tisbury World War Memorial, now displayed alongside the matching World War II Memorial plaque just inside the State Road entrance to Oak Grove Cemetery. Photograph by A. Bowdoin Van Riper.

150 Years of Island Industry



Photographs from the last quarter of the nineteenth century, part of the Basic Welch Collection, capture the Roaring Brook Brickworks in its heyday. L to R: mill wheel and sluiceway; on-site workers' dormitory; the brickworks complex from above; bricks stockpiled for shipping; wharf where schooners loaded bricks