

MVMUSEUM

Quarterly

Martha's Vineyard Museum's Journal of Island History

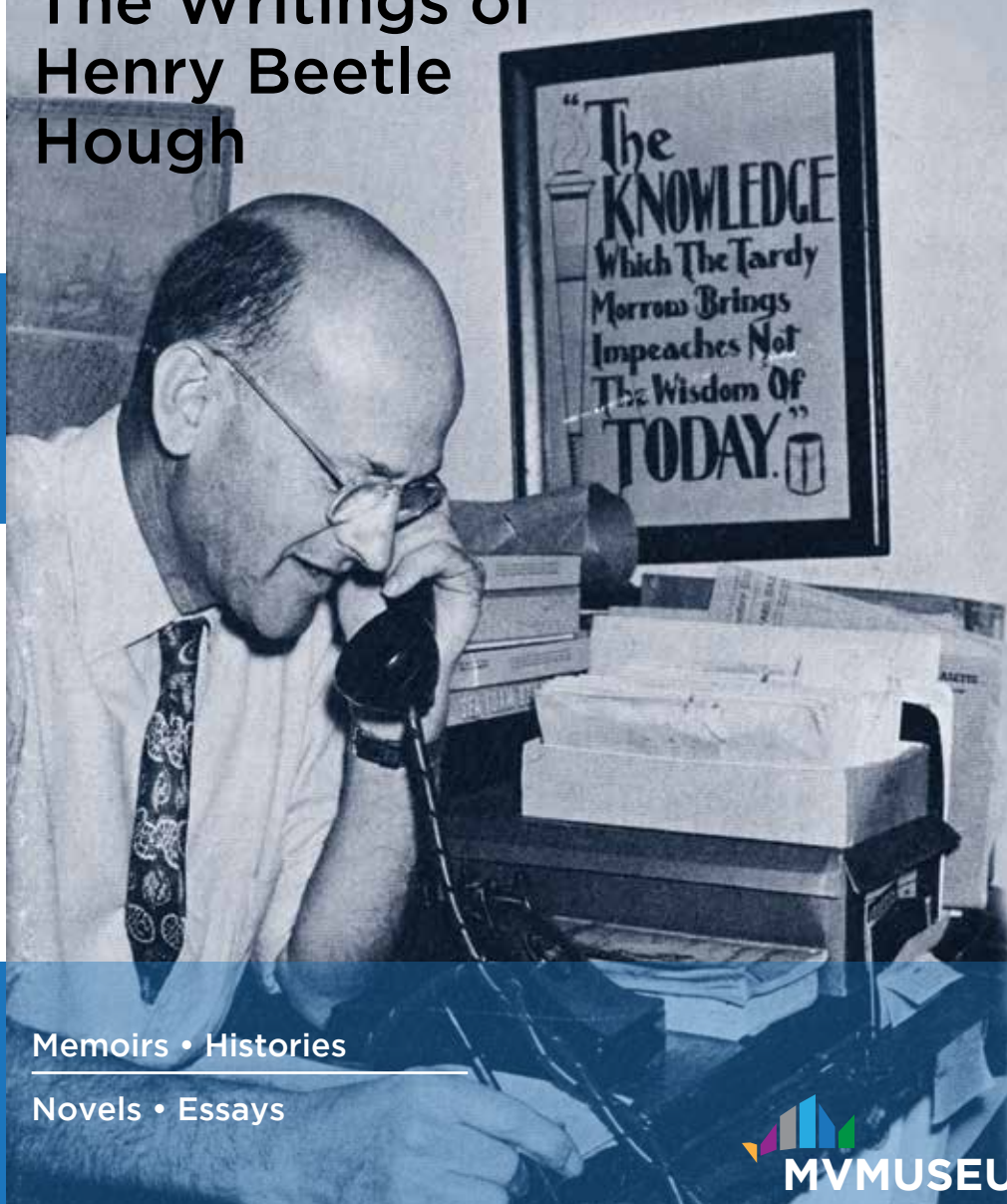
Formerly
The Dukes County
Intelligencer

NOVEMBER
2020

VOLUME 61
NO. 4

MVMUSEUM.ORG

The Writings of Henry Beetle Hough



Memoirs • Histories

Novels • Essays


MVMUSEUM

MVM MEMBERSHIP CATEGORIES

Details at mvmuseum.org/membership

Basic	\$55
Partner	\$150
Sustainer	\$250
Patron.....	\$500
Benefactor.....	\$1,000

*Basic membership includes one adult;
higher levels include two adults. All levels
include children through age 18.*

*Full-time Island residents are eligible for
discounted membership rates. Contact
Annie Howell at 508-627-4441 x126.*

HENRY BEETLE HOUGH

He was the only man I ever heard my father address as “Sir.”

It was a brief, chance encounter: I was home from college, we had stopped at the old Vineyard Haven Delicatessen for take-out sandwiches, and Henry Beetle Hough was seated at one of the tables sharing lunch with friends. “Hello, Tony,” he said. My father responded: “Hello, Sir, how are you?” and they exchanged a few pleasantries before returning to their briefly paused lives.

I was old enough, at 20, to know how deeply the New England tradition of radical egalitarianism ran in my father, and how deeply he disdained any social formality that implied a difference in status (let alone worth) between two human beings. I was raised to unfailingly address my elders as “Mr. Smith” or “Mrs. Jones,” but using “Sir” or “Ma’am” would have felt as alien to my ears as addressing them in Mandarin. When he was leader of my Boy Scout troop, salutes were rendered only to the flag, never to another individual. Once a draftee private in an army raised to defend democracy from totalitarianism, he took democracy—in all its forms—very seriously indeed.

And yet, for him, Henry Beetle Hough was “Sir.” Outside, walking back to the car, I remarked on it. My father (who had made words the basis of his livelihood and the center of his life) replied: “There are very few people who have earned that level of respect, but Henry Hough is one of them.” This issue of the *Quarterly*, one of an ongoing series of November issues on key themes on Island history, is an exploration of why.

— A. Bowdoin Van Riper

MARTHA'S VINEYARD MUSEUM QUARTERLY

≈
Special Edition
The Writings
Of Henry Beetle Hough

WRITTEN & EDITED BY A. BOWDOIN VAN RIPER

VOL. 61, No. 4

© 2020

NOVEMBER 2020

Introduction3
The *Gazette* Books7
The Histories21
The Novels35
The Essays47
Final Thoughts62

Founding Editor: Gale Huntington (1959-1961, 1964-1977) Dorothy Scoville, Editor (1961-1963) George Adams, Editor (1977-1979) Arthur R. Railton, Editor (1979-2006) John Walter, Editor (2007-2008) Susan Wilson, Editor (2009-2014)

The Martha's Vineyard Museum Quarterly is published by the Martha's Vineyard Museum. Subscription is by membership in the Museum. Recent issues are available in the Museum gift shop or by emailing frontdesk@mvmmuseum.org. Back issues may be requested through the Museum library. Membership in the Museum is invited. Visit www.mvmmuseum.org and go to the "Support" tab.

Author queries and manuscripts for this journal should be submitted electronically to bvanriper@mvmmuseum.org, subject line "MVM Quarterly."

Articles in the *MVM Quarterly* do not necessarily represent the opinions of the Museum or its officers. Every effort is made to confirm dates, names and events in published articles, but we cannot guarantee total accuracy.

ISSN 0418 1379

MARTHA'S VINEYARD MUSEUM

Board of Directors

Cathy Weiss, *Chair*

Paul Schneider, *Vice-Chair*

David Grain, *Secretary*

Meredith Degen, *Treasurer*

Barbara Alleyne, Stever Aubrey, Nat Benjamin, Robert Blacklow
Jeb Blatt, Jonathan Blum, Marcia Mulford Cini, Gordon Cromwell

David R. Foster, Deirdre Frank, Dale Garth, Peter Gearhart

Fain Hackney, Fred Jackson, David Lewis

Calvin Linnemann, June Manning, Christopher Morse

Jim Newman, Phil Regan, James B. Richardson III, Alison Shaw

Shelley Stewart, Elizabeth Hawes Weinstock

Lana Woods, Denys Wortman

Staff

Heather Seger, *Interim Executive Director*

Anna Barber, *Manager of Exhibitions and Public Programs*

Savannah Berryman-Moore, *Special Projects Coordinator*

Carol Carroll, *Director of Finance and Administration*

Tamara Chin, *Advancement Associate*

Ann DuCharme, *Museum Teacher*

Katy Fuller, *Director of Operations and Business Development*

Khalid Jackson, *Visitor Services Coordinator*

Lea Kaeka, *Visitor Services Associate*

Vitoria Krasa, *Visitor Services Associate*

Linsey Lee, *Oral History Curator*

Kate Logue, *Exhibitions Associate*

Betsey Mayhew, *Finance Administrator*

Sam Morris, *Digital Services Manager*

Laura Noonan, *Oral History Assistant*

Dawna Phaneuf, *Housekeeper*

Adam Smith, *Facilities Manager*

Bonnie Stacy, *Chief Curator*

A. Bowdoin Van Riper, *Research Librarian and Historian*

Introduction

THE LIST OF nationally famous authors who have summered on (and, in some cases, retired to) Martha's Vineyard's is long and well-known. It is easy to list a dozen—Geraldine Brooks, Philip R. Craig, Henry Louis Gates, Jessica Harris, Lillian Hellman, John Hersey, Tony Horwitz, Ward Just, Jill Nelson, Emily Post, William Styron, Dorothy West—without exhausting the so-called “A list” or turning to individuals (Experience Mayhew, Nathaniel Southgate Shaler, Charles Banks, Carly Simon, Barack Obama) for whom writing was an adjunct to another career. The list of “Vineyard-famous” writers—whose work is centered on, or whose fame is tied to, the Island—is also robust. Here, too, listing a dozen—Joseph Chase Allen, Polly Burroughs, Thomas Dresser, Tom Dunlop, Jib Ellis, C. G. Hine, Gale Huntington, Linsey Lee, Phyllis Méras, Holly Nadler, Dorothy Cottle Poole, Dan Waters—leaves many more in reserve.¹

And then there is Henry Beetle Hough.

Hough bestrides the two literary worlds. He was an author with deep (though not exclusive) family ties to the Island and his works were primarily (though not wholly) about the Island. He wrote, co-wrote, or edited 25 books, scores of articles and short stories, and uncountable reams of material for the *Vineyard Gazette*.² Four decades after his death, his books remain in public libraries across the Island and academic libraries across the country. At any bookstore or library sale with a “Vineyard Books” section, and any impromptu yard sale listing “Vineyard Books” among its offerings, Hough's works are all but certain to be represented. His fame was intimately bound up with the Island, and yet—particularly at its peak—extended far beyond it. “Henry B. Hough, Editor of Vineyard Paper, Dies,” the *Washington Post* declared in a June 7, 1985, headline that ran over an obituary taken from the Associated Press feed. The *Los Angeles*

1 These lists are meant to be illustrative, not evaluative; the inclusion or omission of a particular name is not intended as a judgement of literary merit.

2 A complete bibliography of Hough's book-length works appears at the end of this issue. A similar list of his shorter works has yet to be compiled.

Times obituary that ran the following day was headlined: “65 Years with the Vineyard Gazette: Country Editor Henry Hough Dies.” The *New York Times* headline was more austere: “Henry Beetle Hough Is Dead at 88.” The absence of an additional identifying clause spoke volumes: *Times* readers would, in the editors’ judgement, already know him by name.

Born in New Bedford in 1896, the younger son of *New Bedford Standard* editor George A. Hough and Abby Louise Beetle of Chilmark, Henry Beetle Hough had Vineyard connections on both sides of his family.³ His paternal grandfather, Dr. George T. Hough, had practiced in Vineyard Haven for several years before settling in New Bedford; his maternal grandfather, Capt. Henry W. Beetle, was a master mariner from Tisbury who had commanded the New Bedford whaling ships *Hercules*, *James Andrews*, and *Fortune* on voyages in the 1840s and 1850s.

Hough’s own bond with the Island began in 1898, when his father bought a seaside camp at the end of Indian Hill Road in West Tisbury as a summer and weekend retreat. Dubbed “Fish Hook” by a family friend (because it was “at the end of the line”) it became a second home where Henry and his older brother George Jr. swam, fished, rode horses, and tramped through the surrounding woods and fields. Henry graduated from New Bedford High School and then, in 1918, from the Columbia University School of Journalism, where an essay he co-wrote with fellow student Minna Lewinson was awarded the first (and only) Pulitzer Prize for Newspaper History.⁴ In 1920, after a brief and unsatisfying period in the corporate world in Chicago, Henry married another Columbia classmate: Elizabeth Bowie. George Hough Sr. bought the *Vineyard Gazette*, then on the market, as a wedding present for his son and new daughter-in-law, and the couple moved to Edgartown in the spring of 1920. They remained, except for brief trips off-Island, for the rest of their lives.

The Houghs’ forty-five years together on the paper was an equal partnership: co-owners, co-publishers, and *de facto* co-editors. Henry may have been the public face and editorial voice of *Gazette*, as well as the driving force behind upgrades in the typesetting equipment and printing press, but Betty was an indispensable presence behind the scenes, serving as managing editor and business manager, while editing reams of copy and managing the steady flow of correspondence to and from subscribers.

3 Hough’s life and newspaper career are fully recounted in Phyllis Méras, *Country Editor: Henry Beetle Hough and the Vineyard Gazette* (2006). His own account of his early life, from childhood through marriage, is in *Mostly on Martha’s Vineyard: A Personal Record* (1975), pp. 1-164.

4 Minna Lewinson and Henry Beetle Hough, “History of Service Rendered to the Public by the American Press in the Year 1917” (1918). https://www.google.com/books/edition/A_History_of_the_Services_Rendered_to_th/8s9CAAAAYAAJ

In 1968, three years after Betty's death, Henry sold the *Gazette* to *New York Times* editor James Reston and his wife Sally, saying that: "I want it to go into a newspaper family, and you have writing sons." One of those sons, former *Los Angeles Times* bureau chief Richard Reston, assumed the editorship of the *Gazette* in 1975, but Henry Beetle Hough continued to write for it until his death ten years later. During Henry Beetle Hough's association with the *Gazette*, its weekly circulation increased from 600 to 13,000. The paper became known nationally an iconic example of small-town journalism, and locally as a powerful voice in favor of conservation and against unregulated development. Architect of the campaign that brought the current Edgartown Harbor Light to Starbuck's Neck, co-founder (with Betty) of the Sheriff's Meadow Foundation, and participant in civic enterprises too numerous to list, he is among the most influential Islanders of the twentieth century.

Henry Beetle Hough's work on the *Gazette* has been documented extensively—in the paper itself, in his books, and in Phyllis Méras's excellent biography.⁵ Aside from contemporary reviews, however, his writings outside the *Gazette* have received little attention. This issue of the *MV Museum Quarterly* is an attempt to fill that gap by considering the 25 books—published over fifty years and representing diverse subjects and genres—that represent Henry Beetle Hough's *other* literary legacy.

5 The bulk of Henry Beetle Hough's personal and papers are held by the Columbia University Library. The Henry Beetle Hough Collection (RU 21) and Hough Family "Fish Hook" Collection (RU 22) in the Martha's Vineyard Museum archives include article-length publications, scrapbooks and family memorabilia, and Hough's extensive files on Vineyard history and culture.

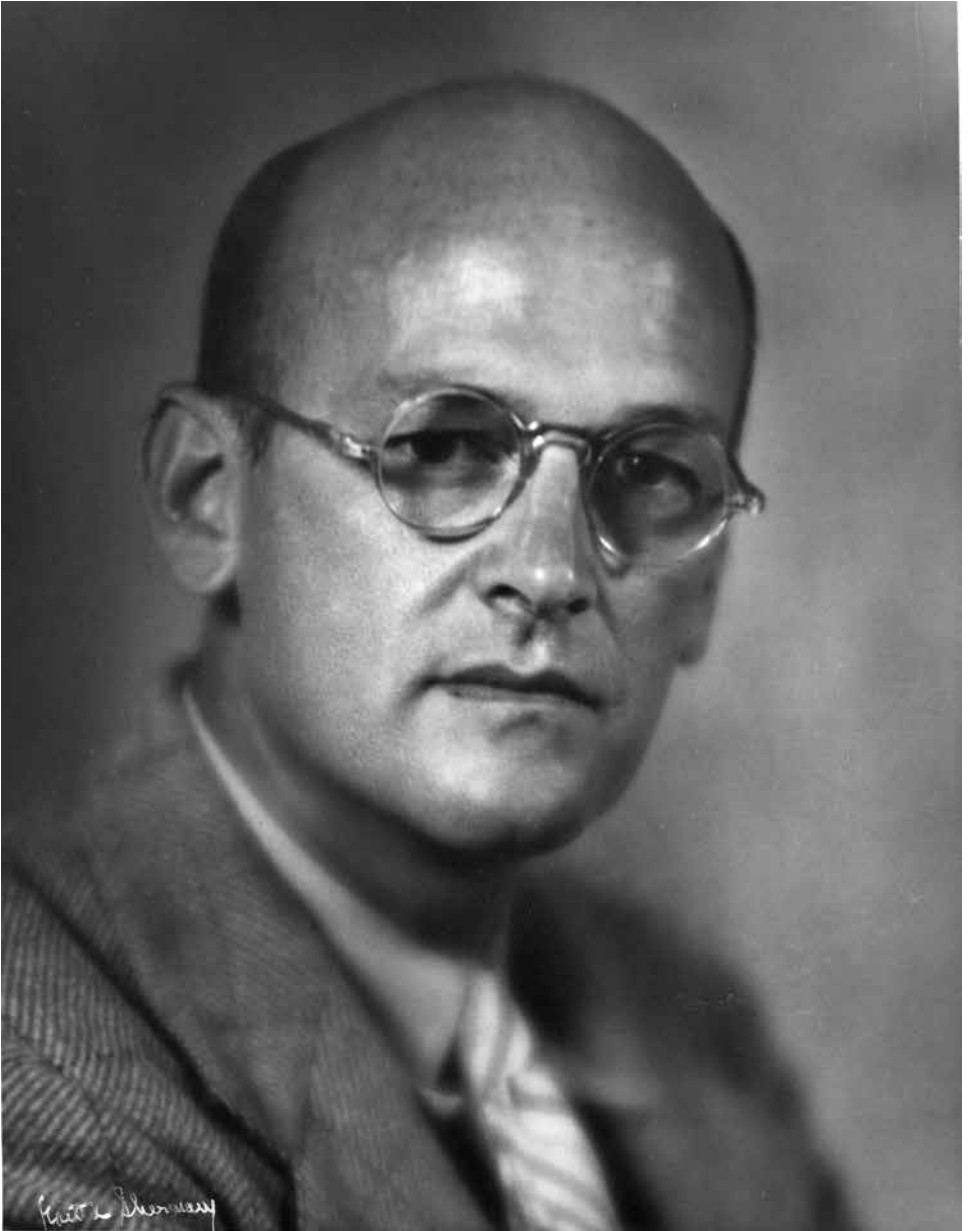


Photo by Editta Sherman

The *Gazette* Books

THE VINEYARD GAZETTE WAS the centerpiece of Henry Beetle Hough's professional life, and *Country Editor* (1940)—based on his first twenty years on the paper—was the cornerstone of his literary reputation. The paper made him a central figure in the history of Martha's Vineyard, and the book made him, for a time, a minor-but-notable presence in the national literary landscape. When Hough died in 1985, they were the lead in his obituary both locally and nationally. Seen from a distance, *Country Editor* and its sequel *Once More the Thunderer* (1950) appear to be straightforward memoirs of life on a small-town New England newspaper. A closer look, however, reveals something more complex. They are memoirs in the sense that they recount events from the author's life, but Hough himself is never truly at the center of their narratives and (atypically for a memoir) he is never his own principal subject. They are stories of the *Gazette*, but not as a publication or as a business enterprise. Rather, they are concerned with the *Gazette* as a community, and with the larger communities—Edgartown and the Island—with which it is imbedded.

The two books, and Hough's intervening essay collection *Singing in the Morning* (1947), share a common theme: the simple, yet deep and satisfying, rhythms of small-town life. It was a theme that Hough also touched on in three of the four novels he published in the 1940s—*All Things Are Yours* (1942), *Long Anchorage* (1947), and particularly *Roosters Crow in Town* (1945)—and that Thornton Wilder had explored a few years earlier in *Our Town* (1938). Wilder's play, about turn-of-the-century life in the fictional small town of Grover's Corners, New Hampshire, is sometimes described as "metatheatrical." On its stage, the boundaries between the world of the living and that of the dead are porous, but so are those between the residents of Grover's Corners and the audience. Wilder's central character, the Stage Manager, transcends both boundaries, conversing with the dead as well as the living, and embodying minor characters in the events played out on stage as well as interpreting and commenting on those events for the audience. It is, perhaps, stretching a point to call *Country Editor* and

Once More the Thunderer “meta-memoirs,” but in them (and to a lesser extent in *Singing in the Morning*) there is more than a little of the Stage Manager in Hough. He is a participant in the events he relates, but also a wise and wistful commentator interpreting their larger significance for his audience of readers.

The 1940s, to which all three books belong, were a watershed decade in the history of the Island. They mark, in retrospect, the point at which Martha’s Vineyard tilted from an island where a three-month tourist season annually interrupted the centuries-old rhythms of fishing and farming to an island where fishing and farming took place on the margins of an ever-expanding tourist economy. The rhythms of vacation life on the Island, which in the 1930s still bore (however faintly) traces of their Gilded Age origins, were also irrevocably altered in the 1940s. Automobiles and roll-on/roll-off car ferries replaced trains and passenger steamers; one- and two-story motels sprouted like mushrooms, and the old Victorian resort hotels were pulled down or modified beyond recognition; steamer trunks gave way to suitcase-packed station wagons; and “the season” began to creep outward into May, September, and October. Looking back from 2006, historian Arthur Railton referred to it simply as “The Change.”

Late in life, in the essay collections that absorbed his literary energies from 1970 onward, Hough would lament the scope and scale of The Change, and its corrosive effects on the Island he loved. His last two novels, *The Port* (1963) and *The Road* (1970), were thinly veiled commentaries on it. His campaigns for land conservation and restrained development, carried on both in town meetings and in the pages of the *Gazette*, were attempts to slow its hurtling progress, and blunt its worst effects. There is no way to know whether Hough sensed The Change coming, and conceived *Country Editor* as a portrait of a soon-to-be-endangered way of life. That *Once More the Thunderer* was, a decade later, written with that in mind seems all but certain. Regardless of his intent, however, they are—along with *Singing in the Morning*, discussed in a later section of this issue—a remarkable (if lovingly burnished and enhanced) portrait of the Island before The Change.

In Praise of Small Towns, 1920-1939

Idealization of small-town life, and praise of small towns as reservoirs of civic virtue and the “true American spirit, has been part of American culture since Thomas Jefferson sang the praises of yeoman farmers in the earliest days of the republic. In the opening decades of the twentieth century, it wove through the writings of Booth Tarkington (*Penrod*) and Sherwood Anderson (*Winesburg, Ohio*), and the art of Norman Rockwell,

Grant Wood, and Thomas Hart Benton. *Main Street* (1920), a skewering of the cultural desolation and mindless conformism of Midwestern small towns, may have made Sinclair Lewis's reputation, but popular (and, to an extent, critical) sentiment was firmly on the side of the idealists. The nationwide economic desolation produced by the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl intensified the process rather than undercutting it. Caught in a catastrophe of Biblical proportions, abandoned by the corrupt rulers of a broken society, Ma Joad of *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) puts her quiet, unshakable faith not in God, but in the residents of small towns: "Why, Tom, we're the people that live. They ain't gonna wipe us out. Why, we're the people—we go on." America's entry into World War II intensified the process further, yielding (in 1943 alone) cultural milestones like Rockwell's "Four Freedoms" paintings, Rogers and Hammerstein's musical play *Oklahoma*, and Philip Van Doren Stern's short story "The Greatest Gift," filmed by Frank Capra in 1946 as *It's a Wonderful Life*.

Against this backdrop, books about the lives of learned professionals in small towns enjoyed a brief, intense vogue in the late 1930s. John Franklin Carter's book *The Rectory Family* (1937) described life as the son of an Episcopal priest in Williamstown, MA, before what was then still known as "The Great War."¹ The following year brought two country-doctor books—William N. Macartney's *Fifty Years a Country Doctor* and Arthur Emmanuel Hertzler's *Horse-and-Buggy Doctor*—that, along with the autobiography of the impressively named Dr. Chevalier Quixote Jackson, caused *Time* to quip about "the possible beginning of a trend that may yet make the late boom in foreign correspondents' memoirs look sick."² When *Country Lawyer*, Belamy Partridge's fond memoir of his father's 50-year practice in Phelps, NY, appeared in August 1939, *Kirkus Reviews* noted that it resembled *The Rectory Family*, albeit with a focus on the main character's relationship to the townspeople rather than his own family. Partridge's book would, the brief notice concluded, appeal to "the Country Doctor market."³

Given this background, it is no surprise that Henry Beetle Hough saw the potential for a book about the life of a small-town newspaper editor. It is also easy to see why (eager to seize the moment while it lasted) he wrote *Country Editor* in a few intense months in the fall of 1939. Acquisitions editors at Doubleday—which had seen earlier "Country" books produce robust sales for rivals E. P. Dutton, Grosset and Dunlap, Whittlesey, and Coward-McCann—doubtless hoped that Hough's work would give them a hit of their own. They were right.

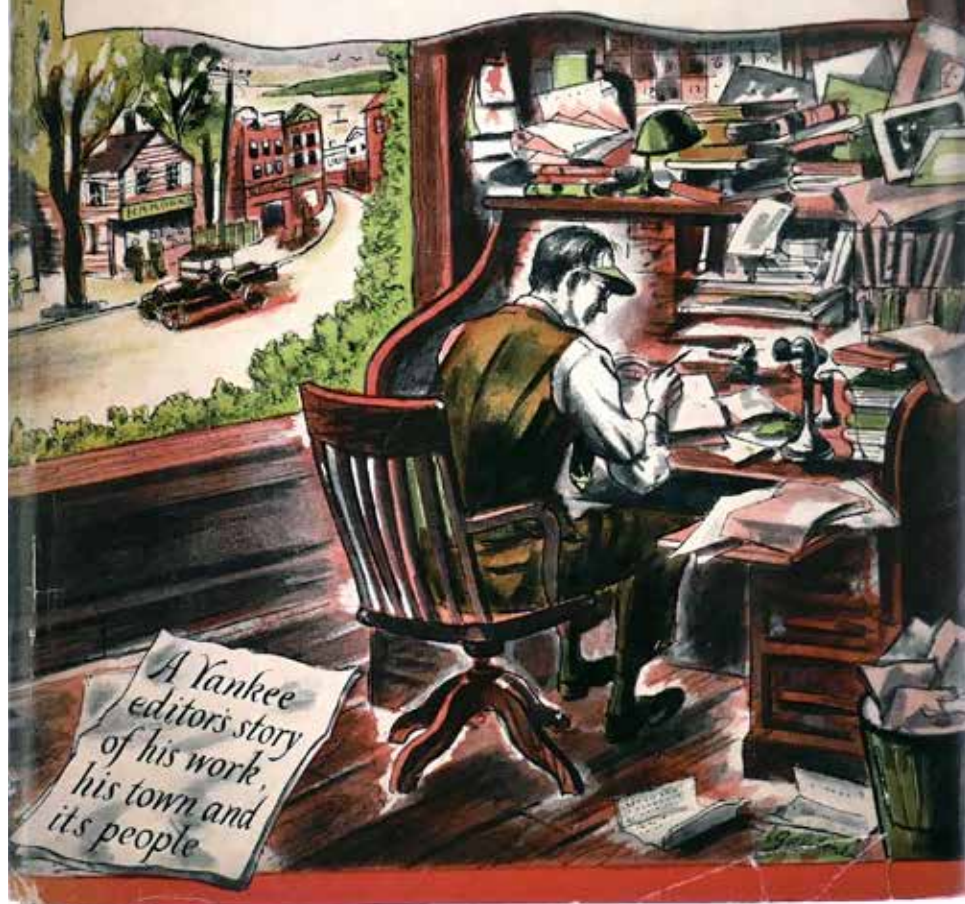
1 Augusta Tucker, "From a New England Rectory," *New York Times*, August 28, 1937.

2 "Books: Kitchen Surgeon," *Time*, August 1, 1938.

3 "Country Lawyer: The Story of My Father," *Kirkus Reviews*, August 1, 1939.

Country Editor

HENRY BEETLE HOUGH



Country Editor appeared in Henry and Betty Hough's twenty-first year as joint owner-publisher-editors of the *Vineyard Gazette*, but it is not a history of the paper. The incidents it describes mostly occur within the mile-square boundaries of Edgartown village, but it is not a history of Edgartown, either. It is the first Hough book in which he appears as an on-the-page character and writes as himself rather than (as in *Martha's Vineyard: Summer Resort*, published five years earlier) a detached voice of authority, but it is not a memoir. It is, rather, a conscious effort by Hough to use his experiences as a newspaper editor to paint an idealized portrait of his adopted small-town home.

Country Editor (1940)

In a book that runs just over 300 pages in its original edition, Hough signals his intentions in the first three. "On the morning the war began," *Country Editor* opens, "Betty and I were hurrying to the Gazette office as close to half past seven as possible. It was publication day. The north-easter appeared to have blown itself out, the sun was coming through the clouds in the east, and the air began to be sweet and clear as it often is in the fall." The initial paragraph is brief: three sentences and sixty-three words. Just over half those words, comprising the longest and most elaborate of the sentences, concern not the just-begun war or even the *Gazette*, but the weather: the way the light comes through the clouds, and the taste of the air in early fall. Quietly but decisively, Hough has established his priorities. A longer paragraph follows, and now the paper *does* take center stage. Hough acknowledges four more members of the staff (Bill Roberts, Joe Allen, and two unnamed boys) and briefly describing the activity in the office: writing headlines, "fixing up" short news stories and personal notices, and choosing the type for the front page. The page ends (the scene has two more lines to run) with Betty posing a salient question: "Hadn't we better have something about the beginning of the war?"⁴

Henry agrees, of course, and composes "a few paragraphs about how the residents of our community had heard that morning over their radios of the bombing of Warsaw and the invasion of Poland." Then, noting that the last of the previous day's storm clouds had withdrawn, revealing "a crystalline, gilded morning," he closes the beginning-of-the-war story with a brief description of the weather, "in order that future generations might know, if they cared to look back in the files, what things were like on our island when the world went mad."⁵

Hough tells the story—*leads* with the story, when he could have led

4 *Country Editor*, p. 3.

5 *Country Editor*, p. 3.

with countless other moments from his twenty years running the paper—not to be quaint or folksy, but to make a larger philosophical point. “All the generations before this one,” he declares, “have found it difficult to understand size, bigness.” The current generation, however, has the opposite problem: Things “have been so big for so long” that people can no longer readily grasp the concept of smallness, or what life in a small town (or on a small-town newspaper) might be like. Worse, they do not even make the *effort* to understand, simply assuming that “anything small is simply an early and imperfect version of something big.”⁶ The *Gazette*, like the town and the island it serves, are counter to that. They are small—small that it is both possible and natural to note the taste of the air and the look of the sky on a day when the world plunges into war—and in their smallness they are perfectly themselves. The first chapter of *Country Editor* is Henry Beetle Hough explaining why he and Betty were drawn to the paper and the town. “Once, for a year, I worked in New York for a corporation which had gross sales of almost a million dollars a day,” he writes. “The Gazette was everything which that was not.” The remaining forty chapters are Hough’s attempt to bring that smallness (and its unique joys) to life for the reader.

Pursuing that goal, Hough continues as he began: by telling stories that, though at first glance they seem merely quaint, become brushstrokes in the larger picture he is painting. There are stories of the paper itself, such as the monumental shift from “cold type” plucked a letter at a time from wooden trays to “hot type” cast from molten metal by a Linotype machine. There are stories of other employees—pressman Bill Roberts, reporter Joe Allen, and a Dickensian figure whom Hough refers to as “the Old Editor,” who ran the paper for decades before the Houghs’ arrival in the spring of 1920 and stayed on at their invitation to stay involved and offer advice. Above all, however, there are stories of the townspeople with whom Hough and the other staff members interact: some are correspondents, some as contributors of news items or advertisements, and some as the subjects of news stories themselves.

Hough’s stories are presented thematically, not chronologically, and they are shorn of dates and—with certain unavoidable exceptions like Prohibition and the Great Depression—mentions of context that would allow them to *be* dated. Names of individuals are omitted or generalized. Recounting the story of a civil case tried in the Dukes County Superior Court in “that first fall” (that is, 1920), Hough refers to the three principal parties as “a gentleman of the old school,” his daughter-in-law, and “a young school teacher.”⁷ The case (and thus its details, including the par-

6 *Country Editor*, p. 3.

7 *Country Editor*, p. 191.

ties' names) was a matter of public record, duly reported in the *Gazette*. In telling the story twenty years later, however, Hough's interest is in narrating one of the *Gazette*'s first journalistic triumphs on his watch. The parties remain anonymous, and readers are left to seek out and comb the pages of what was, even when the book was published, a 20-year-old paper. Other names—but not all—are hidden behind pseudonyms. Henry and Betty Hough appear under their own names, as do pressman Bill Roberts, reporter Joe Allen, and columnist Xenophon Demosthenes Tingley (whose real name seemed, perhaps, too splendid to disguise). Hough's predecessor, however, is always "the Old Editor" or "Mr. Parsons," despite the fact that his real name, Charles Marchant, appeared weekly on page 2 of the *Gazette* for decades prior to the Hough era.

Readers familiar with Edgartown as it was before World War II can, in some cases, recognize the real people behind the veil of pseudonyms, pinning down the true identities of "Judge Nehemiah Alden" on page 117 and merchant prince "Dabney L. Boyd" on pages 141-143. It is easiest when they are involved in events unique enough to be independently searchable-for. "The Murder of Martin Willis," Chapter 36, is in fact the story of the 1935 murder of Knight B. Owen by Harold Look (whom Hough renames "Norman Strowd") as observed by summer resident Richard Salmon (who becomes "Howard Frost"). The year, typically for the book, is omitted, and although "Martin Willis" is accurately described as the grandson of a whaling captain, the fact that his family's fortune came from the manufacture and sale of gramophones (which would have made the Owen connection clearer) is elided. Hough writes, in *Country Editor*, not as a journalist or historian—careful with, and transparent about—facts, but as a spinner of tales of small-town life, names changed to protect the subjects.

These idiosyncrasies limit *Country Editor*'s value as conventional history, but they pay dividends in other ways. Unbound by chronology, and with no obligation to be meticulous about the names of individuals or businesses, Hough is free to observe and comment on patterns that would be lost in more conventionally structured books. At one point, for example, he offers the poignant observation that "[t]he rising generation was continually wanting to go into business and try new things, most of which unfortunately failed because the community was too small . . . [a] young man would try something new and devote to his idea considerable youthful enthusiasm and some intelligence, only to find that there were not enough customers around." Would-be radio dealers, sign-painters, surveyors, and landscape gardeners all came and went this way. In the early 1920s "it seemed that every man not otherwise engaged wanted to

have an agency and sell cars.” Then, a few years later, after a mid-decade real-estate boom had enriched a few lucky agents, “there were so many marginal real estate men that what had been prosperity for a few was likely to become hard pickings for many—but the crash of 1929 took the situation in hand through natural causes. The depression curtailed the interest of summer people in country property, and our real estate agents became fewer.”⁸

Woven subtly through such descriptions is one of the *Country Editor*’s central themes: the sense of stability, permanence, and continuity that pervades small-town life. Disruptions of the regular ebb and flow of events occur—the proliferation of car dealers or real-estate agents, the murder of Knight Owen/Martin Willis, even a fire that damages the *Gazette* office—but their impact is transient. Like ripples in the surface of a still pond, they are quickly damped out. Some things—like electricity and the telephone—came and stayed and changed the rhythms of life in Edgartown, Hough observes in the next-to-last chapter, firmly situated in the fall of 1939 and looking back over nearly 20 years. “But other big things were no more successful than the little things which had been before them. Bigness had been only a cry of the times. In so many instances if we could only have bridged that interval—slept through it, perhaps, in Rip Van Winkle style—we could have waked and gone on just as before, happily ignorant of a dislocation we had missed.”⁹

Once More the Thunderer (1950)

Published a decade after *Country Editor*, Hough’s second account of life on the *Gazette* is both recognizably a sequel and distinctly its own book. The content is broadly the same as that of *Country Editor*—a mixture of behind-the-scenes stories about putting out a small-town newspaper, interleaved with tales of small-town characters and small-town life—but the organization is subtly different, and the tone noticeably so. Individuals other than the *Gazette* staff are, once again, hidden behind pseudonyms, but (unlike *Country Editor*) Hough notes the fact at the outset. He also acknowledges that some Vineyarders—those “who would prefer it so” or who would “be deprived of true reality, or honors earned” by a pseudonym—also appear under their real names. Dates are still sparse, but the chronology is less scrambled. The book is still a collection of loosely connected tales rather than a single sustained narrative, but the tales themselves are longer and more cohesive, with a depth and richness of detail far beyond that of the earlier book. Hough’s recounting of the 1935 murder of Knight Owen occupied a single chapter of fourteen pages in *Country*

8 *Country Editor*, p. 73.

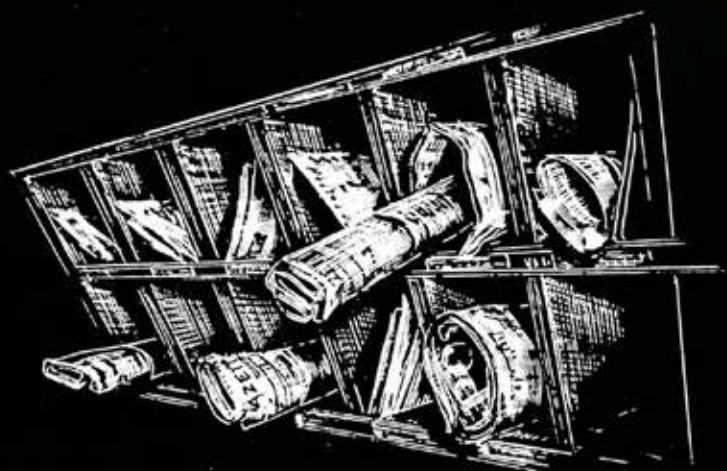
9 *Country Editor*, p. 314.

Editor, but the 1940 murder trial of Ralph Huntingdon Rice (pseudonymized as “Merle Murgatroyd Ross”) occupies seven chapters and 40 pages in *Once More the Thunderer*.

The shift from brief anecdotes to longer, deeper stories, along with the *Once More*’s focus on the tumultuous 1940s, makes it not only useful but—for the era it covers—valuable as a historical source. Hough’s long account was, until the publication of Thomas Dresser’s *Mystery on Martha’s Vineyard* in 2008, the only in-depth narrative of the Rice/Ross trial and the still-unsolved murder that precipitated it. Even today, it remains essential reading for those seeking to understand how a socially awkward bystander who “looked strange” could be swept into the defendant’s chair—and all but convicted in the minds of many on-lookers, Islanders and mainlanders alike—on the basis of the most tenuous evidence. Dresser’s account brings the perspective that comes with historical distance, and previously unrevealed details about the crime (for which Rice was acquitted), but Hough was *there* in the midst of the short-lived storm of suspicion and judgement.

Hough was there, too, when World War II swept over the Island. His accounts of the war—written after wartime censorship restrictions were lifted—are far superior, from a historical point of view, to the patriotically bland and vague reporting in the *Gazette*. Hough’s account of President Roosevelt’s 1941 overnight stop in Vineyard Sound on the way to a secret summit with Winston Churchill, of practice amphibious landings on the Island’s beaches, and of the Navy’s attempts to recover a depth charge inadvertently dropped from a PT boat in Edgartown Harbor add immeasurably to our understanding of the period. So, in a different sense, does his long narrative of a Katama farmer’s battle with the military bureaucracy, and his brief mention of a time when a “U-boat” sighted, and excitedly reported, off South Beach turned out to be a Coast Guard patrol boat that had strayed from its usual route. Transformative Island events adjacent to the war, but unconnected with it, are seamlessly woven into the latter chapters of the book. *Once More* contains the best first-hand account of the devastating impact of the “Great Atlantic Hurricane” of 1944 on the Vineyard, and its narrative of the *Gazette* staff’s heroic efforts to publish a paper in the storm’s aftermath is the most compelling piece of newspaper-memoir writing in either book. A chapter later, Hough turns to the final, postwar collapse of the privately run steamship lines that had served the Island for a century, which led to the establishment of the Steamship Authority in 1948. His descriptions of the antique, much-reviled double-ended ferry *Hackensack*, a key element of that story, are masterful.

ONCE MORE THE THUNDERER



*When the Gazettes had gone to the post office,
there was no hurry any longer. Somebody said,
"Once more the Thunderer goes to the world."
We all laughed and felt fine about it*

HENRY BEETLE HOUGH
Author of "COUNTRY EDITOR"

The most significant difference between *Once More* and *Country Editor*, however, is not content or organization, but tone. Hough's awareness of the passage of ten years—in his own life and in the life of the Island—pervades the book. The vogue for “country” memoirs that spurred him to write *Country Editor* in 1939 ended with the war, and *Once More the Thunderer* (written with no pressing need to carefully target that segment of the literary market) is less self-consciously “folksy” and quirky. Hough is still interested in telling small, human stories, and many of those in *Once More* could have appeared in *Country Editor*.¹⁰ Others, however, have overtones of darkness, sadness, and even tragedy that would have felt out of place in the earlier book.

Hough tells, warmly, the story of the Adams Sisters and their accomplished stage career, but his account of seeing them perform at a church function in Edgartown when they were “really old . . . as most people count years” is tinged with melancholy. “You could feel the magic—yet all the while the curious reality asserted itself that here were two little old New England women, which is of course what they were, like aunts or grandmothers even, and that it was odd for them to be impersonating Grecian statues and Biblical figures.”¹¹ Later, he recounts the story of “Herman Dunham,” who owned a building on Main Street that once housed the headquarters of the Home Club, and later a summer dress shop. Once a leading member of the Home Club, Hough writes, Dunham was left behind when “its membership moved on to the burying ground” and the organization became extinct. Now, in the fall, Dunham would go to the closed-for-the season shop and “sit at the window, as in former contented days, commanding a view all the way up Main Street,” while dress forms, “most of them just stuffed bosoms without heads, flanked him on left and right in the shadows.”¹²

The story of Josephine “Josie” Sumpter runs through multiple, non-consecutive chapters of *Once More*: a slow-motion tragedy in multiple acts. Josie is an epileptic in an era when the condition was poorly understood, and the daughter of an alcoholic in an era when alcoholism was viewed as a moral failing and a mark of personal and familial shame. Hough introduces her as a young girl leading other neighborhood children in exercises before school, practicing for a future as a physical education teacher that (though she does not realize it) is closed to her. She reappears as a proud high-school graduate who shows Hough (a member of the School Committee) her diploma and wryly declares: “Well, they can’t take it away from me now.” Her father disappears from the family’s lives repeatedly,

10 The story of Dr. Maple (pp. 135-139), for example.

11 *Once More the Thunderer*, p. 97.

12 *Once More the Thunderer*, pp. 263-264.

and, finally, for good. Josie struggles to find work and seeks advice on her condition, but all her efforts lead to dead ends. “She fled her illness and it followed her. She faced it and it faced her back,” Hough writes. “Time and again she seemed to see some new avenue of possible escape, but there was only the old mirage in different forms.” She begins to turn to alcohol for a temporary release, sinking into despair and shame after every round of drinking, convinced that she will be discovered and disgraced. Hough describes her sitting in the vestry of a church (seeing herself as unworthy of a seat in the sanctuary) listening to the hymns and sermon through the heating pipes.¹³

Inevitably, the story of Josie Sumpter ends sadly. She sinks deeper and deeper into alcoholism, and is eventually brought before the courts and committed to an institution on the mainland. Hough presents it not just as the story of an individual tragedy, but (at least implicitly) a social tragedy. Woven through Josie’s story are scenes of others’ (including Hough’s) attempts to help her—each well-intended, but all clumsy or ineffectual—and allusions to the ugly reality that the shame and disgrace that Josie so fears have their roots in the judgement of her neighbors. Hough passes no judgement on his fellow townspeople, and offers no moral, but the story ends in a place far from the rosy picture of small-town life offered in pre-war “country” memoirs, including his own.

Similar shadings—not darkness, but melancholy—also surface in Hough’s long view of three decades of changes witnessed from his desk at the *Gazette*. The Home Club, he writes as he tells Herman Dunham’s story, “became a thing of the past, like whaling, the China trade, livery stables, ginger in blue crocks, smoked herring, and old ideas.”¹⁴ The line is vivid, even amusing, in its specificity, but twinge of sadness and loss creeps in (like a chilly draft under the sash of an aging window) as the list unspools. Commenting on another such list—one that includes “drilling Zouaves, illuminated boat parades, the Kickapoo Indians, and the elocutionists and vocalists who gave of their talent at the town hall and the Harbor View”—Hough at first seems to have made his peace with the passage of time and the inevitability of change: “Even in our day, the town was not what it used to be, no will it ever be so.”¹⁵ The mood, however, does not last, and the melancholy returns:

Even though we knew the poignant quality of change in a small town, the change that is so largely loss because the men and women who shaped the character of the times and were themselves the instrument of the period’s social forces, must not only go but yield to newcomers different,

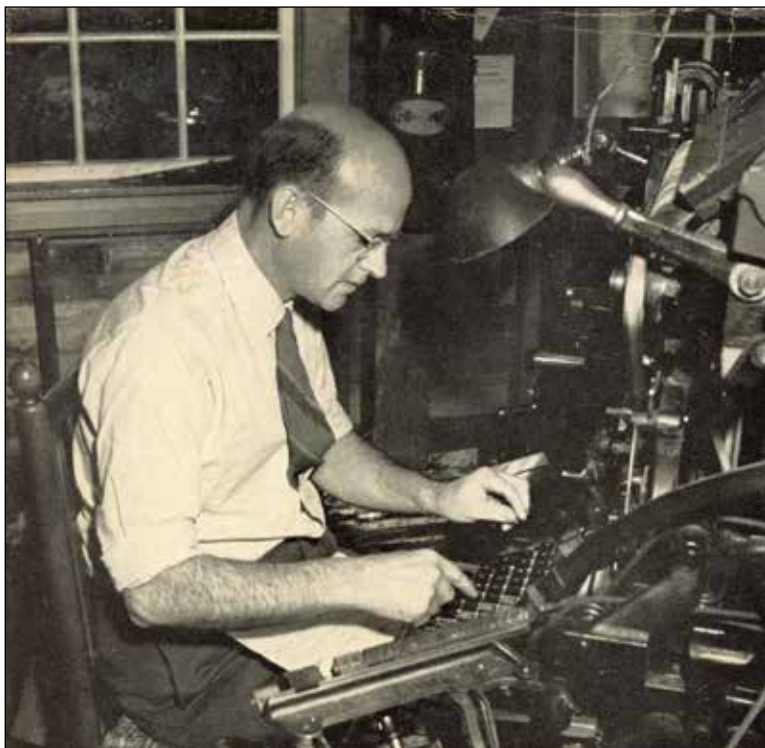
13 *Once More the Thunderer*, pp. 69-70.

14 *Once More the Thunderer*, p. 263.

15 *Once More the Thunderer*, p. 144.

profane, untaught by anything except the present and the siren promise of the future.¹⁶

Once More the Thunderer often reads as if Henry Beetle Hough could see what Railton would one day call “The Change” looming on the horizon like the leading edge of a hurricane: blurred and indistinct, its full extent and exact nature not yet apparent, but its significance for the Island clear. Perhaps he could, and *Once More* was his elegy for the world that, he feared, would be lost forever in its wake.



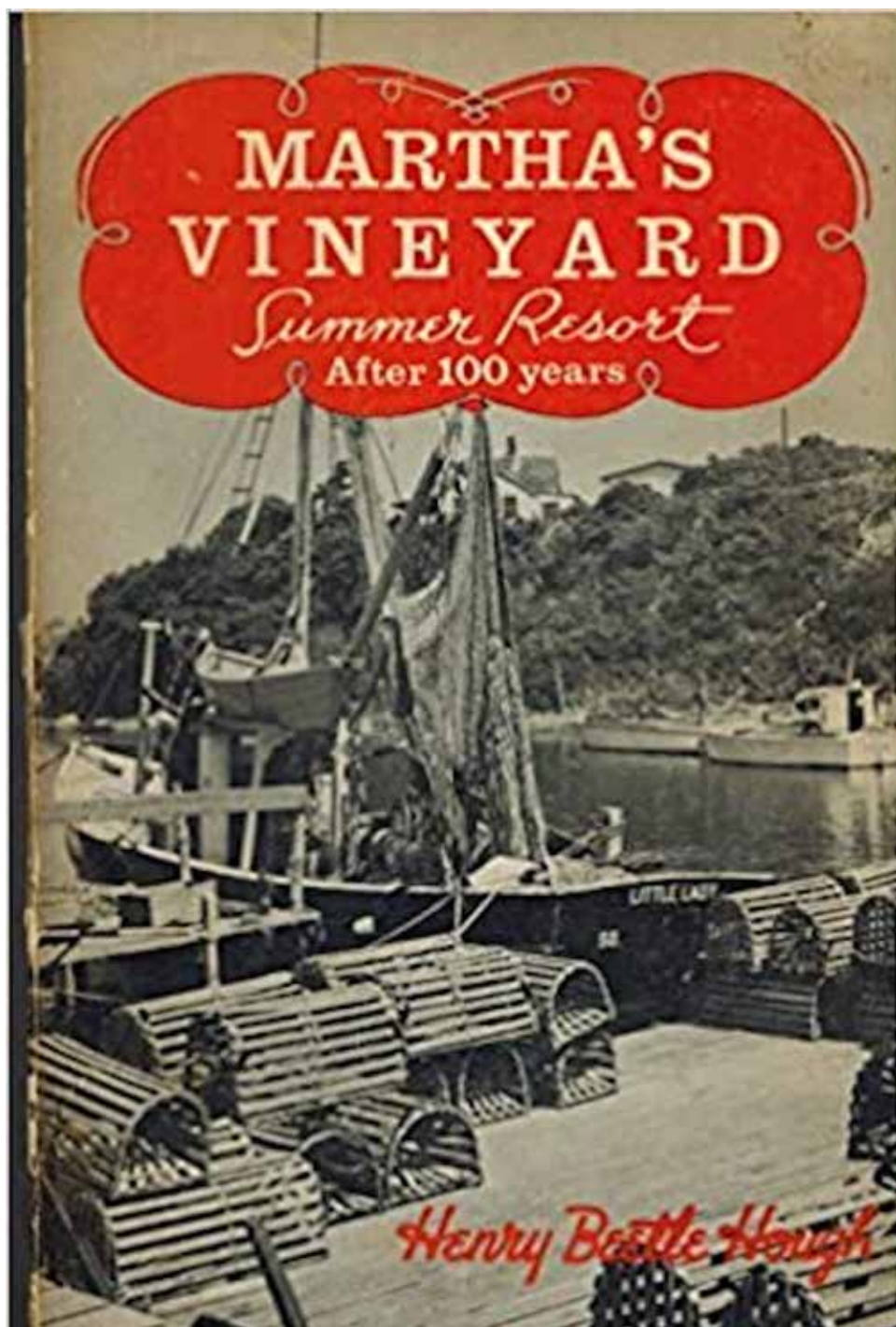
Mr. Hough in the back shop at the Linotype machine. Photo by Gretchen van Tassel.

16 *Once More the Thunderer*, pp. 144-145.

MARTHA'S VINEYARD

Summer Resort

After 100 years



The Histories

HENRY BEETLE HOUGH had no formal training in history, beyond that which came as part of an Ivy League education in the 1910s, but his historical writings are of a quality far beyond what the title “amateur historian” calls to mind. Over the course of his half-century writing career, he published a half-dozen book-length works of history and biography, not counting the as-told-to confessional memoir *An Alcoholic to His Sons* (1954). Alongside those stood six articles in the *Dukes County Intelligencer* (as this journal was then known), and countless historical pieces, signed and not, in the *Vineyard Gazette*. Hough’s historical writings include the densest and most complex of all his books, a slender corporate history, a pair of whaling books written for children and another written for adults, and a biography of nineteenth-century naturalist-philosopher-activist Henry David Thoreau. They encompass subjects ranging from industrial manufacturing to the arts, and settings ranging from Vineyard Sound to the South Pacific. *Country Editor* may be his best-known book, but *Martha’s Vineyard: Summer Resort*—the first of the book-length histories—remains his single most influential work.

Martha’s Vineyard: Summer Resort first appeared in 1936, published by Tuttle Publishing, a small press headquartered in Rutland, VT. Its 276 densely packed pages, organized into 43 short chapters, surveyed the emergence of a resort economy on Martha’s Vineyard over the preceding century, beginning with the first Methodist camp meeting at Wesleyan Grove in what would become Oak Bluffs. Hough then turned away from historical subjects for a decade before returning briefly to them in 1945 to write *Wamsutta of New Bedford*, a brief history commissioned by one of his hometown’s largest businesses to celebrate its 100th year in business. Most of another decade elapsed before *Whaling Wives of Martha’s Vineyard* (1953), on which Hough was listed as co-author with Emma Mayhew Whiting, but additional works of history flowed regularly from his typewriter during the rest of the 1950s. *Thoreau of Walden* appeared in 1956, *Great Days of Whaling* in 1958, and *Melville in the South Seas* in

1960, along with “Transition: Approach to a Period,” his first piece for the *Intelligencer*. The last of his *Intelligencer* articles, “Oak Bluffs in Its Youth,” appeared in the town’s centennial year of 1980, ending a scholarly journey begun 45 years earlier in *Martha’s Vineyard: Summer Resort*.

Bold Beginning: *Martha’s Vineyard: Summer Resort, 1835-1935*

There are numerous ways to write a book-length history of something. One approach is to gather all the extant facts about the subject and stack them in a predetermined order—chronological, geographic, or thematic—like a mason laying bricks. The purest form of such writing, the chronicle, offers sequence without causality and documentation without explanation. It relates, often in meticulous detail, what happened and when but remains reticent about why. Matchless as a reference source, chronicles tend to be stupefying to actually *read*. Another approach is to craft (or gather) engaging historical anecdotes—ranging in length from a paragraph to a few pages—and string them together like pearls in a necklace: individually polished, and cumulatively impressive, but merely proximate rather than actually connected. The first two volumes of Charles Banks’ *History of Martha’s Vineyard* (1911)—one organized chronologically, the other geographically and topically—embodied the “chronicle” approach. C. G. Hine’s *The Story of Martha’s Vineyard* (1908) and Henry Franklin Norton’s *Martha’s Vineyard: Historical—Legendary—Scenic* (1923) were anecdotal, as was Joseph Chase Allen’s *Tales and Trails of Martha’s Vineyard* (1938).

Martha’s Vineyard: Summer Resort represents a third approach. It presents names, dates, places, incidents, and other concrete details in abundance, but knits them into a sustained narrative whose elements are linked together by cause and effect. It tells dozens of specific stories that, Hough takes pains to show, are all part of a single, larger story. It was the first book to present a coherent, unified narrative of the Island’s history or any aspect of it, and—astonishingly, given the dominance of the style in history books written for non-specialist audiences—the last for nearly half-a-century. The integrated narrative eventually reappeared in the modestly scaled *Tisbury 1671-1971* (1971) and in Chris Stoddard’s *Centennial History of Cottage City* (1980), but came into its own only in the twenty-first century with the publication of books like David Silverman’s *Faith and Values* (2005), Arthur Railton’s *History of Martha’s Vineyard* (2006), and David Foster’s *A Meeting of Land and Sea* (2017). Nearly ninety years after its initial publication, *Martha’s Vineyard: Summer Resort* is—along with the latter three titles and Banks’ indispensable, exasperating *History*—one of the five cornerstone works on Vineyard history. There is little prospect of it being displaced from that list in the foreseeable future.

Aware of Banks' monumental volumes, part of the Vineyard's literary landscape for a quarter-century by the time he published his own, Hough skims over the pre-1835 history of the Island in a few paragraphs. Having begun on page 9, he gets down to narrative business midway down page 10: "Now begins the story of the rise of Martha's Vineyard as a summer resort, and how the Island changed from its old ways of life and became as it is today." It is an elegant statement of authorial intent, crisp and direct, but Hough's distinctive voice—honed by a decade-and-a-half at the *Gazette* and brought to national attention in *Country Editor*—immediately returns in the following sentence. "Such a story," he reminds the reader, "is inevitably an erratic tale, full of fragments and fugitive themes, for there is no stranger social organism than a summer resort."

The self-awareness on display in that second sentence, and in the remaining page-and-a-half of the introduction, is one of *Summer Resort's* most remarkable features. Writing at a time when a breezy tone and highly polished surfaces were the norm in popular histories like Herbert Asbury's *The Gangs of New York* (1928) and Frederick Lewis Allen's *Only Yesterday* (1930), Hough is both aware of the complexities that lie behind a (seemingly) seamless narrative and willing to share that awareness with the reader. There are, he notes, "few heroines in the summer resort story," since the pivotal years in the story, 1870-1900, predate women's emergence into public life as individuals. "Thus the moonlight and tenderness of summer days by the sea are reflected in faces unseen, nameless phantoms in crinoline or skirted bathing suits or smart turnouts of the nineties, and the actors who stride about and talk are sea captains, promoters, or affluent cottagers such as Dr. Harrison A. Tucker."

The narrative itself begins in the 1830s, with the stories of individuals who (like Whig statesman Daniel Webster) came to the Island for sport-fishing and solitude. It segues from them to the attendees of the first camp meetings at West Chop and its successors in Wesleyan Grove on the shores of what was then known as Squash Meadow Pond. Tracing the growth of the camp meetings in the thirty years prior to the end of the Civil War, Hough marshals concrete details not just (as a chronicler like Banks might) for the sake of presenting them, but in the service of a larger narrative. New seating was provided for the congregation, he notes, describing a major expansion of the grounds in 1858, "seating on a grand scale, with backs, instead of the old rough boards. Fixed accommodations were thus provided for from 3,000 to 4,000 persons. But on one of the Big Sundays 'ten thousand people might find convenient positions, either sitting or standing, and listen to the word of life uttered from the stand.'" Hough goes on to note the cost of the benches—nearly two thousand dollars—but even this detail serves a larger argument. Barely a decade after the meet-

ing had taken three years to pay off a debt of \$175, he points out, it was in a position to spend more than ten times that on benches *alone*. “And still,” he concludes, Wesleyan Grove was growing.”¹

Growth brought change, Hough notes, and meeting-goers began arriving on the Island before the meeting itself in order to “rusticate.” A gradual shift in accommodations—away from the large “society tents,” put up by congregations, that were originally the norm, and toward smaller “family tents”—increased the popularity of coming early and staying late. It freed families to come and go as they wishes, and encouraged them to build permanent wooden platforms and frameworks for their tents on sites to which they returned year after year. Simultaneously, the growing size of the camp meetings created a demand for services:

Not only were there boarding tents and victualling tents, but there were tents for barbers and bootblacks, for washerwomen and photographers. In fact, the necessities of life in the grove were provided for, and some of the luxuries; and as the encampment grew, it was difficult to tell just where the proper business of catering to the meeting stopped, and where the devices of rustication and pleasure began.²

The contrast between Hough’s narrative and that of Rev. Hebron Vincent’s *History of the Wesleyan Grove Camp Meeting*, published fifty years before, is telling. Vincent, like Banks, was a chronicler. His goal is to record, for the sake of posterity, the details of each camp meeting in turn. Hough takes a broader view. He is concerned not with recording the events of the camp meeting for their own sake but with using them to illuminate a larger historical process: the emergence of the Island as a summer retreat, where thousands came each summer to shed the cares of the city.

When Hough quotes the voices of contemporary observers, as he frequently does, it is less often to capture the details of the specific event than to testify to the mood. Quoting a writer for a Boston newspaper (naming neither) describing a Sunday at the campground in July 1859, Hough dismisses his claim that “there were probably twenty thousand persons assembled,” calling it “greatly mistaken,” and the writer’s judgment “warped” by enthusiasm. The value of the 1859 piece, for Hough, is that it captures the moment. On this point, he quotes the Boston reporter at length:

And although the day was the blessed Sabbath, the scene, for a few hours, reminded me of the Fourth of July, minus fireworks and boisterousness. Everybody appeared happy, joyful, smiling; thousands of young and beautiful females, elegantly dressed, promenaded along green paths with young men, whilst an immense crowd listened attentively to eloquent and deeply impressive addresses.³

1 *Martha’s Vineyard: Summer Resort*, pp. 45–46.

2 *Martha’s Vineyard: Summer Resort*, p. 49.

3 *Martha’s Vineyard: Summer Resort*, p. 49.

What matters, for Hough, is not the size of the crowd (he says it was “not so large by thousands” as the reporter’s estimate, and leaves it at that), the names of the preachers, or the subjects of their sermons. He is, rather, interested in something that—he suggests—is clearer to the modern reader than it was to the contemporary observer: that “the picnic spirit had already seeped into the airs and customs of the grove.” Nearly a decade before the formation of the Oak Bluffs Land and Wharf Company the sacred retreat established by the Methodists at Wesleyan Grove was already coexisting with a nascent secular resort.

Hough continues in this style for another 200 pages, showing how the popularity of the Vineyard as a secular resort grew steadily, then meteorically, in the last four decades of the nineteenth century. He covers the overnight success of the Oak Bluffs Land and Wharf Company, and the seaside development to which it lent its name; the wave of similar developments—Vineyard Highlands, Bellevue Heights, Lagoon Heights, Oklahoma, Cedar Neck—whose founders sought to bottle lighting a second time; the failed development at Katama, and the barely solvent railroad built to serve it; and emergence, at various times, and in various forms, of a resort culture in other corners of the Island: Edgartown, Tisbury, West Tisbury, and Chilmark. Along the way *Martha’s Vineyard: Summer Resort* provides the first detailed, retrospective discussions of what now seem like cornerstone topics in Vineyard history: the separation of Cottage City from Edgartown, the Martha’s Vineyard Railroad, the Summer Institute, and the building of the Baptists’ wooden temple in the Highlands in 1878 and the Methodists’ iron tabernacle at Wesleyan Grove the following year. Upon reaching 1900, however, he winds up the first three decades of the new century in a bare handful of pages. It is not that there are no more individual stories to tell, but that 1900 marks a natural stopping point in the larger story that he wrote the book in order to explore: the rise of the Vineyard as a resort destination.

Read today, *Martha’s Vineyard: Summer Resort* reveals some structural limitations, including sparse index that records the names of people and places but mostly skims over larger themes and, more problematic, a complete lack of notes to indicate the sources of the quotations. The prose remains vivid and compulsively readable, however, and for many of the topics he explores, Hough’s account remains the most complete available in book form. It remains, however, the first—and still one of the relatively few—books on Vineyard history written to advance not just a narrative of events but an in-depth interpretation of them. It is the first book on Vineyard history (and one of a tiny handful written before the current century) that *feels* modern, and the first in which professional historians would recognize a fellow practitioner of their craft at work.

Brief Interlude: Wamsutta

Wamsutta of New Bedford, published a decade after *Martha's Vineyard: Summer Resort*, is slighter both physically and conceptually. Barely a hundred pages long, it is elegantly produced, with its title stamped in gold on a green cloth cover and stylized maps of southern New England and its offshore water for endpapers. The maps are, like the book itself, stylish but lacking in real substance. They show the location of New Bedford, name a handful of geographic features, and are accented by drawings of a whale and a whaling ship, but reveal nothing about the existence of other towns or about the networks of maritime and industrial commerce that knit the region together and bound it to the rest of the world during the nineteenth century.

Commissioned and underwritten by Wamsutta Mills to commemorate the firm's 1946 centennial, the book was almost certainly a "work made for hire" that Hough was paid a flat fee to research and write. The prose is clear and readable, but the authorial "voice"—to the extent that the book has one at all—is one of studied neutrality. Hough is speaking, in its pages, not for himself as an observer, but for the company whose history is being recounted. Had he written it under an impenetrable pseudonym, the words on the page would offer little reason to suspect that he had been involved.

Assessed on the basis of content and rather than style, *Wamsutta* is a workmanlike corporate history. It is almost purely a chronicle—a recitation of events, rather than an explanation of them—and is, as a result, conventionally linear and straightforward. It is the history of a manufacturing firm, but it reads like the history of a small kingdom, with company presidents taking the place of kings and newly opened mill buildings substituting for newly conquered territories. The lives of the kingdom's subjects—the men, women, and (from the middle of the nineteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth) children who operated the machines—barely register, as does their changing racial and ethnic makeup (including the Portuguese ancestry of Edgartown-born president William M. Wood). The narrative moves glides from success to success, celebrating triumphs and downplaying setbacks, and the resulting narrative is impressive without being edifying.

If *Wamsutta of New Bedford* was, in fact, "made for hire," the company was doubtless gratified by the value they received for their money. Few who read it today, when New Bedford has long since ceased to be a manufacturing center and the Wamsutta name persists only as a brand owned by Bed, Bath and Beyond, are likely to feel the same.

Long Second Act: The Whaling “Trilogy”

As the American offshore whaling industry suffered its final contraction and collapse in the early 1920s, it was memorialized, by a round of history books intended to capture “how it was.” Researched and written at a time when it was still possible to observe offshore whaling firsthand, and when informants who remembered the industry in its heyday were plentiful, they were broader in scope and denser in detail than the popular narratives that preceded them. Along with Elmer Clifton’s film *Down to the Sea in Ships* (1922) and whaling memoirs such as George Fred Tilton’s *Cap’n George Fred Himself* (1928) and Hartson H. Bodfish’s *Chasing the Bowhead* (1936), they captured a history that was, for many New Englanders, till part of living memory. This first round of whaling histories—books like George Francis Dow’s *Whale Ships and Whaling* (1925) and Clifford Ashley’s *The Yankee Whaler* (1938)—also took advantage of advances in printing, reproducing photographs and, in Ashley’s case, color plates of paintings (similar to those used in illustrated editions of *Moby Dick* published in the same era).

An entire generation separated the second wave of whaling history books—published in the mid-to-late 1950s—from the first. In the space of those 25 to 30 years, the last generation of whaling captains died (George Fred Tilton in 1932, Hartson Bodfish in 1945, Ellsworth Luce West in 1949) and the young men who, like Amos Smalley and Antone Fortes, had wielded harpoon guns and cutting spades on the last generation of whaleships had grown old. The world, too, had changed. The long declining decades of the whaling era was still part of living memory, but the golden years when New England whalers had built a lucrative industry chasing on the world’s largest mammals on the world’s most remote seas had passed into history. Square-rigged wooden ships driven by wind harnessed with canvas sails and hemp lines seemed impossibly distant from a world of jet engines, atomic energy, and ever-shrinking electronic devices. The second wave of whaling histories—books like Edouard Stackpole’s *The Sea Hunters* (1953), A. B. C. Whipple’s *Yankee Whalers in the South Seas* (1954), and Everett Joshua Edwards’ *Whale Off!* (1956)—were distanced, synthetic overviews of their subject.

Henry Beetle Hough’s three books on whaling were part of this second wave of whaling history. In the first, *Whaling Wives of Martha’s Vineyard* (1953), he played a supporting role to Emma Mayhew Whiting: the book’s principal researcher and writer. Daughter of an old Island family and wife of West Tisbury gentleman-farmer Johnson Whiting, she was one of the Island’s principal amateur historians and genealogists in the first half of

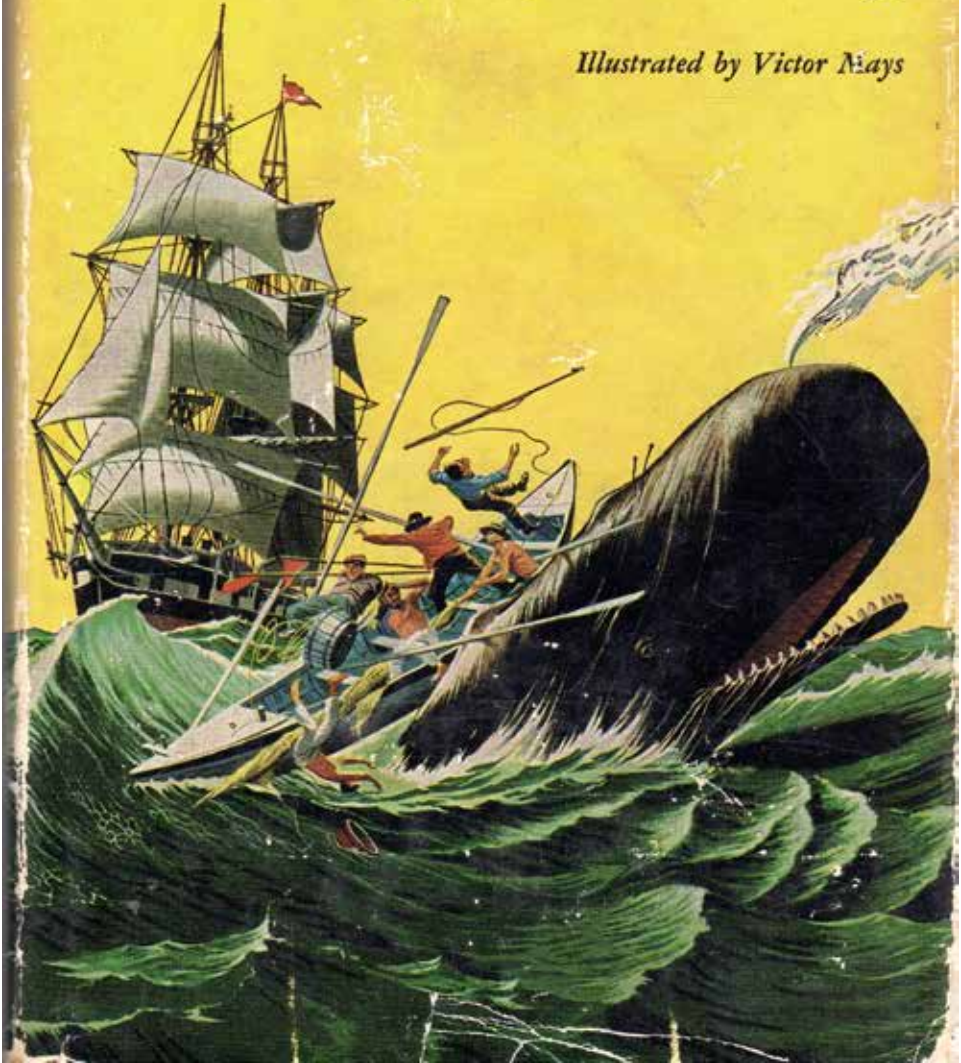
NORTH STAR BOOKS



HENRY BEETLE HOUGH

Great Days of Whaling

Illustrated by Victor Mays



the century.⁴ The extensive notes and draft in her personal papers suggest that the substance and arrangement of the book is hers: a series of third-person stories chronicling the lives of Island women who went to sea with their whaling-captain husbands, arranged into thematic chapters. Hough's contribution was primarily literary: organizing, writing, and polishing Whiting's manuscript text into its final form, and seeing the book through the production process, after Whiting's death in 1947.

Just how *much* of the book's final text is Hough's, and how drastically Hough's "voice" departs from Whiting's, is beyond the scope of this article. More than *Wamsutta of New Bedford*, however, *Whaling Wives* definitely bears the stamp of Hough's voice, and—reading it with the knowledge of its production history in mind—it is easy to understand why Whiting's estate approached him to finish her work. With its multi-page, self-contained narratives of the experiences of individual women, it occupies historical ground squarely situated between first-person narratives by women and the broader, more integrative histories of women's lives afloat that followed in the 1990s and 2000s.⁵ It treats the lives of its subjects not as sources of illustrative examples, but as small windows onto the exotic, vanished world of offshore whaling, much as Hough used the lives of the individuals in *Country Editor* and *Once More the Thunderer* as windows onto the exotic life of a small-town newspaper. Unlike *Martha's Vineyard: Summer Resort*, its value as scholarship has been eclipsed by subsequent work; like *Summer Resort*, however, it can still be read with pleasure.

Hough's other two 1950s books on whaling took a broadly similar approach, albeit for a different audience. Published by Houghton Mifflin as part of its "North Star Books" line of young adult non-fiction, *Great Days of Whaling* (1958) and *Melville in the South Pacific* (1960) were written for readers for whom the Age of Sail (let alone the peak of the whaling era) lay squarely within a distant, nebulously defined realm of "olden days."

The first half of *Great Days*, 84 pages divided into nine chapters, follows 19-year-old William H. Whitten of Biddeford, Maine, through a multi-year whaling voyage to the Indian Ocean aboard the bark *Eureka* from 1857-1861. The *Eureka's* home port was Edgartown, and her captain was Thomas Marshall Pease, but there is nothing of the Vineyard in Hough's narrative of the voyage, which he bases on Whitten's journal. Rather, the

4 Emma Mayhew Whiting's papers, along with Vineyard-related historical documents she collected in the course of her research, make up the Emma Mayhew Whiting Collection (RU 55) in the Museum archives.

5 Key interpretive works on the history of women in the age of sail include Margaret Creighton, ed. *Iron Men, Wooden Women: Gender and Seafaring in the Atlantic World, 1700-1920* (1996); Lisa Norling, *Captain Ahab Had a Wife: New England Women in the Whale Fishery, 1780-1870* (2000); and Joan Druett, *Petticoat Whalers: Whaling Wives at Sea, 1820-1920* (2001).



THE DUKES COUNTY INTELLIGENCER

VOL. 21, NO. 3

FEBRUARY 1980

Oak Bluffs in Its Youth



by

HENRY BEETLE

HOUGH

OAK BLUFFS



CENTENNIAL

The First Up-Island Summer People

by GALE HUNTINGTON

Yesterday's Valentines

Documents: Jeremiah Pease Diary

Books, Director's Report, Letters, Bits & Pieces

SINGLE COPY, \$1.50

voyage of the *Eureka* becomes a framework on which Hough hangs account of life aboard a whaleship: how crew members are signed on and outfitted; how the “lay” system of payment works; how whales are spotted, chased, killed, and processed into oil; and how the crew lives in between whales. The second half of the book, a further 92 pages divided into eleven self-contained chapters, tells a series of true stories from the history of New England whaling. The stories are neither arranged chronologically nor chosen with an eye toward illustrating the history of the whaling industry. Many of them involve Vineyard ships and Vineyard crews, but Hough (writing for a national audience) does not call attention to the fact. The stories are framed, instead, as thrilling “true adventure” tales taken from history—a thread that ran through the entire North Star Books series—designed to be edifying as well as exciting. Hough foregrounds youthful (male) heroes wherever possible, and focuses on narrative elements—shipwreck, mutiny, war, and encounters with exotic cultures in distant lands—presumed to appeal to a readership composed entirely of middle-grade boys.

Herman Melville shipped as a “greenhand” (novice seaman) aboard the whaler *Acushnet* in January 1841, and remained aboard her for 18 months before deserting, along with a shipmate, at Nuku Hiva in the Marquesas. He spent the next three-and-a-half years wandering the Pacific, alternating time ashore and time at sea, eventually joining the U. S. Navy for long enough to return home as a seaman aboard the frigate *United States*. Hough uses Melville’s five-year journey, which formed the basis for his debut novel *Typee* and its sequel *Omoo*, as the basis for *Melville in the South Pacific* (1960). The book, like *Great Days of Whaling*, is a series of adventures rooted in history, told through the eyes of a young male hero. It is, however, less successful on every level. The individual events Hough narrates—limited to those Melville experienced—are less compelling than those in the second half of *Great Days* (where he had the whole of whaling history to draw from), and the pacing, set by Melville’s whims, is more uneven and less compelling than that of the William Whitten story in the first half. The “window on the past” approach that served well in *Whaling Wives* and *Great Days* fails in *Melville* because the only part of the past it can provide a window *on*—Melville’s formative years—is a subject of little intrinsic interest to its intended audience.

Coda: The *Intelligencer* Articles

The Dukes County Historical Society would reprint *Whaling Wives* in 1964, but *Melville in the South Pacific* was Henry Beetle Hough’s last book-length work of history. His subsequent historical writings appeared, at shorter length, in the *Gazette* and in the newly established *Dukes Coun-*

ty *Intelligencer*. Three of his six *Intelligencer* articles—“Martha’s Vineyard and the Theater” (August 1966) and “Amelia Watson” (February 1968), and “Memories of Marshall Shepard” (August 1973)—are tightly focused pieces on specific themes. The other three, the first two and the very last, cast their historical nets broader and deeper.

“Transition: Approach to a Period” (May 1960) uses a series of Island business directories from the years around 1900 to illustrate the often-surprising progress of the Vineyard’s entry into the modern world. Less than ten pages long, the piece (despite its unsuggestive title) is a return to the meticulous use of details on display in *Martha’s Vineyard: Summer Resort* a quarter-century before. Discussing an Edgartown business directory from 1901, after enumerating its listing of large cargo-carrying schooners and their captains, Hough notes that:

Only three yachts are listed. Obviously we have here the background against which one of the great themes of change was to operate; within twenty years the fleet of yachts in all Island harbors was to be multiplied many times over, and in thirty years it was to become almost supreme. And the commercial fleet of large vessels was to be reduced to a single survivor and then to none.⁶

“Years of Innocence on Martha’s Vineyard” (February 1961) mines similar insights about the years around 1900 from small items in Island papers, including the *Gazette* before Henry and Betty Hough took it over. “For the real history of the period that began with the turn of the century,” its opening line reads, “one looks to small events as well as great ones, remembering ironically that in the perspective of the time the great can seldom be distinguished from the small.”

The “small events” Hough marshals to make his point include the presentation of a new bell to the Cottage City schoolhouse (which at the time had only one faucet and no indoor toilets), a concert by the Edgartown Cornet Band, and a “Russian Tea” served at the monthly meeting of the Want to Know Club in Vineyard Haven. There are events, such as Eben Luce’s repair of storm-damaged lines and poles in his telephone network (then one of several on the Island), that hint at a new world emerging. There are others, such as the formation of a company to provide electric trolley service between Cottage City and Edgartown, that belong to futures that never came to pass. As in the larger tapestry he wove in *Martha’s Vineyard: Summer Resort*, Hough uses these threads to paint a vivid, detailed picture, but also to remind readers that history is complicated: full of loose threads, unexpected turns, and dead ends.

“Oak Bluffs in Its Youth,” published in the February 1980 issue of the *Intelligencer* to commemorate the centennial of the town’s independence

6 “Transition: Approach to a Period,” *Dukes County Intelligencer*, May 1960, p. 4.

from Edgartown, opened with an editorial note describing the author as “an eminent Island historian and author.” It proved to be Hough’s last significant contribution to Island history, and if the content was familiar to longtime readers of his work—a brisk recap of highlights from *Martha’s Vineyard: Summer Resort*—the opening paragraph, describing the birth of the campground at Wesleyan Grove, was a reminder of his unique ability to place readers in the midst of a bygone era:

We had our own prophet Jeremiah, surnamed Pease, who lived at Edgartown in the old days and rode out over the sandy hills of a long, winding road into an Eden of summer innocence and delight. In a grove of oaks on the southern side of Squash Meadow Pond he set out stakes to mark the boundaries of his religious purpose and zeal.⁷



7 “Oak Bluffs in Its Youth,” *Dukes County Intelligencer*, February 1980, p. 87.



HENRY BEETLE HOUGH

THAT LOFTY
SKY *A Novel*

BY THE AUTHOR OF "COUNTRY EDITOR"

The Novels

HENRY BEETLE HOUGH's literary reputation rested on his non-fiction, but his heart (it is said) was in his novels. Over a literary career that spanned fifty years, he wrote eight novels, more than any other literary form in which he worked.¹ They appeared in two clusters—the first four between 1941 and 1947, and the last four between 1958 and 1970—and during those years he published little book-length work *but* novels.² *That Lofty Sky* (1941) followed *Country Editor* by just a year, was issued by the same publisher (Doubleday), and featured the words “by the author of *Country Editor*” prominently on the front of its dustjacket. Both author and publisher clearly hoped to capitalize on the runaway success of the memoir, and Hough's production of four novels (along with significant numbers of short stories) in seven years suggests a deliberate attempt to establish himself as a fiction writer.³

Hough was neither a self-conscious writer of what would now be called “literary fiction” nor a contributor any established genre. *All Things Are Yours*, *Long Anchorage*, *The New England Story*, and *Lament for a City* are set wholly or primarily in the past and unfold over multiple decades, but eschew the conventions of characterization and plotting typically associated with historical novels. The other four are set in the present and fall into the realm of “general fiction.” Like most works in that literary middle-ground of vast extent and ill-defined boundaries they had a short shelf life. They have, except on the *Island*, long since disappeared from the shelves of libraries and bookstores. No one now reads them for the diversion they

1 The novels, in order of publication, were: *That Lofty Sky* (1941), *All Things Are Yours* (1942), *Roosters Crow in Town* (1945), *Long Anchorage* (1947), *The New England Story* (1958), *Lament for a City* (1960), *The Port* (1963), and *The Road* (1970).

2 The exceptions are minor works: the slim corporate history *Wamsutta of New Bedford* (1946) and the juvenile histories *Great Days of Whaling* (1958) and *Melville in the South Pacific* (1960).

3 No exhaustive list of the short stories Hough wrote for magazines has yet been compiled.

offer, and few who revere Hough as a writer do so on the strength of his novels. Nonetheless, they represent a significant part of his body of work and—viewed as a group—a window into how he saw the world.

Times and Places

Except for the first—*That Lofty Sky*, which takes place in and around a shabby resort hotel in South Africa—all of Hough's novels are centered on the southeast coast of Massachusetts. *Long Anchorage* takes place in New Bedford, *Lament for a City* in the fictional mill town of Hindon, and the other five in small coastal towns that are drawn with his experience of the Vineyard in mind. The Island connection is sometimes palpable—it is hard to read the opening scene of *All Things Are Yours*, set amid a religious camp meeting, and *not* picture Wesleyan Grove—but Hough mixes and matches geographical elements to suit his purposes. The village in *Roosters Crow in Town* is clearly modelled on Edgartown, but it is connected to the wider world by a train rather than a steamer, and the hill that rises on the outskirts of town is higher than anything on the Island. It is the rhythms of daily life and the web of social relationships between the characters that evoke the Vineyard. The fictional characters are not interchangeable with the fictionalized ones in *Country Editor* and *Once More the Thunderer*—their quirks are more exaggerated, and their concerns more dramatic—but they are cut from the same cloth. Hough's newspaper books are less memoirs than exercises in Americana. The majority of his novels reach for a similar effect by other means.

Four of the novels—*That Lofty Sky*, *Roosters Crow in Town*, *The Port*, and *The Road*—are set wholly in the present. *All Things Are Yours* and *Long Anchorage* sprawl over multiple decades of the nineteenth century, *Lament for a City* begins in the first years of the twentieth century and ends in the then-present of the late 1950s. The events in *All Things* and *Long Anchorage*, however, are narrated as the characters experience them, while *Lament* is framed as the memoir of Cornelius “Connie” Tyler, a retired newspaper editor looking backward over his career as he tries to understand the decline of the newspaper he worked for and the city it served. *The New England Story*'s improbably named hero, Edgecomb Hartwell, comes (in the the novel's present) to the former whaling center of Dinton Port to track down the story behind nineteenth-century writer Archer Templeton and Captain Enoch Adams, on whose ship Templeton sailed, and on whom he is believed to have modeled the title character of his most famous novel: *Bildad's Locker*. Like Connie Tyler—and like Hough himself—Hartwell is a present-day writer studying the past in order to make sense of the present.

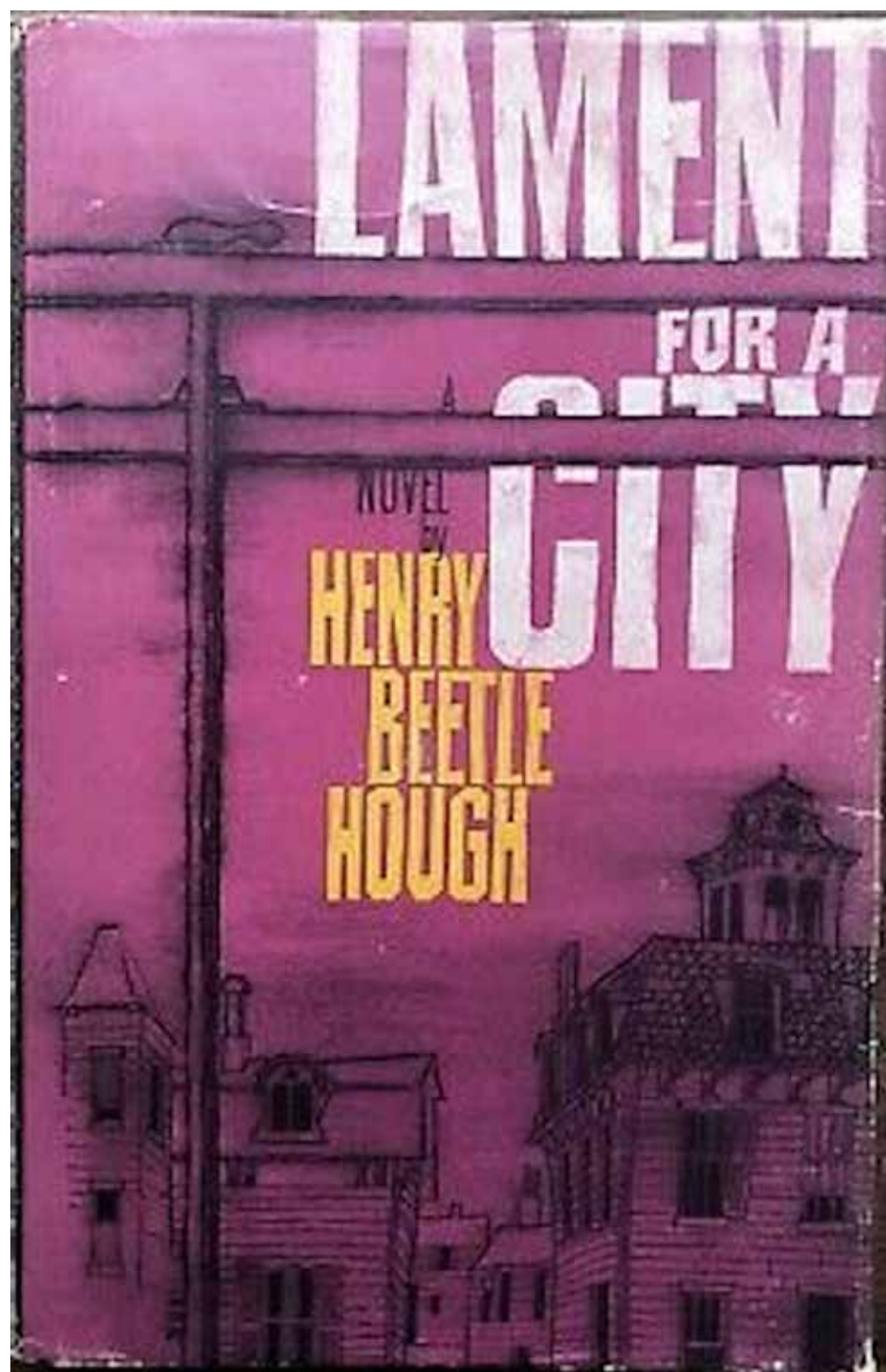
Hough makes no particular effort to place his fictional towns on a single, coherent map, as Stephen King does with Castle Rock, Derry, and their

outlying villages in his fictional Maine. Dinton Port, the setting of *The New England Story*, is presumably adjacent to Dinton Center, the setting of *The Road*, as Baddow Port (*The Port*) is to Baddow proper (*All Things Are Yours*), but their respective stories are functionally independent. The most striking continuity between novels is, ironically, one that Hough carefully downplays. *Long Anchorage*, set in nineteenth-century New Bedford, ends just after 1900, within a few years of the moment where *Lament for a City*, set in the New-Bedfordesque city of Hindon, begins. Hough takes care to establish that Hindon is *not* New Bedford (the latter city is referenced, in passing, under its own name), but the latter novel functions as a spiritual, if not actual, sequel to the former.

Plots and Characters

A typical Hough novel features a surfeit of incident, but a dearth of plot. The characters continually interact with one another, and event follows event across the page, but there is rarely a sense that the interactions and events are part of a larger story steadily building toward a climax. *Long Anchorage*, for example, takes up the story of Russell Ashmead, the mildly rebellious middle son of a prosperous New Bedford family, when he is in his late teens, and follows him to the brink of old age. Over the course of the book he assists the escape of a fugitive from enslavement, sails as a foremast hand on a whaling ship, and is witness to fraud, riot, mutiny, and murder. He experiences romance at home and abroad, manages a textile mill, and becomes a shipowner. The events, however, resemble a scatter of loose tiles rather than elements in a finished mosaic. There is no sense, when the story ends, that we—or Russell—have arrived anywhere in particular or been changed in any noticeable way. *Roosters Crow in Town*, set in the early years of World War II, unfolds on a far more compressed time scale, but with similar results. Its hero, Chris Shearard, who has returned home from college in anticipation of being called up for military service, interacts with (seemingly) every other character in the story as he searches for a direction for his life and the truth about his father's suicide. He finds both, but they all but drop into his lap in the final chapters, rather than emerging from anything that has gone before.

The bagginess of Hough's plotting is particularly apparent in *That Lofty Sky*—ironically so, given that it is the most conspicuously and intricately plotted of all his novels. The three principal characters are Victor Tolley, an ambitious but marginally competent hotel manager; Hugo Becker, a German naval cadet on a port call; and Niccoline “Nicky” Birch, a young woman from England who accepts an invitation from Victor (who is attracted to her) to become hostess at the hotel, but finds herself attracted to Hugo instead. The three collide with each other, and with a dozen sup-



porting characters, in a plot that blends elements of 1930s-style espionage dramas like *The Thirty-Nine Steps* and *The Lady Vanishes* and the comedy-of-errors B-plots of Astaire-and-Rogers musicals. Bad timing, misunderstood conversations, well-intentioned-but-misguided advice, and conflicted romantic attachments intersect, gradually entangling everyone in the story. A more confident, experienced writer might have set the plot spinning ever faster, doubling and redoubling the complications, until a final, climactic explosion of chaos that dispelled all misunderstandings and delivered every character their just desserts.⁴ Hough, however, resolves the story piecemeal, leaving it without a climax or payoff.

The slackness of Hough's plotting is matched by the passiveness of his heroes, who—like Ishmael in *Moby-Dick*—are central to the events of the story without ever being the driving force behind them. Hugo's path through the events of *That Lofty Sky* is shaped for him by random chance and the earnest advice of others, which he unreflectively takes. Captain Joe Van Deveren of *All Things Are Yours* and Russell Ashmead of *Long Anchorage* make their own choices, but they do so seemingly at random, reacting to the moment rather than pursuing a larger goal. Both of them have goals—Joe is attracted to Lottie Waldron, who he meets in the opening scene; Russell is determined to free himself from the tyranny of his family's expectations—but both are desultory in pursuit of them and neither achieves more than partial success by the end of the story. Edgecomb Hartwell functions, in *The New England Story*, as the lens through which the reader views the tale of Templeton and Capt. Adams, and Connie Tyler of *Lament for a City* is little more than a witness to the decline and fall of Hindon and its newspaper. The central conflict in *The Port*—the collision of an old-school Yankee and a slick businessman from the city who sees his property as the ideal site for a new real-estate development—is likewise shown to the reader through the eyes of an onlooker.

Pivotal moments in the plots of the novels are, frequently, not shown at all. Russell's whaling voyage in *Long Anchorage* is described as eventful and adventurous, but we are told of, rather than shown, the adventures. Late in the story, the future of several of the characters is riding on their ability to defeat a malicious legal action brought against them by an enemy. They do, using an ingenious stratagem, but this too is announced to the reader second-hand, one character narrating it to another like a sportswriter describing a game-winning play the next morning. The mock amphibious landing staged by the Army in *Roosters Crow in Town*—practice for the real

4 Novelist Thorne Smith—author of *Topper* (1926), *Night Life of the Gods* (1931), and *The Passionate Witch* (1941)—was a master of the form, but it reached its pinnacle in the screenplays of “screwball comedy” films such as *Bringing Up Baby* (1938), *His Girl Friday* (1940), and *The Miracle of Morgan's Creek* (1943).

thing—takes place off-stage, though a mock air-raid intended as a drill for citizens and civil defense workers is given a brief description. Connie Tyler in *Lament for a City* nearly always describes his and his colleagues' reportage of newsworthy events rather than the events themselves. The cumulative effect of these choices is to flatten the rhythm of the books: Instead of conversations punctuated by action, there are conversations punctuated by characters' (or, where one exists, the narrator's) reflections on them.

The principal virtues of Hough's novels are, not surprisingly, also prominent in his non-fiction. The portraits of nature, the landscape, and the changing seasons—whether in New England or South Africa—are carefully observed and unfailingly evocative. At one point in *Roosters Crow in Town*, two emotionally guarded characters in the process of falling in love with each other find themselves together in the cabin atop a fire tower, watching for enemy aircraft on a frigid winter night. The fire in the coal stove that provides the only warmth in the tower has nearly gone out, and as he describes the man working to relight it—a practical gesture but also a romantic one—Hough makes the pervasive cold into a third character in the scene, a piece of description but also a deft bit of symbolism.

The eccentric, colorful New Englanders who provide the supporting cast in Hough's novels are, like the world they inhabit, vividly and engagingly drawn. Many are, like the lightly disguised real Vineyarders in *Country Editor*, described in a tone of wry, bemused detachment, and with a sharp eye for their foibles, but the descriptions are tempered with warmth. The self-important head of the local Civil Defense force in *Roosters Crow in Town*, the radical millworker and ambitious young politician in *Lament for a City*, and the Chicago saloon-keepers that Joe Van Deveren encounters in *All Things Are Yours* are comic figures, but never buffoons. Hough is careful to leave their dignity intact, and their status as valued members of the community unquestioned. Solon Ridgeley and Pete Pickering (who symbolize, respectively, progress and tradition in *The Port*), like Henry Spinney and Barry Johnson (who serve the same purpose in *The Road*), come across as more-developed versions of “The Man from the City” and “The Local,” stock characters in the *commedia dell'arte* that is traditional New England humor.⁵ Pickering and Johnson's intensity is a product not of aggression, but of unfamiliarity with the ways of small towns. Ridgeley and Spinney's constant evasions are signs not of a dull mind, but of a measured and thoughtful one.

Hough the novelist, observing fictional characters in imaginary town, sometimes allows himself to use a more penetrating eye and sharper lan-

5 The team of Marshall Dodge and Robert Bryan, creators of the *Bert & I* tales, gave it national exposure, and a highly diluted form provided the “local color” in the long-running television series *Murder, She Wrote*, but it existed as a folk tradition long before either enterprise was conceived.

guage than Hough the memoirist would use for his own real-world neighbors. Writing in “narrator” mode, he introduces a key figure in *The New England Story* this way: “Miss Harriet Craddock knew that she probably looked fairly repulsive, and she did not care a bit. She was fattish, steamy, and soiled—also comfortable.” Two paragraphs later, her first encounter with Hartwell adds shading to the portrait:

“Well!” Miss Craddock exclaimed, affecting the heartiness that was always expected from an inhabitant of the old New England coastal town of Dinton Port. Then again, “Well!” She had put on a set smile, allowing her plump face to resemble a traditional image of cheer. She knew that her cropped white hair, clinging to her scalp like lamb’s wool, would preserve one mark of neatness and dignity, let all else stray as it would.⁶

Hough’s trademark warmth is still present, but muted. “Fattish, steamy and soiled” would never have appeared in the pages of *Country Editor*, let alone the *Gazette*. Nor would Craddock’s “heartiness” and “cheer” have been so carefully interrogated, or so baldly revealed as a mask put in place to satisfy the expectations of outsiders.⁷

Looking through the eyes of his characters, and writing in their voices, Hough allows himself freer rein. *Lament for a City*—arguably his best-executed novel, and certainly his darkest—ends with this bleak self-assessment by narrator Connie Tyler: “I’m an old man and a drunk, and my day has gone by.”⁸ Inhabiting the thoughts of twenty-year-old Chris Shearard, the central character of *Roosters Crow in Town*, Hough captures both the misty romanticism and racing pulse that suffuses Chris’s impression of Helen Coye, an older, married woman on whom he has a desperate crush:

Helen leaned forward, and Chris could see the soft hair, the curl, at the nape of her slender neck. Just to look at that gave him a satisfying sense of intimacy, and for a while he lost track of the lengthening controversy.⁹

and the tone of judgmental sophistication he affects when he describes a recent high-school graduate who he thinks of as “too young” for him:

She dangled her bare legs from a chair which was too high for her and made eyes at the visitors. She made Chris think of a ripe, red apple dipped in sugar syrup for a party—not that she was in any way shiny, but the mixture of nature and artifice was like that. Every year one or two of the high school girls bloomed like this; they would get married or go away to beauticians’ schools, and others would take their place.¹⁰

6 *The New England Story*, p. 3.

7 Like the Beatles’ Eleanor Rigby, Harriet Craddock greets the world “wearing the face that she keeps in a jar by the door.”

8 *Lament for a City*, p. 371.

9 *Roosters Crow in Town*, p. 79.

10 *Roosters Crow in Town*, p. 22.



The New England Story

A NOVEL

BY Henry Beetle Hough



A RANDOM HOUSE BOOK

The last sentence, and especially the last clause, *almost* breaks the mood: It is too self-aware, and too informed by the long view, to be the voice of a 20-year-old man. It is the voice of the author, then in his mid-40s, unconvincingly disguised as that of his protagonist. It slides by unnoticed, however, leaving the reader's sense of disbelief willingly suspended, because the insight is so poignant, and the understated wording so perfect.

Themes

It is, perhaps, a stretch to speak of Hough's novels having themes, but a pair of interwoven concerns run through nearly all of them. One involves characters who, chafing under the perceived limits imposed on them by the town in which they live, leave—or try to—in order to find a more congenial life elsewhere. The other involves outsiders who, arriving in a place strange to them, transform it—sometimes deliberately, sometimes unwittingly—by their presence.

The first pattern animates, to varying degrees, in all four of Hough's novels from the 1940s, as well as parts of *The New England Story*. Joe Van Deveren and Lottie Waldron, the dual protagonists of *All Things Are Yours*, set out from a thinly disguised version of the Vineyard in search of better prospects in the wider world. Joe, in addition to being sea captain, takes a maritime salvage job in the Bahamas, works in a saloon near the stockyards of Chicago, and becomes a miner in the Far West. Lottie, in pursuit of her dream of becoming an accomplished and acclaimed singer, travels first to Boston and then across Europe, eventually settling in Italy. Chris Shearard, the young hero of *Roosters Crow in Town*, is desperate to leave his hometown and become part of the wider world by joining the military and, by extension, the war raging overseas. At one point, Hough imagines the local newspaper editor, comparing Chris's freedom with his own feelings of entrapment:

I'm static, Tom thought. I don't even creak, except when the wind blows. But the wind of the war is blowing, and to creak is not enough. He looked with envy at Chris Shearard who was young, and had not wasted his mentality with thought. Chris would be going to do something, to fight, to have a part in the deciding of the great issues.¹¹

Russell Ashmead of *Long Anchorage*, eager for a life of adventure and dismayed by the prospects that New Bedford—and his prosperous family's plans for his future—hold for him, runs away to sea as a young man and circles the world on a whaling ship. Captain Enoch Adams leaves his home for the sea repeatedly in the portions of *The New England Story* that take place in the past, and both Nicky and Hugo of *That Lofty Sky* leave the safety and familiarity of the hotel for the wildness of the South African countryside.

11 *Roosters Crow in Town*, p. 98.

Only in *That Lofty Sky*, however, does leaving the familiar for the unfamiliar turn out to be the answer. Across the other four novels, it is home—not some sought-after Other Place—where happiness lies. Joe and Lottie of *All Things Are Yours* are intimated, from the very first scene, to be meant for each other. They seek their respective fortunes in the wider world, periodically returning to Baddow but never reconnecting with one another, ultimately failing to find that they're looking for *and* failing to find one another. Had they only stayed home, Hough seems to suggest, they would have found a life together and, with it, happiness. Russell Ashmead, as the title of *A Long Anchorage* suggests, returns from his voyage and spends the rest of the novel in his home town. He plans, repeatedly, to get away—even buying a whaling ship and promising his wife that they will sail to the Pacific in it, free of their responsibilities—but, like George Bailey in Frank Capra's film *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946), never succeeds. His failure, however, represents a kind of back-door success: He prospers in New Bedford, his married life is happy, and he succeeds (after a fashion) in living life on his own terms. Chris Shearard, having longed for Helen Coye and abruptly kissed Phyllis Edderly, has an epiphany on the eve of his induction and proposes to a blandly competent young teacher, promising to come back to her after the war and build a life together in the town he had been desperate to leave:

“Kathleen,” he said, “what do you say we get married now, before I go away?”

“Oh, Chris,” she said, “do you want to? Do you love me?”

“I love you,” he said, but he meant much more than that; he meant that he loved life, and that with her and through her he could live as his heart desired.¹²

Kathleen's uncertainty about Chris's love for her is genuine, not rhetorical, and entirely consistent with his behavior throughout the story. *Author ex machina* is at work.

The small-town (or, in *Lament*, small-city) heroes in Hough's later novels—Connie Tyler of *Lament for a City*, Solon Ridgely and Whit Fifield of *The Port*, Gid Lester and Henry Spinney of *The Road*—are, by contrast, thoroughly comfortable with their surroundings. Their struggle is not to adapt to the unique rhythms of local life and thus find happiness (they already *are* adapted, and, as a result, happy) but to protect those rhythms from the transformative changes that outsiders seek to impose. Change, and all that comes with it, is represented by a proposed real estate development in *The Port* and by the titular structure—a proposed through highway laid over the bones of an dead-end “lane to nowhere”—in *The Road*, projects imposed on small coastal towns by outsiders who fail to understand that their pet

¹² *Roosters Crow in Town*, p. 266.

projects will exact a price not measurable in dollars and cents. Outsiders, specifically new owners who take over the *Hindon Courier-Journal*, are also the antagonists in *Lament for a City*, but the changes to which Connie Tyler bears unhappy witness affect the city as a whole, not just its long-running daily newspaper. What the heroes of *The Port* and *The Road* fear—the heedless abandonment (or outright destruction) of traditional values and institution in the pursuit of an ill-defined “modernity” valued purely because it is modern—Tyler experiences and recounts for the reader. An outsider himself who (early in the story, and his life) embraces Hindon as he finds it, he lives to see it destroy most of what he loved about it.

The struggle between New England traditions and corrosive “modernity,” explicit in Hough’s later novels, is also present, implicitly, in his earlier ones. Tom Wade, the newspaper editor (and Hough proxy) in *Roosters Crow in Town*, observes of self-important civic leader Cheney Cunningham that “[as] a boy around here a good many years ago, he learned to recite and do arithmetic and recognize the wildflowers. He learned the important things. But there was some fancy strain in the family and Cheney had to go to college.” The college experience left Cunningham trapped between two worlds. He has, Wade explains to Chris Shearard, been “lost on the rooftops of culture and commerce, and he’s been climbing around up there ever since . . . looking through upstairs windows and wishing he could crawl inside.” Driven back to his birthplace by the Great Depression, he finds that “the town isn’t good enough for him.”

Chris professes not to understand—one of his functions in the story is not to understand his hometown or its citizens, so that they can be explained to him and thus to the reader—giving Tom (and Hough) the opportunity to elaborate.

Small-town New Englanders—“the only real New Englanders alive to-day,” Tom declares them—see themselves as part of a natural environment, not a human society. They live immersed in a world

in which there are trees and birds and clouds, winter and summer, youth and age, sickness and health, all the concern of man and nature. Everything about the environment is tremendously important, but not much else has the same standing. Cheney Cunningham is a lost New Englander because he has delusions of living in a society and even running it. Way back in the primary grades he discovered the whole of life, and in his heart I think he still knows it, but he can never go back.¹³

True happiness, in Hough novels, is reserved for those who embrace the message of the Shaker song “Simple Gifts” and, when they find themselves “in the place just right,” have the wisdom to recognize it.



13 *Roosters Crow in Town*, pp. 66-67.

Singing in the Morning

AND OTHER ESSAYS ABOUT
MARTHA'S VINEYARD

by HENRY BEETLE HOUGH

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY *Will Huntington*



The Essays

HENRY BEETLE HOUGH'S LAST book-length work of history or biography, *Melville in the South Pacific*, was published in 1960. Betty died, after a long illness, in 1965. He sold the *Vineyard Gazette* to James and Sally Reston in 1968, stepping away from the day-to-day work of editing and production after nearly half-a-century, but continuing to contribute editorials and other pieces. His final novel, *The Road*, appeared in 1970. Hough remained a prolific writer, but 1970 was (as 1950 had been) a watershed year in his literary career. All of the seven books he published between 1970 and his death in 1985 at the age of 88 were, in one form or another, essays: personal reflections on the world, the Island, and his own life—long and, he knew, entering its final stages.

An Island Year: *Singing in the Morning* (1951)

Hough had first explored the essay form twenty years earlier, in a collection with the mellifluous title *Singing in the Morning*, published in 1951. Like *Country Editor* and *Once More the Thunderer*, it is a collection of short vignettes given coherence and unity by their relation to a broader theme: the satisfying permanence and stability of small-town life. Hough's newspaper memoirs are centered on townspeople's interactions with one another, but in *Singing* he shifts his gaze to the natural environment: the world of plants and birds and the cyclical procession of the seasons. It is a book of essays, but they are the antithesis of "personal." Like his trademark editorials for the *Gazette* that noted seasonal changes in the natural world, they are Hough speaking (or, rather, writing) *ex cathedra*. The use of language and the arrangement of words, sentences, and paragraphs on the page are clearly and unambiguously Hough's, but the viewpoint is less "first-person particular" than "third-person omniscient." He is an intimate, yet detached observer, standing just outside the ebb-and-flow of the events he describes but watching them with a keen and unwavering eye and describing them in vivid, meticulous detail. *Singing in the Morning* is Hough's answer to Thoreau's

Cape Cod: It is his attempt to pay close attention to the particular and, through it, describe the eternal and the universal.

Divided into four sections—"Coming-Out Party" (spring), "Dooryard in the Sun" (summer), "Horse-Chestnut Days" (fall), and "The Catching of the Pump" (winter)—the book begins in early March and cycles, season-by-season, through the year. Many of the essays are tied to the Vineyard in specific and concrete ways. Hough discourses on sea gulls and sea lions, Beetlebung trees and beach plums, and the essay on spring peepers is titled "Pinkletinks"—the traditional Island name for the tiny frogs with the outsized voices. Still others are about universal subjects as they play out in the specific context of the Island. Essays on subjects as varied as wild cherries, goldenrod, and winter storms (when closed-up summer houses "invite drifts, festoons, and blankets of snow") are as much about the unique qualities of the Vineyard as they are about nature itself.¹

The focus of *Singing in the Morning* is squarely on nature, but the human presence in the natural world, and the ways in which Vineyard residents (year-round and seasonal) interact with nature, periodically slip into the essays. "Old Dooryards," for example, looks back to the time when country houses, isolated in the countryside and surrounded by fields, had small fenced enclosures ("more than gardens") outside their front doors. "They were epitomes of character, and of a civilization. Slat or picket fences enclosed the dooryards in neat rectangles enclosed the dooryards in neat rectangles from out the generality of nature." Hough briefly catalogs the plants that might bloom in that "generality" and then asks, rhetorically, "within flourished—what?" The answer spans four paragraphs and fourteen species, woven together of explanations of *why* those plants were favored by country housewives. Dooryards, Hough admits, are mostly a thing of the past; the line between the ordered and the wild is now blurred. "These diminutive enclosures, patches of much in little, will long linger in memory, however, and generations which have never known them should be told about them."²

A similar spirit runs through much of *Singing in the Morning*: A desire to capture, before it is too late to do so, the rhythms and nuances of the country year and the small details (like the dooryard) of country life. There are essays on boot scrapers (once a fixture of country doorsteps), on town clocks, and on the centrality of turnips, winter squash and pumpkins to Thanksgiving feasts in the New England countryside. He catalogs the way that the chill of autumn creeps into late summer evenings, and the way the sunlight of October is different than that of August or September.³ "October," he writes, "has long

1 *Singing in the Morning*, pp. 106, 128-129, and 222-223.

2 *Singing in the Morning*, p. 53

3 *Singing in the Morning*, pp. 120-122.

shadows in morning and evening, cool skies of palest slate or green or amber at daybreak, and on clear days a brilliance of sunlight entirely without cruelty or sting, a kind of enlightenment rather than sharp illumination, warming with a cordiality from which the excesses of summer have been removed.”⁴ One essay sings the praises of summer thunderstorms, which announce their coming with “jets of cool air through the hot, sodden atmosphere” and arrive with “lighting vivid in the darkness” and thunder “cannonading through the sky.”⁵ There is, Hough suggests, infinite richness in the “ordinary” nature around us, if only we will open our eyes and ears to it.

The final essay, “Song Sparrow,” begins with such a close observation: “In the final hopefully sunny days of February . . . we hear a song sparrow sing. It is, Hough declares, “a thin song,” but “full . . . of bravery and promise.” Soon, however, Hough shifts his focus to larger pattern. The song sparrow sings through the closing days of winter, he notes, and its regular return in late February and early March is, for humans, a sign of spring’s imminent return. “There will be other birds arriving by the calendar that corresponds so nearly to ours, and waiting for the time to sing. But the song sparrow is the first.”⁶ And with the arrival of the song sparrow, the year—and the book—come full circle.

A Portrait of the Island: *Martha’s Vineyard* (1970)

A ninety-six-page, landscape-format book published simultaneously by Viking Press in the United States and Macmillan in Canada, *Martha’s Vineyard* is bylined “Photographs by Alfred Eisenstaedt • Text by Henry Beetle Hough.” The last twenty-six pages are all Eisenstaedt. They reproduce a series of his color photographs, several spilling across adjacent pages, that alternate between capturing the exuberant gaiety of the Island’s high season—racing sailboats with jewel-toned hulls and spinnakers in Edgartown harbor, the glow of Japanese lanterns on Illumination Night, teenaged girls in bright bikinis romping in the surf at Katama—and documenting the infinite subtleties that, in quieter moments, are revealed when sunlight touches the Island’s landscape. The captions on the color photographs, and on the black-and-white photographs spread across the first seventy pages, are strikingly (almost aggressively) brief. The effect, however, is very different in the black-and-white section. Those seventy pages are, without seeming to be so, an artfully choreographed duet between Eisenstaedt and Hough.

Hough’s text for the book is not, in any narrow or concrete sense, a commentary on Eisenstaedt’s pictures. It never “points” at them (it leaves

4 *Singing in the Morning*, p. 160.

5 *Singing in the Morning*, pp. 84–85.

6 *Singing in the Morning*, p. 242.

the captions to do that), and could stand entirely apart from them, reprinted in an unillustrated book of its own. Eisenstaedt's photos are, likewise, complete in themselves, and would lose nothing of their power if hung on the walls of a gallery with none of Hough's text in sight. Yet, thanks to the sleight-of-hand of some nameless Viking Press editor, words and images run in parallel for 70 pages: two streams of information that feed and deepen one another. Eisenstaedt's images remain confined, in ones and twos, to the broad outer margins of the pages, or even disappear entirely for a page or two, only to spread unexpectedly over an entire page or even—as with a panoramic view of Menemsha during the 1938 Hurricane—a two-page spread.

Hough's text carries the reader westward across the Island from Chapquiddick Oak Bluffs and Vineyard Haven to Gay Head, while simultaneously moving through the cycle of the seasons (shades of *Singing in the Morning*) and through the Island's human history. The three threads braid together, with Hough turning his attention from one to another as a point of intersection between them suggests itself. Consider the following passage, which follows Hough's inventory of the natural signs traditionally taken to mark the coming of spring:

Once there would have been the smell of freshly turned earth—some old-time Vineyarders planted their potatoes in March—but most farming has fallen before the competition with the mainland. It has been almost half a century since Mayhew G. Norton ground his corn and buckwheat and rye into meal in a windmill atop a shed identified by the quarterboard of the wrecked vessel *Elisha Gibbs*. He was probably the last. Used farmlands have surrendered slowly to thickets of bayberry, huckleberry, and sumac, and to the spires of young cedars, showing up in April, a fair prospect of reddening and budding twigs.⁷

Having spent the three preceding paragraphs on the details of nature itself—"three white frosts on three successive mornings," the "streaked idleness" of Vineyard Sound, and the "dawn chorus of robins"—he pivots, in rapid succession, to the patterns of "old-time Vineyarders" lives (planting potatoes in late March), to the forces that disrupted them (competition from mainland farms), and to Mayhew Norton as both an exemplar and a last vestige of the old ways. What seems, at first, to be gratuitous description becomes (on closer examination) evidence of Hough's skill at unobtrusively layering details into his narrative like the paper-thin layers of butter in puff pastry. Norton's "corn, buckwheat, and rye" establish the Island's traditional staple grain crops, and "thickets of bayberry, huckleberry and sumac" evoke the unruly wildness of once-cleared land reclaimed by nature—a common sight on the Vineyard by 1970.

7 *Martha's Vineyard*, pp. 7-8.

Hough next introduces another historical figure: Nathaniel Southgate Shaler, a Kentucky-born Harvard professor who bought land on the North Shore and established Seven Gates Farm there. Shaler *seems* like a non-sequitur—centered in West Tisbury, miles to the westward of Mayhew Norton, and flourishing thirty years or more earlier in time—but the focus does not shift to him. Hough introduces Shaler in order to quote his admiring thoughts (expressed in 1888) about the diversity of the Island landscape, and to add another layer of detail to his own portrait of the slow yielding of Island agriculture to off-Island competition and the coming of “summer people” like Shaler. “Not all the old houses were gone” when Shaler arrived in the 1880s, “leaving only their stone doorsteps, cellar holes, and lilac bushes to mark the centuries of sheep raising and husbandry” by then fading away. Some were “still the homes of old families, and some the beloved reward of city dwellers who had wanted, like Shaler, to possess some part of the earth and upon it a dwelling—not for one season, but for always.”

Hough slips back into the present then, segueing from the frosts of March to the bright sunlight of late April: the season when summer houses are inspected and opened so that their rooms may be “brought gently alive for months of vacation ahead.” The smoke that rises from farmhouse chimneys might, he suggests, belong to members of old Island families, or to “adopted islanders” come for an early weekend: “those who are strangers, yet not strangers really,” only “familiar migrants” like the returning redwings. Opposite, an Up-Island stone wall—low and compact as if slumped in old age—fills the foreground of full-page Eisenstaedt photograph. In the background, a farmhouse and outbuilding hunker behind a fold in the nap of the land with dense forest beyond. There is no sign of human life, and no way to tell whether the owners’ ties to the Island are centuries reach back centuries, or only years.

It is easy, in a first glance at *Martha’s Vineyard* or a quick flip through its pages, to mistake it for a “coffee table book:” a book built for casual browsing, all gloss and no depth. It is, however, something far richer. Hough’s text draws equally on two of his established literary personas: the distanced observer of nature from *Singing in the Morning* and the distanced observer of human activity from *Once More the Thunderer*. The text is a fusion of history, geography, and natural history, yet more than the sum of those parts, just as the book as a whole is more than the sum of its text and photos. It is Hough’s (and Eisenstaedt’s) attempt to explain the Island to those—old-timers and newcomers—who also love it.

*Tuesday
will be
Different*

LETTERS FROM SHERIFF'S LANE

*Henry Beetle
Hough*

A Glimpse of the Man: *Tuesday Will Be Different* (1971)

I have argued, in discussing *Country Editor* and *Once More the Thunderer*, that Henry Beetle Hough—the flesh-and-blood individual who chatted with neighbors as he went about his day-to-day business on the streets of Edgartown—does not appear in them. Hough, as author-narrator of the books, appears under his own name, but he is—like every other character he describes in the two books—a subtly stylized version of the real thing. The precise nature, and precise extent, of the stylization are not easy to identify, but by midway through *Country Editor* it is clear to readers that Hough-the-author has no more intention of making them privy to the thoughts of Hough-the-character than to the thoughts of any other figure in the narrative. When Hough-the-author expresses an opinion, it is nearly always delivered in the third-person-omniscient voice of the Stage Manager, or (if it specifically concerns the *Gazette*) as the voice of an ambiguous “we” that could represent the paper as a business, the senior staff as a whole, himself and Betty, or himself alone speaking on behalf of any of the above.

Henry Beetle Hough almost certainly *does* appear, in various forms, in his novels. Nearly all of them—with the seemingly inevitable exception of the first, *That Lofty Sky*—feature at least one male character whose backstory or personality invites comparison with Hough’s own. Joe Van Deveren in *All Things are Yours*, Tom Wade in *Roosters Crow in Town*, and Russell Ashmead in *Long Anchorage* could all be read as Hough working through his feelings about a life that brought him from New Bedford, via New York and Chicago, to a small-town weekly on an isolated island. Chris Shearand in *Roosters* could, on the other hand, be read as Hough’s vision of himself as a young man, finding love and a future in the closing year of global war. Connie Tyler of *Lament for a City* likely owes more to Hough’s father than to Hough himself, but the eager young outside-writer hero of *The New England Story* and the bemused observer-narrator of *The Port* are another matter. To the extent that *any* of these characters are reflections of Henry Beetle Hough, however, they are—even more so than the reflections in the *Gazette* memoirs—stylized ones.

Tuesday Will Be Different: Letters from Sheriff’s Lane offers a sharp, clear break from this pattern. Its fifty-one chapters read as short essays but they are, as the subtitle suggests, personal letters to family members and friends. Each opens with a “Dear _____” salutation that, reasonably enough, addresses the recipient by their first name, but the identity of the recipient and the date when the letter was written are never specified. Some of the missing information can be inferred. References to then-current events suggest that most of the letters are from 1969-1971, and none

noticeably older than 1967 or 1968. “George” is almost certainly Henry’s elder brother (publisher of the *Falmouth Enterprise*), “Jack” his nephew (novelist John T. Hough, Jr.), and “Edie” his friend, confidante, and future second wife Edith Graham Blake. These details of individual letters matter less, however, than the fact that they *are* letters, and that Hough is (at least nominally) writing not as an observer of the world, interpreting it for a broad audience, but as one individual sharing his thoughts with another.

Tuesday Will Be Different is Hough’s first overtly personal and introspective book and—though later works would cover similar ground—arguably his *most* personal book. The third-person-omniscient voice of the *Gazette* memoirs is absent. When Hough writes about the politics of the late 1960s, the rising tide of development and “progress,” and encounters with the hippies who were flocking to the Island at the time, he does so not in his ever-so-slightly detached “editorial” voice but in the voice of a man in his mid-70s, born in the waning years of the previous century. The letter/essays are both a fascinating time-capsule and (Hough’s dismay over the supposed “inevitability” of supersonic transport aircraft now seems more prescient than the extravagant predictions of SST enthusiasts) and an extraordinary glimpse into Hough’s mind.

“Two Parades in One,” an essay about the traditional Memorial Day parade down Main Street to the Edgartown waterfront, captures the book’s strengths. Hough catalogs the parade’s traditional participants—delegations from the American Legion and Veterans of Foreign Wars, from the Coast Guard, the Edgartown Police, the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts—“all smartly in uniform, all prepared to a walk in the old ceremonial order in the pattern of the day.” Following them, however, is a second group of marchers, predominantly young, “loosely crowded” and “dressed in the puzzling costume of a puzzling generation.” Hough catalogs their appearance—“dungarees, sandals, bare feet, old pants, hung-out shirts, and for the girls and women blankets around their shoulders, flaring pants dingy with wear”—and notes their motivation: to honor those killed in “the fight against inequality and repression.”⁸ He draws the obvious contrast between “the precise marching by men who had mostly drilled under arms in time of war” and the “rude turnout of the protestors,”⁹ and quotes an onlooker who declares: “It’s an outrage. They spoil the whole thing.”¹⁰ Other writers might have doubled down on the contrast—the clash of generations and, implicitly, of ideologies—and

8 *Tuesday Will Be Different*, pp. 144-145.

9 “Rude” not in the modern sense of “disrespectful,” but in the older sense of “unpolished”—like the “rude mechanicals” (country tradesmen) of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* or the “rude bridge that arched the flood” in Emerson’s “Concord Hymn.”

10 *Tuesday Will Be Different*, p. 145.

made it the theme of the essay. Hough, however, uses it as a stepping-stone to something more complex.

He notes that, upon hearing that the protestors wanted to march, the commander of the American Legion post declared that “a place would certainly be found for them,” and that the police “marched impartially beside” both upholders and critics of the *status quo*. He observes they marched with American flags held high (“flags not from stores, but from homes, borne on homemade staffs”) and that those watching from the sidewalks stood at attention for the protestors’ flags “no less scrupulously than at the march past of the uniformed color guards.” He concludes that it may be “a long time, perhaps, before a final meaning can be wrought from the events, peaceful yet alien-seeming, of this day,” but hints at what he suspects that it will be. He is conscious of having witnessed a small step in a long journey. “They were walking along in open ranks,” he says of the protestors, “for a different purpose than the rest: for the future, not so much for the past.”¹¹

Hough’s struggle to come to terms with his own feelings about the protestors runs like a subtext through “Two Parades in One,” the tension between his disdain for their appearance and his sympathy for their cause lending the piece power and poignance. Similar subtexts run through many of the essays, with similar results. On rare occasions, the subtext becomes text, and Hough reveals himself to the reader directly. “Lochinvar Outlives His Youth,” a tribute to one of his beloved collies, is also about his own old age, and adjustment to life as a widower. “In the Context of a Common Humanity,” with its (deliberately?) vague title, is about Betty’s death. As the last moments of her life play out, the nurse tells him that “she’s not aware anymore,” and Hough reflects: “So it wasn’t you now. It wasn’t you anymore. It was only life, that still unknown and gallant force within us all, that was struggling for itself.”¹²

Hough does not dwell publicly on his emotions—as a Yankee of the old school, it would have gone against his nature—but neither does he disguise them. “Ours was good fortune beyond our deserts,” he writes to Betty (five years gone) on the fiftieth anniversary of the day they took ownership of the paper. “Bill and Joe and you and I were comrades, co-workers of many years . . . [and] the *Gazette* to all of us was one of the overriding importances of life. We made the best of it. We did what we could.” Closing the letter a few paragraphs later, he quotes the poet Sara Teasdale: “But if we had it all to do, it would be the same again,” and signs it: “With unforgotten love, [Henry].”¹³

11 *Tuesday Will Be Different*, p. 146.

12 *Tuesday Will Be Different*, p. 174.

13 *Tuesday Will Be Different*, pp. 122-123; the essay is titled “A Day Remembered.”

MARTHA'S VINEYARD

Photographs by Alfred Eisenstaedt · Text by Henry Beetle Hough



The Sage of Sheriff's Lane: From *Mostly on Martha's Vineyard* (1975) To *Far Out the Coils* (1985)

Henry Beetle Hough published five volumes of non-fiction in the last decade of his life. They are essays in spirit—their contents descriptive, their mood reflective, their tone personal—but not in organization. All five fall somewhere the discretely bounded, uniformly sized, individually titled components of *Singing in the Morning* and *Tuesday Will Be Different* (on the one hand) and the continuous stream of words in *Martha's Vineyard*. Like the newspaper memoirs, they wander, actively resisting any attempt by the reader to find a particular story within the flow of the narrative. Reading them means requires taking their contents as they come, trusting Hough's not-always-apparent sense of structure and juxtaposition to make itself clear in time.

Mostly on Martha's Vineyard (1975) is billed by its subtitle as "A Personal Record," but it is no closer to a conventional memoir than *Country Editor* or *Once More the Thunderer*. The first 160 pages take Hough from

his earliest childhood memories to his marriage to Betty in 1920. The remaining 120 are a collection of anecdotes about the *Gazette* and the Vineyard, including such post-*Thunderer* developments as the creation of the Martha's Vineyard Regional High School and the Houghs' venture into conservation with the founding of the Sheriff's Meadow Foundation. *To the Harbor Light* (1977) and *Soundings at Sea Level* (1982) are more uniform but (even) less organized: discursive reflections—presented in chapters without titles or even numbers—on old age, the history of the Island, the accelerating pace of change, and the small dramas of everyday life.

Remembrance and Light (1984) breaks, sharply and decisively, with the pattern of the preceding three books. If any work by Henry Beetle Hough deserves to be called “experimental,” this is it. The boldest part of the experiment is also the most apparent: Hough, and his voice, are no longer center-stage, and text is no longer the dominant element in the work. Like *Martha's Vineyard*, it is a duet between Hough and a talented photographer, but it is not simply a return to the formula of the earlier work. It is, instead, an attempt at something entirely different.

Alison Shaw, the photographer whose work features in *Remembrance and Light*, had—like Eisenstaedt and her own mother, Gretchen Van Tassel Shaw—worked as a photojournalist, bringing an artist's eye to the business of documenting current events.¹⁴ Like Eisenstaedt, she also took thousands of photographs of the Vineyard for artistic, rather than documentary, purposes. Nearly all of Eisenstaedt's artistic photos of the Vineyard, however, retain a level of documentary realism; they are an extension of the images of the Island that he took in the service of *Life*, rather than a wholly separate enterprise. Eisenstaedt, in his non-journalistic images of the Island, allows himself far greater latitude to experiment with light, color, framing, and focus, but beneath the experimentation there is always firm foundation of documentary *intent*. The color image of Menemsha Harbor spanning pages 84 and 85 of *Martha's Vineyard* is arresting because of its soft focus and palette of grays and browns—it captures, effortlessly, the famous stage direction in *Macbeth*: “Light Thickens”—but anyone who has walked through Menemsha on a certain type of foggy morning will recognize that beneath the artistry is (still) a record of a specific moment in space and time. Shaw, when working in “artistic” mode, often leaves such specificity behind, separating her subjects from the space and time in which she encounters them—treating them as elements in a still-life composition or reducing them to their formal qualities: texture, color, and shape.

The images in *Remembrance and Light* are Shaw working in high artis-

14 Eisenstaedt, famously, worked for *Life* magazine; Van Tassel worked for the federal government's War Relocation Authority; Alison Shaw was a long-time staff photographer for the *Vineyard Gazette*.

tic mode, to spectacular effect. They are filled with unusual camera angles, unexpected compositions, and choices (in shooting or printing) that push brightness and contrast to extremes. A low-angle shot of dozens of birds perched on utility wires has the stark aesthetic of a pen-and-ink drawing: the birds and wires a uniform jet black and the overcast sky behind a smooth, featureless page gray. A ground-level view of a farmer guiding his team during a horse-pulling contest at the Agricultural Fair borrows the aesthetic of the art nude, obscuring the subject(s) as a whole in order to draw the viewer's eye to the outlines of limbs and the contours of muscles in tension. A picture of a small boy riding the Flying Horses keeps the boy's head, torso, and outstretched right arm in sharp but smears everything else—background, machinery, the horse's wooden haunch, and even the boy's leg—into varying levels of blur, evoking a feeling of exhilarating speed that the real Flying Horses do not (except in the imaginations of small children) create.

Hough's accompanying text—presented, four or five short paragraphs at a time, on facing pages—is clearly written *to* the pictures (like a composer writing to a rough cut of the film as they create its soundtrack), but it is written to resonate with them rather than explain them. They are not captions in any conventional sense, but neither are they self-contained essays capable of standing independently from the photographs. The text is also, in another form of resonance with Shaw's images, abstract and reflective rather than (in Hough's usual style) concrete and descriptive. Freed (whether by mutual agreement with Shaw and the publishers, his own advancing age and changed professional responsibilities, or both) of the need to be journalistic, Hough allows himself to wax philosophical. In the five paragraphs opposite the image of boy on the Flying Horses, Hough begins by linking carousels to the tournaments in which medieval knights trained for war, and declaring the modern version “among the most valuable improvements of history.” The rider of today's Flying Horses, after all, “rides with free excitement, and he knows where his horse is going. Knights in tournaments in the old days never knew.” Hough ends by invoking the legend of Tom O'Bedlam, who proposed “to ride to the world's end” and declared: “Methinks it is no journey.” No one, Hough concludes, “knows whether it was or not, but the rider of a steed on the Flying Horses can come nearest to giving a true account of that cantering journey of the mind.”¹⁵

As in all his earlier works, Hough writes as one entranced by the uniqueness of the Vineyard. “The mainland is all right in its way,” he acknowledges at one point, “but its way is necessarily imperfect. Only an island has a shoreline that never ends and that is yet a present fact rather than a distant understanding. Only an island has the sea-intimacy and the

15 *Remembrance and Light*, p. 53.

level, friendly gaze of a really wise horizon.”¹⁶ As in his works of the 1970s and early 1980s, In *Remembrance and Light*, far more than in his essay collections from the 1970s and early 1980s, Hough seems to have made his peace with change. He does not downplay it—it is one of the recurring themes that runs through the text—but laments over what has been lost are matched by reflections on what has been gained. “Nothing is as it used to be,” he notes alongside a picture of a departing ferry, “and therefore the business of going away isn’t what it used to be.”¹⁷ Automobiles and modern ferries have, he notes, erased “the elaborate staff work and ritual of getting families aboard the steamer” but also (in doing so) the feeling that “it seemed almost presumptuous to think of any quick return.” Now that you can drive on the ferry and off again with no additional fuss, “you can face with complacency or even anticipation the prospect of coming back for one weekend or for several.”¹⁸

Far Out the Coils, Hough’s last book, changes gears yet again. It began a series of lectures delivered at the Nathan Mayhew Seminars in 1982, and these origins gives its individual chapters a level of cohesion absent since *Tuesday Will Be Different*. Opening with an introduction that Hough dubs “An Overture,” it proceeds through four chapters—thematically linked, but functionally independent—and ends in a conclusion titled “Which Way Vineyard Culture?” The book as a whole thus has the general form of an essay collection, but the six sections that compose it—in keeping with their origins as talks to be delivered before a live audience—have a different rhythm than essays that Hough wrote directly for the page. Loosely woven, discursive, and exuberantly anecdotal, they are collections of stories rather than sustained historical narratives. Chapter III is typical. Titled “How They Lived Was the Way They Were,” it segues from theories to that explorers’ descriptions of the Vineyard inspired Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, to the landing of Bartholomew Gosnold, interactions between the English and the Wampanoag, observations of the Island by Hector St. John de Crevecoeur in the 1780s, the role of the Wampanoag in the whaling industry, Wampanoag legends, and the writings of famous-in-his-day West Tisbury novelist James Athearn Jones (author of *Tales from an Indian Camp*).

Chapter III breaks new ground for Hough (it is his only extended discussion of the Wampanoag), but other chapter/essays rework older material. The tales of his childhood summers on the Island that make up the “Overture” appear, differently told, in *Tuesdays Will be Different*. Chapter II expands on “Transition: Approach to a Period,” an early contribution to the *Dukes County Intelligencer*, and Chapters IV and V recycle material

16 *Remembrance and Light*, p. 80.

17 *Remembrance and Light*, p. 69.

18 *Remembrance and Light*, p.69.



Alison Shaw and Henry Beetle Hough, photographed by Janet Holladay for the back cover of *Remembrance and Light*.

from *Whaling Wives* and *Great Days of Whaling*. The book's extensive attention to Oak Bluffs in Chapters II and V draws on his detailed account in *Martha's Vineyard: Summer Resort* and a shorter account, "Oak Bluffs in Its Youth," that he wrote for a 1980 *Intelligencer* issue commemorating the centennial of the town's independence.

The concluding chapter opens with a broadside against unrestrained development and those who advocate for it, warning of the "incalculable harm" that it will inflict on "those who, whether or not Island born, participate in and cherish its culture." The tone that it strikes, and the names that it names, are of a piece with essays in *Soundings at Sea Level* and of Hough's late-career editorials for the *Gazette* (which, it is said, so frustrated Island business interests that they founded a rival weekly—the *Martha's Vineyard Times*—to amplify their voices). "The danger closes in," Hough warns in the open paragraphs of the chapter, "and the time may be later than we have supposed."¹⁹ As Hough works his way deeper into

¹⁹ *Far Out the Coils*, p. 113.

the conclusion, however, such grim warnings give way to a more general discussion of change on the Island, unfolded—like the earlier chapters—through a series of anecdotes: the movement of the Martha's Vineyard National Bank from Edgartown to Vineyard Haven, the construction of the Lagoon Bridge, the birth of the Edgartown Yacht Club, and the flurry of golf-course-building on the Island in the early 20th century.

Hough ends the essay, and the book, by quoting—at some length—the words of microbiologist Rene DuBos, whose essays appeared in *The American Scholar* under the series title “The Despairing Optimist.” Change, the scientist declares, is inevitable: “Changes there must be, and change there will be, because it is an essential condition of life. But change can be successful only if it occurs within the constraints imposed by the physical nature of the locality and the local conditioning of human nature.”²⁰ In those words, the deeper truth that Hough wants the reader to see within the book's tapestry of stories becomes clear at last. The Vineyard is not like other places, and Vineyarders are not like other people. Changes that would be tolerable, even beneficial, elsewhere would be anathema to the Island, at odds with its “physical nature” and with the “local conditioning”—shaped by four hundred years of experience—of its people. Writing as a “despairing optimist” himself, Hough concludes:

As we look ahead near or far to identify the forces that will save our values, we must recognize that none of these are wiser or more persuasive than those weapons of law and words over which we have control. Change itself is a value that can be controlled.²¹

Those words—a final endorsement of a “weapon” he had spent a lifetime wielding with grace and artistry, in novels, histories, essays, and the pages of his beloved *Gazette*—were to be Henry Beetle Hough's last. He died on June 6, 1985, a few weeks before the first edition of *Far Out the Coils* went to press.



20 *Far Out the Coils*, p. 126.

21 *Far Out the Coils*, p. 127.

Final Thoughts: Reading Henry Beetle Hough

“Where do I start?” and “What’s worth my time?” are relevant questions to ask of any author who produced a body of work as large and varied as Henry Beetle Hough’s. Answers to them reflect, inevitably, the preferences (and prejudices) of whoever is answering. The judgements that follow reflect mine.

Singing in the Morning is Hough’s single best book (and a classic of Vineyard nature writing), and captures, in a single volume, his greatest strengths as writer.

Martha’s Vineyard—Summer Resort is Hough’s most significant book, and one likely to continue being read (at least by serious Vineyard historians) well past its centennial year of 2035.

Country Editor is far better known, but *Once More the Thunderer* is a better-conceived, more confidently executed, and more interesting book about the day-to-day life of the *Gazette*.

Lament for a City is the best of Hough’s novels, and a fair demonstration of his strengths (setting) and weaknesses (plotting, character motivation) as a novelist. None of the novels, however, are essential reading.

Tuesday Will Be Different is a useful litmus test for Hough’s later works. Readers who find a few randomly chosen essays compelling will likely enjoy the book, and those who enjoy the book as a whole will likely enjoy *To The Harbor Light* and *Soundings at Sea Level*.

Martha’s Vineyard (with Eisenstaedt) and *Remembrance and Light* (with Shaw) are works far more substantial—and far more worth reading—than they might, at first glance, appear.

❧ Bibliography ❧

The following is a list, in chronological order, of all twenty-six books for which Hough received cover credit as author, co-author, or editor. Pamphlet-length works such as *The Heath Hen's Journey to Extinction* (c. 1936) and *At Christmas All Bells Say the Same* (1942) are not included, nor are the numerous works to which Hough contributed a foreword, afterword, or introduction.

Martha's Vineyard, Summer Resort, 1835-1935 [history]. Tuttle Publishing, 1936; paperback reprint (as "second edition" but identical to the original) by Avery's, Inc., 1966; reprinted (as "third edition" but identical to the original) by Academy Press, 1982.

Country Editor [memoir]. Doubleday, 1940; reprinted as an Armed Services Edition, 1944; reprinted by Chatham Press, 1974; reprinted by Peninsula Publishing, 1996.

That Lofty Sky [novel]. Doubleday, 1941

All Things Are Yours [novel]. Doubleday, 1942

Roosters Crow in Town [novel]. Appleton-Century, 1945.

Wamsutta of New Bedford, 1846-1946: A Story of New England Enterprise [history]. Wamsutta Mills, 1946.

Long Anchorage [novel]. Appleton-Century, 1947

Once More the Thunderer [memoir]. Ives Washburn, 1950.

Singing in the Morning [essays]. Simon and Schuster, 1951.

Whaling Wives of Martha's Vineyard [history; completed by Hough from the notes of co-author Emma Mayhew Whiting]. Houghton Mifflin, 1953; reprinted by the Dukes County Historical Society, 1965.

An Alcoholic to His Sons [memoir, "as told to" Hough]. Simon and Schuster, 1954.

Thoreau of Walden: The Man and His Eventful Life [biography]. Simon and Schuster, 1956; reprinted by Archon Books, 1970.

Great Days of Whaling [young-adult history]. Houghton Mifflin, 1958.

The New England Story [novel]. Random House, 1958.

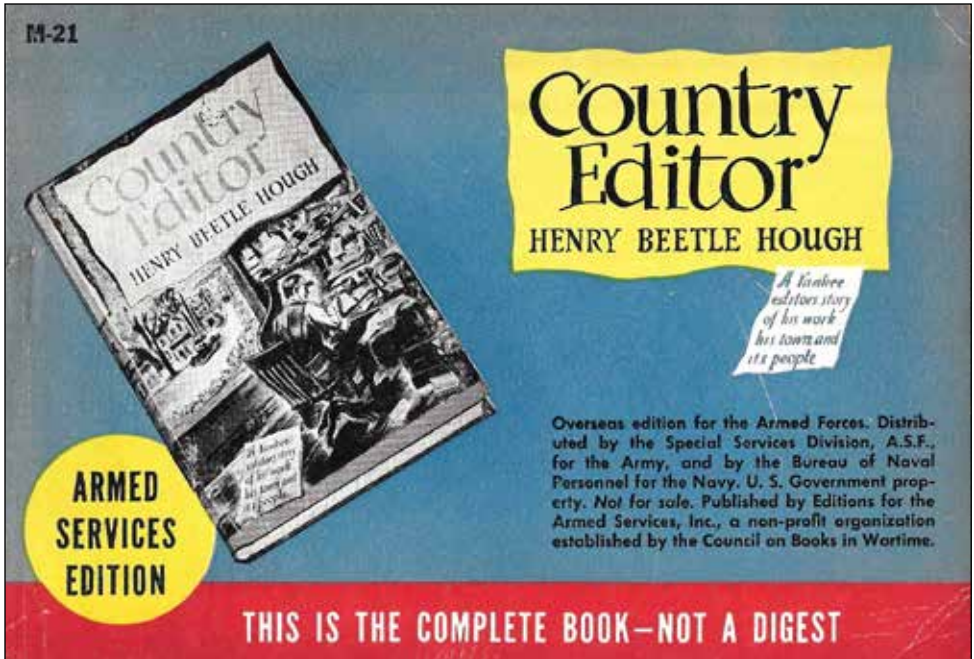
Melville in the South Pacific [young adult history]. Houghton Mifflin, 1960.

Lament for a City [novel]. Atheneum, 1960.

The Port [novel]. *The Port*, 1963.

The Vineyard Gazette Reader [edited anthology]. Harcourt, Brace and World, 1967.

- Martha's Vineyard* [photographs by Alfred Eisenstaedt, text by Hough]. Viking Press, 1970.
- The Road* [novel]. Harcourt, Brace and World, 1970.
- Tuesday Will be Different: Letters from Sheriff's Lane* [essays]. Dial Press, 1971.
- Mostly on Martha's Vineyard: A Personal Record* [essays]. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975.
- To the Harbor Light* [essays]. Houghton Mifflin, 1977.
- Soundings at Sea Level* [essays]. Houghton Mifflin, 1980.
- Remembrance and Light* [photographs by Alison Shaw, text by Hough]. Harvard Common Press, 1984.
- Far Out the Coils: A Personal View of Life on Martha's Vineyard* [essays]. Tashmoo Press/Nathan Mayhew Seminars of Martha's Vineyard, 1985.



The Museum library includes copies of all Henry Beetle Hough's books, including this compact edition of *Country Editor* printed in 1944 for distribution to members of the armed services. The non-profit Council on Books in Wartime (CBW) published 122 million copies of 133 different works—a mixture of classics and contemporary best-sellers, selected by literary experts—in 1943-1947. More than seventy publishers collaborated with the Army and Navy on the program. Designed to slip easily into a pack or uniform pocket, the books proved popular with service members as an antidote to boredom, and single copies often passed through the hands of multiple readers.

The CBW saw a more serious purpose for the program. Its slogan declared: "Books are weapons in the war of ideas." For more on the history of Armed Services Editions, see: Cara Giaimo, "How Books Designed for Soldiers' Pockets Changed Publishing Forever," [AtlasObscura.com](https://atlasobscura.com), September 22, 2017.

The Writings of Henry Beetle Hough

