

# MVMUSEUM Quarterly

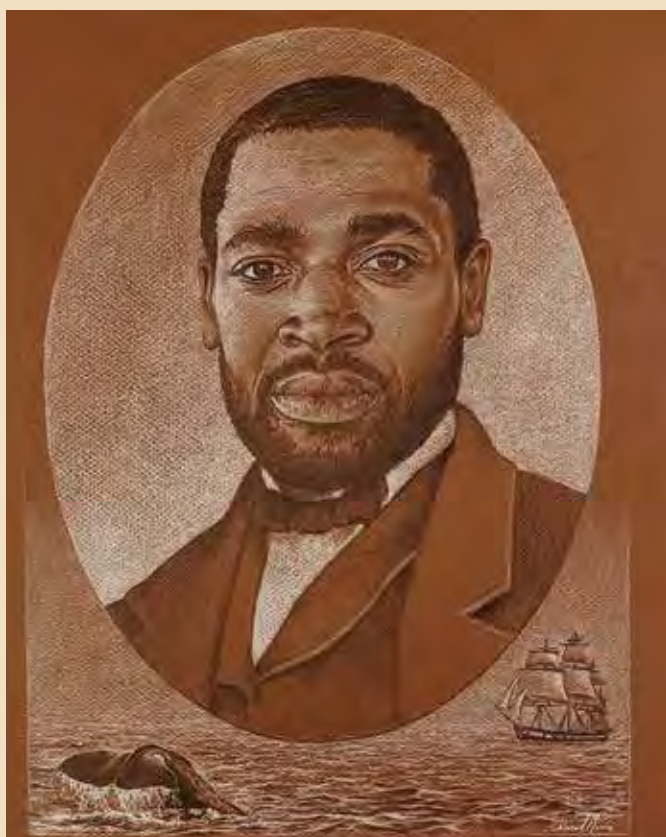
Martha's Vineyard Museum's Journal of Island History

FEBRUARY  
& MAY 2021

VOLUME 62  
NOS. 1 & 2

MVMUSEUM.ORG

## The Last Voyage of Captain William Martin



Epitaphs from Island Gravestones

Letters from the Summer Institute

Summer People: The Blackwells of Chilmark

The Federated Church Bell

The Cleveland House Poets

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## DETAILS

The details are where God—or, depending on one’s choice of aphorisms, the Devil—is said to reside. The *Quarterly* takes no position on such cosmic matters but, as the six pieces in this expanded issue make clear, historical truth certainly dwells there. One uses newly discovered letters written by Capt. William A. Martin of Edgartown to reveal the day-to-day realities of life for an African American whaling master in the waning days of the industry, revealing a man of unshakeable confidence and fierce pride in his skills as a master mariner. Another uses epitaphs in some of the Island’s oldest cemeteries to reveal the complex ways in which eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Islanders dealt with the too-frequent pain of death, and the challenges of moving past loss and grief. The third featured article explores life at the Martha’s Vineyard Summer Institute in the 1880s, where lectures and teacher-training classes mingled fishing trips, hymn singing, and picnics on the bluffs at East Chop. Shorter articles revisit familiar topics—the Blackwell family of Chilmark, the Federated Church in Edgartown, and the Cleaveland House Poets writer’s group in West Tisbury—from unfamiliar perspectives. All use a wealth of small details, carefully observed and artfully arranged, to reveal larger historical truths.

This issue, 25% larger than normal at 64 pages, combines the February and May 2021 iterations of the *Quarterly*. Regular quarterly publication will resume with the August issue.

— A. Bowdoin Van Riper

*On the Cover:* “The Captain,” a portrait of an African American whaling captain inspired by Capt. William A. Martin, of whom no historical images exist, by Darrel Morris ([darrelmorris.com](http://darrelmorris.com)).

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# The Last Voyage

by SKIP FINLEY

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WILLIAM A. MARTIN was one of some 50 men of color whose talents led to them becoming captains of American whaling vessels.<sup>1</sup> Eight handwritten letters that Martin wrote to Samuel Osborn, Jr., the owner of the *Eunice H. Adams*, were recently discovered in the archives of the Martha's Vineyard Museum. They chronicle events during what proved to be Martin's last whaling trip, from October 16, 1887 to January, 1890.<sup>2</sup> Fortunately, the log of this whaling trip is also available, providing context for the letters and allowing for a shipboard view of the circumstances under which they were written.

## William A. Martin, Whaling Master

The whaling industry was a major economic engine for America from the mid-1700s to the early 1920s, achieving its peak production in the mid-1800s when slavery was the law of the land. The industry was marked by the difficulty and discomfort endured by crews during voyages that averaged three to four years on relatively small vessels, shared by 20 to 30 or more crewmembers. Reportedly, some 90% of 175,000 men who pursued the difficult occupation only went whaling once, creating opportunity for the more than 30% of the workforce that were men of color. William A. Martin was one of them: a black man from Edgartown, which—like Nantucket, New Bedford and Sag Harbor—became a nexus of the American whaling industry.

Martin was first brought to public attention in 1997 by Elaine Weintraub and Carrie Tankard, the founders of the African American Heritage Trail of Martha's Vineyard. In census data and on his death certificate, as

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1 Skip Finley, *Whaling Captains of Color: America's First Meritocracy* (2019).

2 Martha's Vineyard Museum, RU 335 (Osborn Family Papers), Box 1, Folder 7. The letters, filed among other business correspondence of Osborn's, were discovered, transcribed and edited by MV Museum Research Librarian A. Bowdoin Van Riper in 2020.

Skip Finley, a retired broadcaster, is director of sales and marketing for the Vineyard Gazette Media Group. A longtime resident of Oak Bluffs, he is the author of *Historic Tales of Oak Bluffs* and *Whaling Captains of Color* (both 2019) and a frequent contributor to the *Quarterly*.

well as in genealogical sources, he is explicitly listed as Black.<sup>3</sup> The crew list for the *Rebecca Sims* in 1857 describes Martin as “light” skinned. The *Emma Jane*’s 1881 crew list describes him as “dark,” which seem to be the only clues in whaling records to his racial description.

Martin’s roots on Martha’s Vineyard date to the mid-1700s. His great-grandmother, Rebecca, born in Guinea, West Africa, was enslaved by Colonel Cornelius Bassett of Chilmark. Zaccheus Mayhew, a Chilmark justice of the peace, owned another African slave named Rose, whose son Sharper Michael (born 1742) had two children with Rebecca: a daughter named Nancy, born in 1772, and a son named James. Sharper Michael, after gaining his freedom, moved to Gay Head (now Aquinnah) and married a Wampanoag widow named Lucy Peters in 1775. Sharper Michael, like the half-Black, half-Wampanoag seaman Crispus Attucks killed by British troops at the Boston Massacre, was a martyr to the Revolution. In September 1777, an American ship grounded on the beach at Squibnocket, on the border between Gay Head and Chilmark, and was set afire by the pursuing British privateer *Cerberus*. Locals, including Abner Mayhew and an “unknown negro” rained fire on the attackers, wounding many. Sharper Michael, who had happened upon the fracas—was killed by a musket ball, making him the first person killed by the British on Martha’s Vineyard. Sharper Michael was William A. Martin’s great-grandfather.<sup>4</sup>

Sharper’s daughter Nancy Michael inherited the home that brother James (believed to have been a mariner) owned in Edgartown. She never married but had two daughters: Rebecca in 1804 and Lucy in 1808. By 1812 Nancy ran into financial difficulty, was declared a pauper, and was forced to sell the small house in 1819. Rebecca, who had problems with drinking and the law, gave birth to William A. Martin in 1827. Driven by personal demons, Rebecca served nine jail sentences after William was born and died in 1854. As a result of Rebecca’s trials Martin was raised by his grandmother Nancy, who was known as “Black Nance.” An article about her death described her fondness of children—and that there were “few among us who at some time have not been indebted to her.” She was thought to be a witch whose remonstrations provided “good or bad luck to those bound on long voyages.” The article noted: “her strange power and influence over many continued till the day of her death.” Although Nancy Michael died before her grandson became a captain, one suspects that whatever powers she may have had contributed to William A. Martin’s whaling career.<sup>5</sup>

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3 R. Andrew Pierce and Jerome D. Segal. *Wampanoag Families of Martha’s Vineyard*. Vol. 2, pts. A and B (2016).

4 R. Andrew Pierce, “Sharper Michael, Born a Slave, First Islander Killed in the Revolution,” *Dukes County Intelligencer*, May 2005, pp. 147-152.

5 “An Old Landmark Gone,” *Vineyard Gazette*, January 2, 1857.

## William A. Martin Whaling Voyages

Ship	Port	Rank (Age)	Departed	Returned	Owner
<i>Benjamin Tucker</i>	New Bedford	Greenhand (16)	6 Jul 1846	1 Apr 1849	Charles R. Tucker
<i>Waverly</i>	New Bedford	Cooper, Boatsteerer (21)	19 Jul 1851	19 Jun 1854	David B. Kempton
<i>Europa</i>	Edgartown	Unknown (23)	4 Oct 1853	12 Jun 1857*	Abraham Osborn
<i>Corinthian</i>	New Bedford	Boatsteerer (24)	10 Oct 1854	6 Apr 1858	G. & M. Howland
<i>Europa</i>	Edgartown	1st Mate, Log Keeper (27)	17 Sep 1857	27 Jul 1862*	Abraham Osborne
<i>Rebecca Sims</i>	Fairhaven	Unknown (27)	16 Nov 1857	14 Apr 1861*	Jenny & Tripp
<i>Gratitude</i>	New Bedford	Boatsteerer (28)	25 Aug 1858	22 Apr 1862	Swift & Allen
<i>Almira</i>	Edgartown	Unknown (34)	8 Aug 1864	4 Oct 1868	Abraham Osborn
<i>Clarice</i>	Edgartown	1st Mate (41)	Oct 1871	Sep 1875	Samuel Osborn, Jr.
<i>Golden City</i>	New Bedford	Unknown (47)	19 Jun 1877	21 Sep 1878	Henry Clay
<i>Golden City</i>	New Bedford	Master (48)†	29 Nov 1878	18 Mar 1880	Henry Clay
<i>Emma Jane</i>	Edgartown	Unknown (51)	6 Oct 1881	9 Dec 1881	Samuel Osborn
<i>Emma Jane</i>	Edgartown	Master (53)	9 Oct 1883	27 Mar 1884	Samuel Osborn
<i>Eunice H. Adams</i>	Edgartown	Master (57)	16 Oct 1887	Mar 1890*	Samuel Osborn

\* Martin left the ship before its return to port, a not-uncommon practice for the era.

† Replaced by James F. Avery

Data derived from Finley, *Whaling Captains of Color*; Alexander Starbuck, *History of the American Whale Fishery* (1878); Reginald Hegarty, *Returns of Whaling Vessels Sailing from American Ports* (1959); Judith A. Lund, *Whaling Masters and Whaling Voyages Sailing from American Ports* (2001); New Bedford Whaling Museum, Whaling Crew List Database, [https://www.whalingmuseum.org/online\\_exhibits/crewlist/](https://www.whalingmuseum.org/online_exhibits/crewlist/).

Martin was well known locally due to the activities of his mother and grandmother and apparently received a good education in the Edgartown public schools. Martin is believed to have gone to sea in 1846, when he was 16. It was rare for someone Black, almost 20 years before the Civil War ended, to be able to read and write, and to be entrusted with the responsibility for a whaleship and crew. During Martin's whaling career from 1846-1890 he made fourteen voyages on eleven ships. Five of them owned by Samuel Osborn, Jr. including two (*Emma Jane* and *Eunice H. Adams*) of the three on which he sailed as Master.

### Samuel Osborn, Jr.<sup>6</sup>

Samuel Osborn, Jr. (1823-1895) was born in Edgartown, one of seven children of Samuel and Mary T. Osborn. His uncle, Capt. Abraham Os-



Four years older than William A. Martin, Samuel Osborn, Jr. (1823-1895) was "probably the largest individual owner of whaling property in the United States." *Vineyard Gazette*, "Death of Samuel Osborn, Jr." March 21, 1895.

born (1798-1865), commanded the Edgartown-based whaler *Almira* on a voyage to the Pacific in the 1824-1826 and then became a ship owner and agent. His cousin, Capt. Abraham Osborn, Jr. (1831-1910) "went master" on five whaling voyages in five different ships—including the *Almira* and the *Ocmulgee*, which was burned by the Confederate raider *Alabama*—between 1856 and 1878. Samuel, like his uncle, had an entrepreneurial bent. After attending school, he opened a clothing store on Lower Main Street in Edgartown, then became involved in the whaling business as agent for the *Almira* and *Europa*. He initially invested in whaling ships in partnership with others, and then—as his fortune increased—became sole owner of several, beginning with the bark *Clarice* in 1872. By 1880 he had a fleet of eight vessels and was (according to his obituary in the *Gazette*) "the largest individual owner of whaling property in the United

States."<sup>7</sup> The proceeds of his whaling investments allowed him to amass a fortune valued, in contemporary terms, at over \$13 million. The immacu-

6 "Death of Samuel Osborn, Jr." *Vineyard Gazette*, March 21, 1895. [vineyard-gazette.com/news/1895/03/21/death-samuel-osborn-jr](http://vineyard-gazette.com/news/1895/03/21/death-samuel-osborn-jr)

7 "Death of Samuel Osborn, Jr."



late Charlotte Inn on South Summer Street—built by Samuel Osborn Jr. for his wife, Zoraida, and their two sons—is a monument to his success.<sup>8</sup>

Businessmen like Samuel Osborn, Jr. were essential to the offshore whaling industry. All of the 15,913 recorded whaling voyages that sailed from American ports were structured as individual business enterprises, with at times different owner/investors, managers, and crews. Whaling was a venture capital enterprise—indeed, a forerunner of today’s similarly structured private equity firms and hedge funds—in which investors (and crews) took substantial risks in the hope of reaping large rewards.<sup>9</sup> Whaling ships were bought, repaired, maintained, and equipped using money paid out by their owners at the beginning of each voyage. Captains and crews were paid, and investors’ expenses repaid, when the ship returned home years later. If whales were scarce or the crew’s luck was bad, a voyage might not even cover expenses. If the ship was lost—as the *Ocmulgee* and several others owned by the Osborn family were—the investors would lose everything they had put into her.

Hiring the experienced masters and mates, and signing on the best possible crews, was a key to successful, profitable whaling voyages. The fact that seven of William A. Martin’s fourteen whaling voyages were aboard ships owned by the Osborns suggests their high level of confidence in him. Abraham Osborn was principal owner of the *Europa* and *Almira* and Samuel Osborn was principal owner of the *Clarice*, as well as the *Emma Jane* and *Eunice A. Adams*, which Martin commanded.

It is probably not coincidental that Samuel Osborn, Jr. was a prominent member of the Republicans: the party of Abraham Lincoln, credited with freeing America’s slaves. He represented the Island in the Massachusetts legislature, served on Governor John A. Andrew’s advisory council during the Civil War, and acted as the Governor’s



Figurehead of the *Eunice H. Adams*, presumably representing her namesake. Mystic Seaport Photo (1956.745)

8 Arthur R. Railton, *Walking Tour of Historic Edgartown* (1986), pp. 51-52.

9 Tom Nicholas, and Jonas Peter Akins, “Whaling Ventures,” Harvard Business School Case 813-086, October 2012 (revised February 2019). <https://store.hbr.org/product/whaling-ventures/813086>

emissary to Washington. It is from this aspect of his life—coupled with the activities of many Vineyard abolitionists, who invited Frederick Douglass who spoke on the Island in 1857 and 1876—that it can be perceived as a reason the Osborn's placed such great faith in Capt. William A. Martin, whose last command was the whaling schooner *Eunice H. Adams*.

### **The *Eunice H. Adams* and Vineyard Whaling**

The *Eunice H. Adams*, launched in 1845, was built for Freeman E. Adams of Nantucket by the Amos Crandall Shipyard in Bristol, RI. It was named for the original owner's wife, the former Eunice H. Nickerson, whose likeness—in the form of the ship's carved wooden figurehead—is on display at the Mystic Seaport Museum. Built as a two-masted, single-decked coasting schooner, the 82-foot, 110-ton vessel spent 20 years carrying cargo before becoming, in the same month the Civil War ended, the last whaling vessel registered on Nantucket. The *Adams* made four voyages from Nantucket (1865-1870) under the command of Capt. Zenas M. Coleman, then five more out of New Bedford (1872-1882) under five different masters. She was rerigged as a brig after her second trip under Captain Coleman, and her subsequent voyages lasted 20-22 months rather than the 4-6 of her first two. Bought by Samuel Osborn in the early 1880s, the *Eunice H. Adams* spent its final years in Edgartown, making five more whaling voyages between 1884 and 1894.<sup>10</sup> Already old when converted for whaling, she continued whaling for another 27 years. Launched late in the whaling era when prices were low and with shorter trips lasting fewer than 3 years, her useful life produced just under 4,500 barrels of oil valued at \$3.7 million dollars in today's funds.<sup>11</sup>

The *Eunice H. Adams* was diminutive by the standards of her era. Displacing only 110 tons, she was less than one-third the size of the iconic *Charles W. Morgan* (351 tons) and less than one-fifth the size of the 500-ton behemoths that were, in the last decades of the nineteenth century, sailing to the North Pacific and Arctic Ocean whaling grounds. The *Eunice H. Adams* was lighter than Vineyard Haven's 170-ton topsail schooner *Shenandoah*, as well as nearly thirty feet shorter (82 feet v. 110 feet). The interior spaces of the *Adams*, were approximately twice the volume of an average American home, but had to house 24 men—along with all their supplies and equipment—for more than two years.

Cornelius M. Marchant, co-owner of the *Eunice H. Adams* along with Samuel Osborn, commanded her on her first two Edgartown voyages. A veteran of the industry, he had sailed as captain on seven previous whaling voyages from Edgartown over the course of nearly a quarter-century (1860-

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10 American Offshore Whaling Voyages (AOWV) Database, National Maritime Digital Library, <https://whalinghistory.org/av/voyages/>

11 Author's estimate, see chart.

1884). His earlier commands included the barks *Ellen* and *Clarice* and the schooner *Emma Jane*, the latter two owned—like the *Eunice H. Adams*—by Samuel Osborn. Marchant took the *Adams* out of Edgartown for the first time on June 4, 1884, but returned only three weeks later (June 24) due to a hurricane that carried away three whaleboats and caused the ship to leak badly. After repairs at a yard in New Bedford, Marchant took the *Adams* to sea again in July 1884. The ship returned to Edgartown in April 1885—still chronically leaking, a condition that would have repercussions later—under the command of Capt. John Pardee. Marchant had died in Barbados in February, a few months before his 60th birthday.



The *Eunice H. Adams*, William A. Martin's last command, and one of the last whalers to sail from the Vineyard. Author's Collection.

Capt. William Martin took command of the *Eunice H. Adams* in the fall of 1887, and set sail from Edgartown on October 16. It was the *Adams*' thirteenth whaling voyage—the ship's next-to-last, and Martin's last—and it lasted for 29 months, ending in March 1890. The *Eunice H. Adams* would call at the Cape Verde Islands, St. Eustatius, Dominica, Monserrat, St. Michaels, Barbados, and the southern US ports of Beaufort and Port Royal, South Carolina, and Norfolk, Virginia (where Martin's letters to Samuel Osborn, reprinted below, were written). Throughout the history of the American whaling industry, from the mid-1700s to the early 1900s, good weather and the availability of whales were the key variables that determined success or failure. Martin's luck, on both counts, was bad. Whales were scarce, with an average of 45 days elapsing between kills, and the voyage included the second time the *Adams* had been driven into port as a result of inclement weather, and the third time—December 6, 1887—that it had been under sail

during a hurricane.<sup>12</sup> The voyage was also dogged by a variety of other problems: accidents, desertions, a leaking hull, and uncooperative port officials. Captain Martin weathered these setbacks until February 1890, when he was replaced by Capt. Thomas E. Fordham for reasons that are unclear but believed to be related to Martin's health.<sup>13</sup>

Over the course of the offshore whaling era, a total of 98 vessels, commanded by 175 different captains, sailed from Vineyard ports on 247 whaling voyages.<sup>14</sup> The sloop *Diamond*, which left Edgartown under the command of Capt. Joseph Chase in 1738, was the first. The *Eunice H. Adams* was among the last. The fourteenth and final voyage of her whaling career, under the command of Capt. John T. Gonsalves, began in April 1893 and ended in September 1894. The *Hattie E. Smith*, a small Osborn-owned schooner commanded by Capt. John E. Johnson, Jr., left Edgartown a year after the *Eunice H. Adams*, in April 1894.<sup>15</sup> When she returned that November, the Vineyard's days as a home base for whaling vessels ended for good.<sup>16</sup> The whaling industry had, over a century-and-a-half, transformed the Vineyard in general and Edgartown in particular. Martin's final voyage aboard the *Adams* was part of its swansong on the Island.

Logbooks had been part of seafaring long before offshore whaling began, and were part of the whaling industry from its earliest days. Logs for roughly 3,000 of the 15,000 offshore whaling voyages made by American crews have survived to the present day, and approximately one-third of those are in the Nicholson Whaling Collection of the Providence Public Library. Among them is the log of the *Eunice H. Adams*, kept by Capt. Martin on his final, hard-luck voyage.<sup>17</sup>

The log's hardbound cover, aging and stained, contains 224 pages, the

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12 The first time was in June 1884, under Capt. Marchant, and the second in December 1885, under Capt. Manuel Costa.

13 AOWV Database

14 These numbers do not include vessels that, though owned or commanded by Vineyarders, sailed from New Bedford and other mainland ports. The first (1845-1848) voyage of the *Charles W. Morgan*, for example, was commanded by Capt. Thomas Adams Norton of Edgartown and included XX Vineyarders among its crew.

15 AOWV Database

16 Whalers continued to operate from mainland ports on both coasts for another three decades, and Vineyarders continued to sail on them. The Arctic whaling careers of Captains James A. Tilton of Chilmark and Hartson Bodfish of Tisbury, among others, began in the 1890s and lasted until World War I or even later. Amos Smalley of Gay Head (now Aquinnah) famously killed a white sperm whale off the Azores in 1903, while a harpooner on the bark *Platina*, out of New Bedford.

17 Logbook of the *Eunice H. Adams*, Internet Archive, [https://archive.org/details/logbookofeuniceh00euni\\_2/mode/2up](https://archive.org/details/logbookofeuniceh00euni_2/mode/2up)

first 172 of which reflect Martin's leadership and activities. Written across the top of each set of two facing pages is the inscription: "Remarks of a Whaling Voyage onboard the Brig EH Adams—W. A. Martin Master" Pages 174 to 181 were used by Martin's replacement, Thomas E. Fordham. Pages 182 to 209 are blank and unused, while pages 210 to 213 contain lists, kept by Martin, that detail amounts of oil sent home and the names of crewmembers who had sighted and struck the seventeen whales taken on the voyage. Most whaling-log entries are cursory at best: The information in a typical one details the location of the ship, the weather, and any important shipboard events, such as the taking of a whale. Martin's log is no exception. It exercises brevity, detailing only what was important: the date, weather and location of the ship. Sightings of other ships and sea life are noted in addition to where and when prey was spotted and caught.

Nevertheless, the log's pages provide a valuable overview of the portion of the 27 months of the voyage when Captain Martin was in charge, and context for the weeks in August and September of 1889 when he wrote to Samuel Osborn from Norfolk.

### **A Master's Last Voyage**

William A. Martin's voyage as master of the *Eunice H. Adams* began with difficulty and ended badly. On the day the brig cast off, he wrote in the log:

October 16, 1887: Took our anchor from port of New Bedford at 9 O'clock AM and shaped our course for sea with a company of 25 all told. At 12m [Noon] discharged the Pilot. Wind blowing strong from South west. At 3 O'clock PM kept off and steered for Tarpaulin cove. Came at anchor at 6 PM in eight fathoms of water. So ends this day.

Bad weather caused the ship to lay over at Tarpaulin Cove for three days before finally leaving on October 19. Contrary winds and bad weather continued to hamper the voyage, however, and log entries frequently reference it: "the wind blew so that we could not lower the boats" . . . "strong winds" . . . "continuous gales" . . . "squally with rain." There were numerous accidents (men falling, sometimes overboard) and cases of sicknesses, some specified as diarrhea and mumps. Despite the bad luck, however, there is not a single notation about Martin feeling badly about it or sorry for himself.

Winds that began on December 1, 1887 rose to hurricane force by December 6, and badly damaged one of the whaleboats. More importantly, it stressed the hull of the ship and loosened the seams between its aging timbers, caused severe leakage that continued for the balance of the trip. The ship's pump, mounted on deck but equipped with an intake pipe that reached deep into the ship's bilges, was operated by two men who stood on opposite sides of a see-saw-like handle. The work was monotonous and exhausting, but necessary to keep the ship from filling with seawater and sinking. Notations in the log record virtually continual pumping: up to

400 strokes an hour at times of peak danger, and 4000 strokes per day. Almost immediately, the crew was perturbed both by the work and the danger it was meant to avert. Stopping for repairs at Port Royal, South Carolina, a crewman jumped ship, but was returned by a passing boat. The majority of the crew, Martin noted in the log, “sent a letter on shore to the authorities stating that they considered the vessel unseaworthy. And that they did not wish to go to sea in the vessel again.”

Working conditions on a whaleship were difficult and dangerous even when conditions were good. Historians estimate that from half to two-thirds the crew that signed onto a ship at the beginning of a voyage might desert before it returned home.<sup>18</sup> Whaling crews worked not for a regular wage but for a “lay:” a specified fraction of the profits that they agreed to when they signed onto the ship, with the understanding that they would be paid when the voyage ended and the books were balanced. Sailors who jumped ship forfeited their right to any profit from the voyage, which (in principle) saved the owners money. They also, however, deprived the captain of their labor; if too many men deserted, the entire crew’s ability to catch and kill whales (and thus earn a profit that would ultimately benefit them all) would be compromised. Preventing desertion and replacing deserters was thus part of the business model of whaling.

Desertion was a continuing problem during Martin’s command of the *Eunice H. Adams*. On December 7, 1887, in the aftermath of the hurricane, some members of the crew deserted and others refused to work. One sailor jumped ship and returned with a lawyer who interviewed the rest of the crew. Evidently, nothing came of the lawyer’s intervention. The crew finally agreed to return to work, and on January 3, 1888, Martin raised anchor and headed for sea with a full complement. The crew of the *Eunice H. Adams* numbered 25, but by the end of its voyage the names of 47 men had been entered in the ship’s books. Eight were recorded as having deserted, and as many as fifteen others may have followed them.

Whaling captains rarely had the benefit of training in management, and many are the horrifying stories of poor and dangerous leadership. There is no evidence in the log that this was Captain Martin’s problem. He was diligent in reporting the food he “broke out” to feed the crew, including bread, water, flour, molasses, vinegar, sugar, butter and, at alternate times, beef and pork. There are no indications of crewmen being severely punished and the captain provided for occasional leave for the entire crew. There were several times the crew refused to work but, in each instance, Martin was able to re-engage them—his managerial skills seemed adequate. Nor is it likely

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18 Briton Cooper Busch, *Whaling Will Never Do for Me – The American Whaleman in the Nineteenth Century* (20009), Chapter 6; Elmo Hohman, *The American Whaleman* (1928).

## Original Crew of the Eunice H. Adams, 1887

Name	Rank	Lay	Age	Race	Residence	Disposition
William A. Martin	Captain		57	B	Edgartown	
Arthur O. Gibbons	1st Mate	1/18	28	B		
Philip Sylaveiro	2nd Mate	1/24	31	B		Deserted
Joseph Gomez	Harpooner	1/25	28			
Benjamin Hazzard	Harpooner	1/75	55		Hawaii	
Thomas Taylor	Steward	1/120	28		Boston	
Domingo Fleming	Harpooner	1/75	24	B	Fogo, CVI	
Joseph Lopes	Cook	1/140	40	B	Sao Taigo, CVI	
Manuel J. Pera	Seaman	1/130				
Antone Roderique	Seaman	1/125				
John Lopez	Seaman	1/140	25	B	Sao Taigo, CVI	
Albert E. Vaughn	Greenhand	1/150	21		New Bedford	
S. F. McArther	Seaman	1/150	21		Portland	Deserted
C. C. Briggs	Greenhand	1/150	26		Philadelphia	Deserted
James McNally	Greenhand	1/150	18		Marblehead	
C. C. Hamilton	Greenhand	1/150	21		Nantucket	Deserted
John McNamara	Greenhand	1/150	31		Boston	Deserted
Fred Ridson						Deserted
George Ridson	Carpenter	1/140	21		London	
Abram L. Josh	Greenhand	1/150	23		Edgartown	

### Replacements & Additions

Name	Rank	Lay	Notes
Thomas E. Fordham	Captain		Resident of Edgartown
Theophilus S. Almeida	1st Mate	1/18	
Frank Perry	2nd Mate	1/28	
Henry Allen	Harpooner	1/75	
Isaac Simmons	Harpooner	1/80	
Girard (?) Solomon	Greenhand	1/125	
Jose Antonio Duarte	Greenhand	1/140	
Charles Thompson		1/140	
Edgar La Bruce		1/140	
John Alves	3rd mate	1/40	
Fred D. West	2nd mate		
John Domingo Lopes	Greenhand		Hired "before the mast"
Antoine Joseph	Harpooner		Hired "before the mast"
Cesar Brava	Greenhand		Hired "before the mast"
Segeo Marrier Farrar			Deserted
Benjamin Dice			Deserted
John A. Chapman			
Ernest Kennedy			
Manuel D. Bourgo			
Joseph Queltho (?)		1/140	
John Le Canto (?)		1/140	
John Rodrick (?)			
Rufino Gonzales			
Lobarrio Farues (?)			
Mr. Perez			
Alan (?)			
Otten (?)			

that the captain's race played any significant role in the desertions. Several crewmembers were black and there were no doubt other men of color hired from stops in the West Indies and Cape Verde. It is more than likely that the weather and working conditions caused rancor. The log's constant references to the ship leaking, harpoons breaking, major and minor accidents, terrible weather and few whales spotted suggest a miserable voyage that did nothing to sustain the happiness of the crew.

Indeed, from departure on October 16, 1887 it took until November 21 before the crew of the *Eunice H. Adams* even *sighted* a sperm whale and until May 14, 1888—seven months later—before they caught one. Along the way they did harvest blackfish (pilot whales) and porpoises, possibly for consumption. On June 29, 1888, the ship sent its first cargo of oil home from Barbados. February, May, June and July of 1889 were particularly productive, accounting for 10 of the 17 captured on the voyage, which ultimately produced 375 barrels of sperm whale oil.

At July's end the weather had worsened enough that Captain Martin decided to anchor at Norfolk on August 1, amidst a rainstorm. With the storm continuing through August 13, Captain Martin had 123 barrels of oil made ready for transfer for shipping home and drafted the first of these newly discovered letters. In it, Martin details damage to the ship and repair costs caused by the weather necessitating the unusual stop at Norfolk where as a black man, just 24 years earlier, he could have been accused, under the Fugitive Slave Act, of having "escaped" and been "returned" to enslavement.

Norfolk, Aug 13th, 1889

Mr. Osborn Dear sir

I suppose you think strange my not being gone. I think so too, but we had hard weather, not fit to go to sea [even] if I could, and I think it is a good thing that the pilot did not take me out as we should have been on the beach and all hands lost, as the wind has been blowing [a] fearful gale from [the] NE then back to the north and then to Northwest and blew [a] heavy gale so that we [unclear] two anchors & the [unclear] [unclear] on a schooner took her jibboom and sprung her bowsprit: broke off at [the] stanchions and set her to leaking. All the damage it done [was] the broken spritsail yard, parted flying jib guy. I shall be gone before you get this letter [and] will report as often as I can. Settle damages to schooner [unclear] \$500; tow boat \$8. I shall not come here again. The weather will be too cold & it may get froze up here. Do not know where I will go.

Yours truly,

Wm. A. Martin

Martin and the ship remained in Norfolk until September 23, 1889 through daily bad weather, the period during which he corresponded with Osborn. He may have received letters from Osborn in reply but, if they survived, their whereabouts are unknown.



On August 15, crewman John A. Chapman deserted. On the 16th, Fred West, one of the mates, did as well.

Norfolk, Va. Aug 16th 1889 [first letter]

Mr. Osborn Dear Sir,

I pen you a few lines to Inform you that I have got the sails made, and [bought] some spare canvas & twine, and have sent a draft to you. [I] have gotten [them] as cheap as I could. I have not shipped the oil. It is all on deck and ready to land, and [I] shall send it as soon as I hear from you, which I hope will be very soon, for laying here is a waste of time and money. West the second mate has left. If you can find one send him out, or I shall [go] without one. I think you can find someone. If [name unclear] is there, send him out, or any one you can find [unclear]. West said he was coming back but I don't believe it. He is in Provincetown. His name is Fred West. He may come back. If he does not come soon he will be too late.

I will write again soon.

Yours,

Wm. A. Martin

During the stay in Norfolk, Martin kept the crew busy with maintenance, repair and painting aboard the old ship. The log entry for Friday, August 25, contains the following note: "Last entry to be made by Arthur O. Gibbons." Gibbons, the first mate, had been keeping the log, and after August 25 it is continued by someone else—possibly Martin, since the handwriting is similar to that in his letters to Osborn.

Norfolk, Va. Aug 16th 1889 [second letter]

Mr. Osborn Dear sir

I pen you a few lines to inform you the sails is done and I send you the draft for sails and spare canvas and twine. I have not shipped the oil yet but shall as soon as I hear from you and find that everything is all right that [I] have done. Has been a great trouble and I would like to be square with him. The Second Mate has left gone home and said he was coming back, but I don't know about that. If you can find one send him or I should go without him. I can catch a whale yet. Please write soon and let me know how thing is. I shall ship the oil as soon as I hear from you, which I hope will be soon.

Yours truly,

Wm. A. Martin

The following day, Martin wrote again, this time looking for instructions from his employer.

Norfolk, Va. Aug 17th 1889 - Mr. Osborn Dear Sir

I pen you few more lines asking you if you do not think it will be just as well to stay on Hatteras & Charleston felt [?] Dec 25 and then go to Blanco and Samu Bay and be back to Charleston and Hatteras in April and not Go to St. Antone as the brig is so low the copper is coming off and it will take 2 months to go down to Cape Devard [?]. But if you say go I will go please write what you think of it. The Provincetown schooners has done well at Sam Bay & Blanco so it

lays with you to say where I shall go after.

Do please write soon and let me know what I am to do. You wrote that you thought it would [be] as well to stay to the North till the hurricane is over. I think it would be a very good plan as I think I can get out of the range of them. I shall send the oil as soon as I hear from you. It is all ready to land and it will be home very quick. I will write when I ship.

Yours truly,  
Wm. A. Martin

The August 17 letter, Martin's third in two days, suggests he has had whaling information from other captains. The following day, August 18, he wrote again, this time in response to a letter written by Osborn on August 16, perhaps in response to Martin's letter of August 13.<sup>19</sup> At four pages, it is his longest letter of the series.

Norfolk, Va. Aug 18th 1889

Mr. Osborn Dear Sir

Yours of the 16th came to hand today and wants answered. The men that is on the list I sent you run away at Bravo months from home. I thought that if they run away that they lost the money that is the [unclear]. I only guess[?] at it. Those bills was something an bear for to bacon. Mr. Gibbons is at least on board. He is the only one left. [evidently of the original crew?] You spoke of going out at night. You would have heard of me at sea if I could get there, but you see they went to the Customs House and told them not to give me my papers or I should [have] left the same night that the lawyer notarized me. I can get out fast enough if I had my papers and should [have] been gone long ago but they have got me fast for the present. It will not do to say anything to Mr. Peed about it. I have found that out. I wish I had gone to Bermuda. It would have been all right [but now] it is too far for that [unclear; poss. "contemptible cur"] to do anything. I could hang him with a good will but I hope it will end all right.

The oil is on deck ready to send home if I dare to send it. They are waiting on my account as I have told them that they need not be afraid of my running away with the brig, but if I get the chance I am gone although I do not see any way yet. The provisions is paid for but am not on board for if they should make attachment they will not get them so I don't take them on board if I see a sight I shall take them off in my boats and get the first chance. I will write again soon.

Yours truly,  
Wm. A. Martin

That Captain Martin does not seem enamored by his experience in Norfolk is clear. His wish that he had gone to Bermuda instead suggests his belief that the British-ruled island would have been more hospitable to a whal-

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19 Editor's Note: The speed of late-nineteenth-century mail service along major trade routes was remarkable by modern standards. A letter reaching Norfolk two days after being mailed in Vineyard Haven was impressive, but not inconceivable, performance.

ing captain who was black. In the Antebellum period prior to the outbreak of the Civil War, whaleships stopping at southern ports are virtually unrecorded. Martin's letter hints at poor treatment by individuals in Norfolk, including the "contemptible cur" who he could "hang with a good will."<sup>20</sup>

Martin's frustration with his treatment in Norfolk also surfaces in his next letter to Osborn, written the following day:

Norfolk, Va. Aug 19th 1889

Mr. Osborn Dear Sir

I pen a few lines to inform you where the \$700 is gone and how much more it will take to finish up. I wrote you the men would have to have some clothing, which I shall get as low as I can and I have tried to get along as small as possible under the trouble I have had & have to get along as easy as possible. I have not seen any of the crew go on shore but I do not think that anyone will run away, as they are well treated & have no reason to complain. This buying [of] provisions makes [for] big drafts [and] if you would send out I should not have to draw so heavy but as it is I do the best I can. I write to let you know what has become of the money that you sent to Mr. Peed. Had this one not come up with that bill I should [have] been gone. Mr. Peed told me that if it was carried into court they would not get anything out of it and I hope they will not, for it is a mean thing to do. If the Brig was at home it would be different, but to try and take the advantage of a man out here is a mean act. No man would do such a thing if it was in my care. I would fight it out with him. We shall send home oil which helps out some and I think I shall get enough to get the brig away again. If nothing it will not always be this hard and [I] hope luck will change soon. I will give you a list of what I have bought [and] I [will] send the bill: Bread, Beef, Pork & more Bread. Sail \$4.28. It will probably take \$100 more for to get clothing for the crew. I will get [it] as cheap as I can. I wish you would fin[ish?] up as soon [as] possible and let me get to sea as soon as possible.

Yours truly,

Wm. A. Martin

The identity of "Mr. Peed," whose name comes up in both the August 18 and August 19 letters, is a mystery, as is his role in Martin's affairs. Osborn has sent him money, presumably to pay debts incurred by Martin on behalf of the ship, but the August 19 letter suggests some discord of which the details are clearer to Martin and Osborn than they are to the modern reader. Had Peed, after receiving the money from Osborn, declared that it didn't fully settle the debt? Had he rendered some service, or provided supplies, for which compensation had not yet arrived? Martin seems to suggest that

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20 Editor's Note: That Martin, as a black man, felt comfortable using such language about their common enemy—an unnamed (but presumably white) man in Norfolk—in a letter to his white employer speaks volumes about the relationship between Martin and Osborn. Had Martin spoken the same words aloud on the docks at Norfolk, his life would likely have been forfeit.

someone else in Norfolk has threatened legal action, but that Peed thinks it will be dismissed if brought before the courts. Perhaps someone in Norfolk is using the threat of a court hearing (and further delay) to leverage Martin and Osborn into paying more money than they believe they owe.

The letters of August 18-19 contain the first negative comments from Martin in his log or letters. It is not clear whether Peed is the “contemptible cur” who Martin would “hang with a good will” if given a chance, but Martin is clearly unhappy with him. “It will not do to say anything to Mr. Peed,” he writes on August 18. “I have found that out.” On August 19 he describes his treatment as “a mean thing to do” and declares that to “take the advantage of a man out here is a mean act” in which he himself would not engage.<sup>21</sup> Clearly the man had backbone.

Three weeks pass before the next letter in the series. In the interval, Martin and Osborn’s disputes with suppliers in Norfolk seem to have been resolved, leaving only the business of getting the ship ready for sea again.

Norfolk, Va. Sept. 6th 1889

Mr. Osborn Dear Sir

You sent me word by telegram to let the second mate outfit her. I have cleared up all my business and am ready for sea so I shall have to send you a 30-dollar draft, which I am very sorry to do as I thought to have been to Sea by this time. This has been a hard task and I hope it will not happen again.

Yours truly,

Wm. A. Martin

The final letter reiterates Martin’s less-than-complete happiness with the situation in Norfolk. Its tone reflects the relationship between Samuel Osborn, a wealthy white shipowner, and Martin, both his employee and a man of color. Even in the racially charged atmosphere of the late 1880s, it is marked by candor and directness on Martin’s part.

Norfolk Sept. 14th 1889

Mr. Osborn Dear Sir

I pen you a few lines to inform you that 5 men ran away last night and I should [have] been to sea by this time, as the weather is getting better and [there is] nothing to stop me from going. I have sent you telegram to send 6 men and a boatsteerer. [I] will take them out of the steamer so that they cannot get on shore, and go to sea the same day. If it had not been such bad weather I should [have] been to sea long ago, but it has been a heavy gale here [unclear] thing strangely, but it is over and I want to get on the Hatteras ground at once, which will take 2 days. I hope to get a good season, and I believe I will if I have

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21 Editor’s Note: The use of “mean” to describe another’s behavior is now associated primarily with squabbling children, but in Martin’s era it was a stinging insult. To call another man’s actions “mean” was to suggest that they were shabby and dishonorable, with overtones of pettiness and stinginess.

weather to do so. I wrote you yesterday that I do not want to come here again. It is a bad place in the winter. I do not know where I will go. It depends on the quantity of oil we get. Hurry up the [unclear]. The officers tell me that there is plenty of men in New Bedford hard up. Capt. Lapham [?] can find plenty.

Yours truly,

William A. Martin

The message is clear: Had the weather been better Martin would have left Norfolk, and his men might not have deserted. Martin confidently explains his situation, the actions he has taken, and what he needs from Osborn. He does not, in the least, seem subservient.

The *Eunice H. Adams* was able to depart Norfolk on September 22 after a frustrating, unproductive month-long stay. On September 28, Martin sighted the first sperm whale the crew had seen since July 30, two months earlier. They caught and killed it, and the voyage continued with modest success, despite the persistently awful weather and never-ending leaks. The record in the log continues until the first week of 1890, when Martin made his last entry on page 172: "Monday, January 6 Commences with a calm, one ship in sight..."

After a blank page, page 174 begins with a new header: "Remarks of A Whaling Voyage on Board Brig E. H. Adams T. E. Fordham, Master." Captain Fordham's first log entry is brief and direct: "Thursday, Feb 20 arrived on board about noon and find all hands dissatisfied with everything brig leaking bad and provisions bad and long lays. So ends this day." There is no indication of what happened to Martin from January 6 to February 20, when he left the ship, or under what conditions. Typically, when masters were replaced it was due to illness, but this time there is no indication of the circumstances that led Thomas E. Fordham to replace Martin.

More mysteriously still, first mate Arthur O. Gibbons left the ship. Fordham's log entry states: "Remarks on board Friday 21<sup>st</sup>. This day the mate took what belong to him an went ashore without 'saing' one word to me. I told him he had better see Mr. Billingshams [?] but he did not ..." Here, again, the reasons behind the departure remain a mystery. Perhaps Gibbons had been loyal to Capt. Martin and was less enamored with Captain Fordham or simply offended by the decision to bring him aboard at all. In any event, according to the log (page 182) Fordham returned the ship to New Bedford on Monday, March 9, 1890.<sup>22</sup>

### **"So Ends"**

The *Eunice H. Adams* began its final whaling voyage in August 1893, three years after Captain Fordham returned it. The voyage lasted thirteen

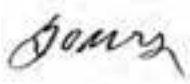
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<sup>22</sup> The AOWV Database, for unknown reasons, lists the return date as September 1890.

months, ending in September 1894, under the command of Capt. Clarence J. Silvia and his replacement, Capt. John T. Gonsalves—another whaling captain of color who was also master of the *Charles W. Morgan* on one of her last voyages. Two years later, the *Eunice H. Adams* met the fate that eventually befell every American whaleship except the *Morgan*. Over fifty years old, worn beyond repair and part of a slowly declining and increasingly unprofitable industry, it was “broken up” (scrapped) at New Bedford 1896.

William Martin returned to Edgartown and his wife Sarah G. (Brown) Martin, a woman of African American and Wampanoag descent who he had married in 1857. No record exists of his life after the voyage of the *Eunice H. Adams*, but a *Vineyard Gazette* article from 1907, celebrating his fifty-year marriage to Sarah, recorded that he had been “a paralytic for the past seven years, and is now practically helpless.” The *Gazette* profile, which also mentioned his service aboard the *Eunice H. Adams*, closed on a note of warmth and understanding: “To those who remember Captain Martin as he appeared some twenty-five years ago, and recall his quick, alert movements and crisp, decisive speech, qualities which went far to make him a successful whaleman, it is difficult to realize his utter helplessness at the present time, and he has the deep sympathy of all in the community.”<sup>23</sup>

Captain William A. Martin died on September 5, 1907, two months after his fiftieth wedding anniversary. He and Sarah (who died on April 25, 1911) are buried together at North Neck Cemetery on Chappaquidick, not far from the modest house to which he returned after his final, troubled voyage.



Sarah G. Martin

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23 “Passed their Fiftieth Wedding Anniversary,” *Vineyard Gazette*, July 11, 1907, p. 2.



Gravestone of Capt. William A. Martin on Chappaquiddick. Edgartown Cemetery Commission Photo.

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# Silent Voices

## From the Past

by E. ST. JOHN VILLARD

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ONE CANNOT WANDER through a pre-1900 New England cemetery without noticing the remarkable iconography and art work. It is impossible to walk by the flying skulls, winged souls, sailing ships, anchors, and drawing compasses without stopping to admire or puzzle over them. Martha's Vineyard certainly has its share of these and many articles have been written about them.

What is written on the gravestones, however, can be even more fascinating as it opens a window into the past. Some can be enjoyed just as you stand there and read them. Others take more work and send you off to the internet and the library to search for more information. You find yourself googling bits of poetry to find a source or looking up families' histories in town vital records or in Charles Edward Banks' *History of Martha's Vineyard*.

The most compelling epitaphs are those which preserve the stories of people who do not appear in the Island's familiar mythology, and whose lives are almost unknown today. Yet many of them have remarkable or frightening stories that you can not forget once you have discovered them. You also discover that Islanders had a remarkable knowledge both of the Bible and of what is known as mourning poetry.

### Puritan Epitaphs

#### **Francis P. Goodridge, Jeffers Lane Cemetery, Chappaquiddick**

Puritan epitaphs get their impact from the way they reflect the belief that "Outward displays of grief were ... (to be) discouraged."<sup>1</sup> Their fierce attitude towards death is far more important than the identity of individual beneath the stone. They remind us that death waits impatiently for all

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1 David Hackett Fischer. *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America* (1989), p.115.

Liz Villard is, or has been, a professor of drama, theatrical director, lighting designer, playwright, walking and bus tour guide, Federated Church council member, Rotary Club board member, Edgartown Cemetery Commission member, and Chappy Ferry captain. This is her first contribution to the *Quarterly*.





Detail from the gravestone of Henry Cooke, showing the death's head. Unless otherwise noted, all photographs are by the author.

of us. The epitaphs are often paired with fierce and frightening winged skulls, but the words are startling enough by themselves.

*Francis P. Goodridge  
Died April, 16. 1862  
aged 58 yrs  
Passing by a casting eye  
As you are now so was I  
As I am now, you must be  
Then prepare to follow me*

This version appears on the grave of Francis Goodridge (Goodrich). As is typical, the words tell us nothing about the man. You have to go to the Edgartown Vital Records and the 1860 census to discover he was a mariner whose wife Theodate was a member of the Chappaquiddick Wampanoag. The vital records describe him as colored and the 1860 census lists him as owning one swine and 20 acres in the Chappaquiddick Plantation. His life could not have been easy, so perhaps this rather out-of-date epitaph has a certain amount of gloating over the fact that even those who looked down on him will end up in the grave just like him.

The most famous variant of this epitaph appears on a gravestone from the 1880s in Nantucket. The Puritan-Congregational calm attitude to death is perhaps summed up by the fact that he could make a joke about it.

*Under the sod and under the trees,  
Lies the body of Jonathan Pease.  
He is not here, there's only the pod.  
Pease shelled out and went to God*

**Henry Cooke and Mary Anna Sylva,  
Old Westside Cemetery, Edgartown**

The emphasis on death as a destroying angel and the body lying in the grave is still there in Henry Cooke's 1789 stone, but there is a new emphasis on the possibility of the Resurrection.

Memento Mortis  
In Memory of Henry Cooke  
7<sup>th</sup> Son of Thomas Cooke Esq.  
and Mrs. Abigail his wife whose death  
was caused by bathing being taken  
in a fit immediately expired July  
21<sup>st</sup>, 1789  
15 years, 3 months and 11 days.  
*Just as this youth began to flower  
And tender branches spread  
Almighty God to show his power  
Did strike the prospect dead  
Sent forth his angel to destroy  
And in a moment sign'd  
Death did find this lovely boy  
In dust he lies confined  
Till Christ the son and lamb of God  
Shall call him forth from this abode<sup>2</sup>.*

The length of Henry Cooke's epitaph with its vivid flying soul above the words makes it clear that he was a much beloved teenager. His fit was probably a simple case of cramps brought on by swimming in cold Island waters or perhaps the onset of some more serious conditions. There is no way to know.

The nineteenth century saw the expansion of the Methodist, Baptist

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2 In the only book about Puritan gravestones that include ones in Island cemeteries, the authors seem to find both the idea of death by bathing and the poem which they misquote as being a fine entry for the "Unconscious Funerary Humor Sweepstakes." Diana Hume George and Malcom A. Nelson. *Epitaph and Icon* (1983), p.111.

and Catholic denominations on the Island. Their different approach to scripture results in many epitaphs that concentrate only on the hope of heaven rather than the reality of death.

Mary Anna Sylva  
Daughter of  
Manuel and Louise  
Sylva  
Died Feb 7, 1875  
Aged 16 years  
4 mos, 27 days  
*Yet again we hope to meet you  
When the day of life is fled  
Then in heaven with joy we greet thee  
Where no grief with tears is shed.*

Both of these elaborate gravestones contradict the often-repeated but inaccurate theory that so many children died young that their families barely mourned them, as they were hardened to loss. One only has to study the genealogical records in Banks, however, to realize almost all children on the Vineyard survived at least into young adulthood. The surprisingly low infant mortality rate is the result of a combination of isolation, cold that froze out most tropic diseases, and the absence of doctors who, failing to understand the dangers of infection, unwittingly transmitted it by failing to sterilize their hands or instruments between patients. Henry Cooke was only a seventh son, but his parents marked his loss with a long epitaph and a carving. Mary Anna Sylva has the largest and most ornate marker in her family lot.

**Capt. Ephraim Harding,  
Tisbury Village Cemetery, Vineyard Haven**

By the nineteenth century, the strict Puritan faith had shifted into a firm stoicism, perhaps a necessary attitude when dealing with the realities of the maritime industries. The role of Holmes Hole (now Vineyard Haven) as both a coastal harbor of refuge and a whaling port is reflected in the many stones that record deaths from tropical diseases. It also has more than its share of those that are memorials to those who were lost at sea.

On a stone obelisk in the Vineyard Haven Village Cemetery, for example, there is a carved sailing ship and this impassive epitaph:

Capt. Ephraim Harding  
Born Oct. 24, 1814  
Died Feb. 20, 1858  
Wrecked in ship John Milton, his son and all aboard  
*Man proposes and God disposes.*



Above: Obelisk marking the grave of Capt. Ephraim Harding, Tisbury Village Cemetery. Top right: Gothic-arched gravestone of twins Ephraim and Eliza Harding, Tisbury Village Cemetery. At right: Gravestone of Rodolphus Harding, who died with his father in the wreck of the *John Milton*. His body was never recovered. Photographs by A. Bowdoin Van Riper.

Around the base of the obelisk are small stones for each family member. His first wife, Deborah R. Harding is there. She was only 27 when she died of typhoid fever on Nov. 7, 1844. Eliza Harding, his second wife, is not so she may have outlived her husband. In 1858, she had to deal with not only the loss of her husband and stepson, but the death of her twins, Ephraim and Eliza. They were born and died the same year as their father's ship was lost.<sup>3</sup> Their graves are marked by two small gothic arched stones which are linked together. She also must have loved her stepson as she marked the back of his small formal stone marker with the words "Dear Dolphy."

<sup>3</sup> Editor's Note: A cargo vessel bound from Norfolk, VA to New York, the *John Milton* went ashore in a gale at Montauk, Long Island. The frozen bodies of her crew were brought ashore by residents of Montauk and East Hampton—many of them mariners themselves—who erected a marble monument in their memory. The story is recounted in Henry Osmer, *They Were All Strangers: The Wreck of the John Milton at Montauk, New York* (2010).

## Biblical, Religious, and Poetic Epitaphs

During the nineteenth century, the Puritan winged skulls and flying souls were replaced by a wide variety of Greek urns, weeping willows, masonic compasses, sailing ships, and, for lost children, broken roses. As Henry and Mary Anna's epitaphs reflect, they also reveal an impressive knowledge of both the Bible and "mourning poetry."

The Biblical passages go well beyond the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm. John Cooke, for example, who died on October 23, 1817 has a passage from Malachi 2:6. "The law of truth was in his mouth and iniquity was not found in his lips. He walked with God in peace and equity and did turn many away from iniquity." Three years later, Capt. Jason Luce has an epitaph from Job 9:12. "Behold, he taketh away, who can hinder him?" The gravestones of Daniel Fellows, who died in 1832, and Mrs. Anna Pratt, who died 5 years later, both use a passage from Revelations 14:13. "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them."

While it is not a biblical reference, Miss Jane Cooke's epitaph is a quotation from a poem by Isaac Watts, one of the founders of Methodism.

*She was born from heaven  
Fulfilled her visit and returned on high*<sup>4</sup>

This gentler approach to death is echoed on gravestones all over the Island and reflects the arrival of both Baptists and Methodists. Jonathan Fisher, who died in 1837, and Hepzibah Holley, who died in 1842, use one that emphasizes that Christ will be there to call them from the grave.

*Friends and Physicians could not save  
My mortal body from the grave  
Nor could the grave confine me here  
When Christ shall call me to appear.*

This epitaph appears all New England, and was even used on the grave of Elizabeth Paul who died in childbirth while passing through Wyoming in a wagon train in 1862.<sup>5</sup>

### **The Joseph Dunhams, Old Westside Cemetery, Edgartown**

This comforting style turns up even on monuments which are focused on human accomplishments. Sometimes the stories on a gravestone or group of gravestones bring to life people about whom nothing is known, but a few dry references in the Vital Records or Banks. There is nothing in those dry records that suggest that the older Joseph Dunham was a hero

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4 Isaac Watts. *Horae Lyricae* (1705).

5 Randy Brown, "The Grave of Elizabeth Paul," *WyoHistory.org*, April 29, 2017. <https://www.wyohistory.org/encyclopedia/grave-elizabeth-paul>

during the Revolutionary War. Banks does even not list him as a mariner, but as an island shipwright. Yet his gravestone reveals another story.

Mr. Joseph Dunham

died March 11, 1796

During the seven year of the  
revolutionary war with our  
mother country, he was employed  
in conveying corn from the  
west to feed the starving people  
of this place and our sister island  
and was fortunate as to escape  
the enemy unmolested.

Aged 55 years.

He could not have escaped the ships in the British blockade if he had tried to make that run in daylight. The odds therefore are that he made his way up Buzzards Bay and though either Quicks Hole or Woods Hole into Vineyard Sound at night. It is easy to say that his knowledge of the local tides, sandbars, and other hazards made it possible for him to make this trip, but anyone who has sailed these waters with modern navigational aids can only stand in awe that he pulled this off in the dark for seven years.

Patience Hathaway, his wife, seems to have been a remarkable woman although in a less dramatic way. She raised and saw all of her nine children married, including one born after her husband died. She managed this feat despite being left a widow when most of them were young. She sent her only son, also named Joseph Dunham, off to Nantucket to learn ship building from a master. It was the first step in his successful career in the whaling industry.

Joseph Dunham

He was left Fatherless at the age of  
16 years: served his time at  
boat building with Isaac Folger of Nantucket;  
was one of three that brought  
the first ships at Edgartown and  
built whaling boats for 49 years  
for the ships of this port: also planted  
and sowed and tilled and reaped his  
lands for 50 years. He was honest in all his dealings.

*Yes! he has gone and left us:  
But why should we mourn and weep  
In the arms of his Jesus he fell asleep  
He is blessed, has died in the Lord  
And gone home to glory to reap his reward.*

The emphasis on this monument is the younger Dunham's earthly achievements, but in the last five lines his family turns to the comfort of a merciful God.

The remarkable thing about both men is how little is known about them. The only other useful source beyond their epitaphs is the odd facts that turn up in the Edgartown Vital Records, which really tell us nothing about either man. How do you measure a man's accomplishments by discovering that the older man died of gout in the stomach and the younger one of consumption. The records do suggest, however, that the younger man had an abiding love for his wife Sukey (Susanna) who died of consumption when she was only 35 and left four young children to be cared for. (Daniel, her fifth, had been born and died the summer before her death). In this situation, most men married again almost immediately, often to the women who had been taking care of the children during their mother's illness. The younger Joseph, however, remained true to his Sukey, possibly because his formidable mother was the one taking care of his children.

## Memorial Stones

### Village Cemetery (Deadman's Corner), West Tisbury

There are three memorial stones in in this God's acre<sup>6</sup> whose epitaphs are powerful enough by themselves, but even more so when you read them on the same visit. They reflect how far Island men travel away from the Vineyard.

Freeman Hancock was 19 in 1794, when he died in Martinico (Martinique.) He was a cousin of John Hancock who signed the Declaration of Independence, part of a distinguished New England family.

*Stop my friends and drop your tears  
My dust lies slumbring in saint pears  
At Martinico intombed I lie,  
Weep for your selves all are to die  
Here I must lie, till Christ appears  
Depart my friends and dry your tears*

His death in the Caribbean reminds one of a part of New England maritime history which most Vineyarders prefer to ignore. The ships and sailors of this area were active participants in the Triangle Trade, carrying goods from the US and Britain to buy slaves in Africa, carrying the slaves to the West Indies to sell for molasses and rum, and then returning to their original ports to sell these articles and start the process over again. In fact, a third of Island men who died at sea

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<sup>6</sup> **Editor's Note:** "God's Acre" is the traditional term for a churchyard, and specifically its burial ground. The Congregational meetinghouse in West Tisbury was located here from 1701 until 1866.

lost their lives somewhere in the Gulf of Mexico or the Caribbean Sea. Most of the others died in the whaling industry and fishing in local, but often dangerous waters.<sup>7</sup>

Caleb Rotch was a fifth-generation Islander. William Rotch, his grandfather, was a soldier and shipwright and John David Rotch, his father, was a mariner. He was youngest of six children and Francis O. Rotch, his closest brother, was a master mariner (captain). With all that heritage weighing down on him, it must have seemed like a great adventure to do something different from his family. On Oct. 15, 1949, he joined a group of Islanders who were setting out for California to seek their fortunes in the Gold Rush. He was dead within 9 months.

Caleb L. Rotch  
Died in California  
June 24, 1850

AE 22 years

*No mother soothed his dying hour  
No father watched with anxious care  
No brother took the farewell hand  
No loving sister knelt in prayer  
But in a distant stranger land  
He yielded up his feeble breath  
And there within a lonely grave  
He sleepth in the arms of death  
But as the tears do freely flow  
While stricken 'neath the chastening rod  
Oh, may we in submission bow  
And grow the closer to our God.*

While his epitaph is a classic example of Victorian sentimentality, it is also a passionately felt expression of grief. He was not alone in dying in California. Many of the islanders who set off to win their fortunes in the gold rush lost their lives. None struck it rich.<sup>8</sup>

All over the island, there are memorial gravestones for those who fought and died in the Civil War. Even in this quiet corner at the center of the Vineyard, one still finds them.

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7 The one-third figure is based on counting where sailors died in the Edgartown Vital Records.

8 Editor's Note: The story of Forty-Niners from the Island is documented in Record Unit 239 (Gold Rush and Martha's Vineyard Collection) of the Museum archives, and chronicled in the August 1989 and February 2007 issues of the *Dukes County Intelligencer*, available on the Museum website.



Lewis C. Luce  
Died at Baton Rouge  
Son of Capt. Aaron  
and Harriet N. Luce  
a member of company C. 41 S.  
Regiment Mass Volunteers  
General Banks Expedition  
Died at Baton Rouge  
August 20, 1863  
Age 22 yrs, 8 mns, 2 dys  
*He died for his country*

Lewis belonged to a family that settled on the Island in the seventeenth century. When the call to defend the Union came, however, he joined the Massachusetts forces assigned to support Grant's drive down the Mississippi. His life ended in Baton Rouge, a city near New Orleans. The stark power of Lewis's simple *He died for his country* is strangely more powerful than the much longer epitaphs on Rotch and Hancock's graves.

**Rev. Samuel Kingsbury,  
Tower Hill and Old Westside Cemeteries, Edgartown**

If you read either of Rev. Samuel Kingsbury's grave, possibly memorial stones, he seems like a nice, but not particularly remarkable person who sadly died of smallpox. This is the one from Edgartown's Tower Hill cemetery.

Rev. Samuel Kingsbury  
who died of the small pox  
Dec. 30, 1778  
ae 42 years, 2 days  
He died in virtue and in meakness shine  
A learned scholar and a good Divine.

Although longer with a few more details, his stone in Edgartown's Old Westside Cemetery evokes a similar response.

Sacred  
to the memory of  
Rev. Samuel  
Kingsbury  
He was born in Dedham  
December 28<sup>th</sup>, 1736  
Was ordained Pastor of the  
Church at Edgartown  
July 1761 and died of the  
Small Pox Dec. 30<sup>th</sup>, 1778

aged 42 years and 2 days  
*He did in virtue and meekness shine;  
A trained scholar and a good Divine.  
Erected by Private friends  
1828*

It is only a rare person who visits both graveyards that realize that Kingsbury has a stone in both cemeteries. It suggests he must have been a rather special person, particularly since the Old Westside stone was erected 50 years after his death.

The fall of 1778 was a grim period on the island. On September 10th, Major General Charles Grey brought his fleet of 82 vessels into Holmes Hole and demanded the Vineyard provide the British forces with 300 oxen and 10,000 sheep. By the time he left on the 15th, he had not only forced the reluctant Islanders to give up the animals, but had taken their guns, burned their boats and appropriated £905 in tax money that had been collected by town officials.

If that was not trouble enough, Edgartown Town Records show that at the same time, a smallpox epidemic was raging out of control. In desperation, Edgartown appointed Thomas Cooke, William Jernegan, and John Pease, Jr to build a temporary shelter or pest house on Cape Pogue. The ill were transported there, probably to die. It was an approach which may seem cruel today, but did protect the rest of the town from contagion.<sup>9</sup>

Probably both of Rev. Kingsbury's stones, particularly the one in Old Westside, are in fact memorial stones since he may well have been buried near where he died. Surely, he must have been a most beloved pastor to achieve such recognition, one with the courage to serve his congregation even to the point at which he fell ill himself.

### **Capt. Archibald Mellen, Old Westside Cemetery, Edgartown**

Sometimes, an epitaph seems almost an attempt to be sure that the version a father or other near relative finds acceptable is the one remembered by history. When you read the gruesome story of Capt. Archibald Mellen's death, it seems to reflect how dangerous the whaling industry was and how a good a man the young captain was.

Captain Archibald Mellen Junior  
born  
at Tisbury, June 5, 1830  
and was murdered  
on board the ship Junior of New Bedford  
off the coast of New Zealand  
Dec. 25, 1857 by Cyrus W. Plummer

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<sup>9</sup> Edgartown Records for 1878

who with others of his crew had entered into a conspiracy to seize the Ship and proceed to the gold digging of Australia.

*Thus at an early age, at the flood tide of successful manhood an intelligent, honest and worthy man became the innocent victim of the insatiable ambition of these conspirators.*

His cenotaph seems to offer a clear record of the events, but at the trial of the mutineers a different side to the story emerges. It is, in fact, a tale that can be told two ways. The “vicious” crew attacked the captain and the third mate and threw their wounded bodies into the ocean. The “desperate” crew attacked Mellen because they were terrified of his brutal treatment. The “vicious” crew wounded the first and second mates who hid in desperation. The “desperate” crew let them get away because they were not angry with them. Plummer and the “vicious crew” planned a mutiny. They were an unruly mob, drunk on the grog—a mixture of rum and water—that the captain had given them to celebrate Christmas Day.

The crew members were certainly not very intelligent in their plotting as none of them knew how to navigate. At some point, the first mate, “in desperate need of food and water” or perhaps just curious as to what was going on, emerged from below, and made a devious bargain with Cyrus Plummer. He promised he would take them to a nearby Australian port and would tell no one what they had done. He promptly sailed them to a different port where he turned them in to the authorities.

At their trial, four of the eight mutineers were found innocent, three



Gravestone of Captain Archibald Mellen, Old West-side Cemetery, Edgartown.

convicted of manslaughter and only one, Plummer, condemned to death. These are rather lenient sentences for mutiny, which suggest that the court saw some merit in their defenses. It is however his father's version of the story that is carved in stone for all time, long after the crew's version has been forgotten.<sup>10</sup>

### Wilmot Luce, New Bedford

If Mellen's cenotaph presents his death in the most positive light, there are others that take a dim if humorous view of a deceased's activities. Although Wilmot Luce's father, Barzillai Luce, had fought in the Revolution, his son legally changed his name to DeLuce when he moved to New Bedford. His family, master mariners all, were not impressed and put this epitaph on his gravestone.

*His parent said Wilmot Luce should be his name  
Since then his petition did improve the same  
And after his name was Wilmot D'Luce  
Old acquaintance, judge ye  
Was he wise or  
Foolish as a goose.<sup>11</sup>*

### Women's Gravestones

Many times, women's epitaphs do not seem to be speaking of a real person, but merely offering a standardized description of a "good" wife. One certainly has that sense when one reads the words this poem about Mellen's mother. It is located to the left of his own gravestone, between his and his father's.

*An affectionate and dutiful wife  
A kind and indulgent Mother  
A dutiful and tender daughter  
A firm and obliging friend  
His wife  
Sarah  
1801-1852*

Since it is located to the right of her husband's, the carver felt no need to give her full name and reduced her identity to "his wife." These words reflect neither her courage in marrying a total newcomer to the island—a man who had been born in Newbury, VT—or her own position as a member of one of the Island's founding families. She was born in the

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10 "The Mutiny and Murder On Board the American Whaleship Junior," *Colonist*, March 9, 1858, p. 4. <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/TC18580309.2.19>

11 Banks, *History of Martha's Vineyard*, vol III, p. 272.

Vincent House, now a museum on the Vineyard Trust campus in Edgartown.

The Puritan attitude to marriage was based on Jesus' statement: "For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife; And they twain shall be one flesh: so then they are no more twain, but one flesh."<sup>12</sup> The one was, of course, the man so a woman's identity became merely an extension of her husband's. This approach leads to a verbal challenge. What do you call what is left when the man dies? Today, a woman who outlives her husband is referred to as a widow, but an earlier usage can be seen all over the Island, including this stone from the West Tisbury Village Cemetery.



Gravestone of Sarah Torrey, West Tisbury Village Cemetery.

Here Lyes Interr'd the body  
of Mrs: SARAH TORREY  
the Relict of the Revd:  
Mr JOSIAH TORREY who  
departed this Life March  
the first 1745  
Aged 68 years 2 Months.

Sarah may have been an Athearn, the leading family in New Town (as the present-day village of West Tisbury was originally known) and outlived her husband by more than 20 years, but on her gravestone in the West Tisbury Village Cemetery she is merely a relict. The term lasts into the 19th century.

Mary Daggett  
Relict of Wm Daggett  
Died October 14, 1835  
Aged 87 years and 6 months

In the 19th century, maiden names finally begin to appear on grave-

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12 Mark 10:7-8 (King James Version)

stones. This usage seems to have occurred most often when the husband was a captain and so away at sea most of the time, particularly when he came from off-Island. Perhaps, at some point Georgian, who outlived her Harwich-born husband by over 60 years, just went back to her familiar island name of Daggett, as her stone in the Vineyard Haven Village Cemetery seems to suggest.

Georgian Daggett  
Wife of Capt. Asa H. Calhoun  
Dec, 7, 1827  
Oct. 12, 1919

Capt. Asa H. Calhoun  
Born in Harwich, MA  
Died in New Orleans, LA  
July 13<sup>th</sup> 1858

The majority of the women's gravestones on the Island seem to contradict the general assumption that a majority of women and children died young. Indeed, the very poignancy of the few that honor a young woman's death suggest that this was not a normal event. Jonathan Worth would remarry barely a year after his wife died of consumptions leaving him with four children, all under the age of 12.<sup>13</sup> The need for a wife to care for his children probably made a rapid remarriage a necessity, but the long epitaph on her stone in Edgartown's Old Westside Cemetery, an expensive investment, does suggest that someone, possibly her parents, deeply mourned her untimely death.

In  
memory of  
Sarah wife of  
Jonathan Worth who  
Departed this life Sept. 1,  
1797 in the 39<sup>th</sup> year of her  
Age  
*Alas she's gone out down at noon  
By God most just but why so soon  
Thus to remove tis natures Lot  
Yet nevertheless she's not forgot  
But left behind to latest days  
A monument of virtue praise.*

An even clearer record of a husband's grief is found in the extended history and poem put up for Zerviah Butler by her husband. Although Samuel Butler's immediate relatives had moved to Providence, RI, they were part of the large Vineyard Butler family, which may explain why he chose to put her elaborate stone here—in the West Tisbury Village Cemetery—rather than elsewhere.

13 Banks, *History of Martha's Vineyard*, vol. III, p. 517.

Sacred to the Memory of  
Mrs. ZERVIAH BUTLER  
Wife of  
Mr. Samuel Butler Junr.  
of Providence Rhode Island;  
and Daughter of Capt. Benjamin and  
Mrs. Eleanor Allen.  
She died at Tisbury when on a visit  
to her Parents the 8th of Sept. 1791  
aged 26 years & 4 days.  
Whose Remains lie here entombed.  
This Stone  
an unavailing tribute of affection, is  
by her Husband erected & inscribed.

*To name her virtues ill befits my Grief  
What was my Bliss can now give no relief;  
A Husband mourns the rest let friendship tell  
Fame spread her worth a Husband knew it well.*



Brown family gravestone group, Tisbury Village Cemetery.

### **The Brown Family, Village Cemetery, West Tisbury**

Perhaps, the most terrifying group of gravestones on the Island belong to the obscure Benjamin Brown Family, whose members are buried in the West Tisbury Village Cemetery. Individually, they are merely sentimental. But their cumulative impact is pure horror.

Susan Ellen was the third daughter of Benjamin and Susan Brown, but in 1854 she was the first to die. She was 7 years and 10 months old when she died of "Lung Fever."

*Weep not morn not, over the dead  
For in the spirit realms above  
Thy little loved one ever lives  
Rejoicing in a savior's love.*

In 1858, her younger sister Amanda was the second child to die. She was 10 years and 3 months old when she too sickened with “Lung Fever,” Her epitaph is from the New Testament:

*But words of Jesus comfort  
our hearts ‘who said suffer little  
children to come unto me, for of  
such is the kingdom of heaven.’<sup>14</sup>*



From left: gravestones of Amanda Brown and Susan Ellen Brown, Tisbury Village Cemetery.

After another four-year gap, in 1861, Sophronia, the oldest sister passed away of consumption when she was 23 years and 5 months. Her epitaph is the first verse of a hymn.

*Calm on the bosom of thy God  
Fair spirit, rest the now!  
E'en while with us, thy footstep trod  
His seal was on thy brow.<sup>15</sup>*

<sup>14</sup> Matthew 19:14 (King James Version)

<sup>15</sup> Felicia Dorothea Hemans, *A Book of Hymns for Public and Private Devotion*, 15th ed., #410. Hymnary.org



In 1866, Lucretia, the second daughter, was the last to die. She passed away when she was 23 years and 3 months, almost the same age as her older sister had been when she died. She died of Phthisis which sounds very medical and impressive until you realize that it merely the Greek word for consumption (despite restoration work, her epitaph is still unreadable).

In 1868, Susan Norton Brown, their mother, died on the same day February day as Sophronia had died two years earlier. She was only 47 years, 2 months and 12 days old, but in addition to having Phthisis pulmonalis she had given birth to six children. Her epitaph is breathtaking given what she had been through.

*She died as a true Christian  
relying on the hope which has  
supported through her life.*

The various names given to the cause of these five deaths are all nineteenth-century terms for the same wasting disease: tuberculosis. It is a highly infection disease which until 1949 was incurable. As the mother and her daughters slept together for warmth and comfort, they were passing on their infection. What must have made the situation even more horrible was that in the nineteenth century tuberculosis was sometime regarded as a form of vampirism. As one member of a family died from it, other members would lose their health slowly as if the original victim was draining the life from them.<sup>16</sup> The repeated deaths may also have been regarded as God's punishment for some sin the family had committed.

Benjamin Brown, their father, worked in the whaling industry, but as his family sickened he stayed home to work as a carpenter. The gravestones do not reveal what happen to him and the other two children. The 1870 census reveals that he and two younger children were still on the island that year, but there is no later mention of them. Perhaps, all three of them escaped by going to Little Compton, RI where Benjamin was born.<sup>17</sup>

**Joseph Huxford and Alice B. Merry,  
Old Westside Cemetery, Edgartown**

On a lighter note, if the Browns are the most frightening story found on island gravestones, there are also a number that suggest the phrase "measure twice, cut once" applies to stone carving as well as woodworking.

Joseph Huxford  
died  
April 8, 1843  
AE 94

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16 Abigail Tucker, "The Great New England Vampire Panic," *Smithsonian*, October 2012.

17 US Censuses for 1850, 1860, and 1870.

He was a soldier of the  
revolution  
He was in the battle on  
Bunker hill  
June 17, 1776

Huxford was an islander, but served as a private in a unit raised in Conroy, MA. After his war service, he returned to Edgartown, married Mary Arey, and lived on Chappaquiddick until his death in 1840. Nonetheless, he would still have had trouble fighting at Bunker Hill on June 17, 1776 as the battle happened a year before on that date, in 1775.<sup>18</sup>

And then there is Alice B. Merry. The words of a classical Easter hymn would seem an effective choice for an epitaph

*The strife is o'er, the battle done  
The victory of life is won.*

Unfortunately, the carver had to insert the word “done” above the line as he had not left enough room to fit it in. This mistake draws your attention to the name etched on the stone. Merry is a historic name on the island with roots that go back to the seventeenth century. It is only when you combine it with a middle initial “B” that you get a rather cheerful thought for a graveyard: Alice, be merry.

These are only a few of the hundreds of stories carved on Vineyard gravestones. The rest are waiting for you to find and explore them.



Gravestone of Alice B. Merry, Old Westside Cemetery, Edgartown.

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18 Banks, *History of Martha's Vineyard*, vol. III, pp. 215-216.

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## From the Archives:

# Things to Write Home About: Letters from the Summer Institute (1883)

by A. BOWDOIN VAN RIPER

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*A summer school for teachers, principals, and other professional educators, the Martha's Vineyard Summer Institute held classes in Cottage City for thirty years, from 1878-1907. What follows is a glimpse into the life lived by those who attended it, drawn from three letters written in late July and early August of 1883. We have read, countless times, about Nantucket Sound alive with sails, Vineyard Haven filled with vessels waiting for a fair wind and tide, and Cottage City thronged with middle-class residents of Boston, Providence, and greater New York seeking cool breezes, spiritual renewal, and a sense of peace that the sweltering, bustling cities could not provide. These letters show us those familiar—even overfamiliar—pieces of the Vineyard story through the eyes of an observer to whom they were fresh and new.<sup>1</sup>*

CLARENCE EDMUND MELENEY was twenty-nine in the summer of 1883, and already an accomplished man.<sup>2</sup> Born in Salem, MA and educated there and in Sydney, Nova Scotia, he went on to a preparatory academy in Waterville, ME and then to Colby College, where he earned his BA in 1876 and his MA in 1879. Graduate degree in hand, he went on to posts as a teacher or principal Warren, ME; Quincy and Marlboro, MA; Yonkers, NY; and Newark, NJ. A new position—superintendent of schools in Patterson, NJ—awaited him in the fall. A protégé of progressive educator Col. Francis W. Parker, he was a rising star in northeastern educational circles: energetic, innovative, and dedicated to self-improve-

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1 Transcripts of all three letters, found during reprocessing of the MVM library's genealogy files in December 2020, are now in the Vertical Files Collection, VREF 0716.001.

2 Details of Clarence E. Meleney's life are taken from his entry in the *National Cyclopedia of American Biography*, a copy of which is in VREF 0716.001



Agassiz Hall, named after Harvard ichthyologist Louis Agassiz, was the centerpiece of the Summer Institute Campus. Photo by Sidney Hicks, 1903. MV Museum Photo Collection (2017.050.022)

ment. He was, in short, precisely the kind of student for which the Martha's Vineyard Summer Institute had been created.<sup>3</sup>

The Institute had been founded five summers before, in 1878, by Col. Homer B. Sprague, principal of Girls' High School in Boston. Inspired by the Anderson School of Natural History, established by Harvard zoology professor Louis Agassiz on Penikese Island, the Institute was a summer school for men and women actively working in education: a venue for self-improvement where they could take substantive courses in the arts, sciences, and humanities, as well as elocution and teaching methods, taught by experts in the field. The first summer school for teachers in the country, it provided a model for similar ones run by colleges and universities: competitors that, before the twentieth century was a decade old, had eclipsed it and led to its closure.<sup>4</sup>

In 1883, however, the Summer Institute was fast-rising star in the educational world. It had incorporated in 1881, and—after four summers of meeting in rented cottages and holding lectures in Union Chapel—dedicated its permanent home in the Highlands neighborhood of Cottage City in July 1882. Built on the sloping land behind the Highland House hotel, Agassiz Hall was four stories high in the front and three high in the rear. Inside were sixteen classrooms, an assembly hall, along with other spaces. The land

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3 For more on the history of the Summer Institute, see RU 535 (Martha's Vineyard Summer Institute Collection), VREF 0233.001.

4 Henry Beetle Hough, *Martha's Vineyard: Summer Resort* (Rutland, VT: Tuttle Publishing Company, 1936), 150-151.

on which it stood (six lots in all) had been donated in 1880 by the Vineyard Grove Company, developers of the Highlands; the cost of the building itself—all \$6,000 of it—had been raised by private donations, many of which came from the students and faculty. Members of both groups (as the Vineyard Grove Company had doubtless counted on when they granted the land) rented, or bought, cottages in the Highlands in order to be close to the action. The Institute's term ran for five weeks in July and early August, and they came from across the country. Disembarking at the Highland Wharf, which thrust into Nantucket Sound at the foot of East Chop Drive, they were only a short walk from Agassiz Hall or the cottages beyond.<sup>5</sup> The attractions of Cottage City proper were a nickel horse-car ride away.



A horsecar line transported visitors from Highland Wharf to the Methodist Campground, and may have brought Clarence Meleney to his cottage. MV Museum Photo Collection (2005.060.006)

### **“My Dear Friend . . .”**

Meleney was joined, that summer, by his mother and sister, with whom he shared a rented cottage in the Highlands. His single reference to them is polite but perfunctory—a statement that they are “improving every opportunity”—but carries none of the affection evident in references to his visiting brother George or his friend and fellow attendee Mr. Day. The woman he clearly *wished* was in Cottage City to share the experience with him was, instead, hundreds of miles away in New Jersey, and it was to her that he wrote the letters.

<sup>5</sup> Another of the Vineyard Grove Company's projects, the Highland Wharf provided easy access to the Highlands themselves and enabled Methodist camp-meeting goers to reach the Campground without passing the secular temptations clustered around the Oak Bluffs wharf.

Carolyn Ella Coit was five years Edmund Meleney's junior. Born on August 12, 1858, in Everetts town, NJ, she would turn 25 a week after he wrote his third letter to her from the Summer Institute.<sup>6</sup> Her father, John Summerfield Coit, had been a New-Jersey-born builder turned Methodist minister, who moved his young family—his wife Ellen and six children, ranging from 13 to infancy—to Iowa after the Civil War. He spent two years as a circuit-riding preacher on the prairies surrounding the growing town of Montana (now Boone) in the central part of the state. Then, in late December 1867, typhoid fever struck the town and the family. Reverend Coit died on January 7, 1868, at the age of 39; Emma (7), Mary (5), and John, Jr. (no older than 3) quickly followed. Carolyn, then 12, was the youngest survivor. Ellen gathered what remained of her family and abandoned the prairie for New Jersey, where she (like John) had been born and raised.

Carolyn graduated from Newark High School and trained as a teacher at Newark Normal School, and—in a professional baptism-by-fire—spent two years as the sole teacher for eighty children housed at the Newark Orphans' Asylum. Moving to New York City she studied at Hunter College and then at the academy run by Maria Kraus-Boelte, the German educational reformer who played a leading role in bringing kindergarten to the United States. Coit completed Kraus-Boelte's two-year course—a year of classroom instruction, followed by a year of practice teaching at a model kindergarten on the grounds of the academy—in 1883. As Edmund Meleney wrote to her that summer from Cottage City, she too was preparing for a new stage in her professional life: directing private kindergartens in Newark, Mount Tabor, and neighboring northern New Jersey towns.

Edmund, who had likely met Carolyn when they were both teaching in in Newark, felt close enough to her in the summer of 1883 to use the familiar form of her given name: the envelopes are addressed to "Miss Carrie E. Coit." The letters themselves hover in an odd no-man's land between intimacy and formality. They uniformly begin with "my dear friend," but close with some variation on "I remain, very truly yours" and are signed "C. E. Meleney." The bodies of the letters are informative and newsy: much about what Meleney has been up to, and little about what he is feeling. Even there, he seems hesitant to reveal too much of himself. "I sent you a paper describing this section of the state," he wrote on July 27, "which, I thought, would interest you and give you a better idea of the Vineyard than I could." Stock phrases, inoffensive but bloodless, abound: "Hope that you are all well . . . remember me to your folks . . . hope to hear from you soon."

Even when viewed through this dense scrim of Victorian propriety, however, Clarence Meleney's feelings are clear. He comes across, in all

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6 Details of Carolyn Coit's life are taken from her entry in the *National Cyclopedia of American Biography*, a copy of which is in VREF 0716.001.

three letters, as deeply taken with this energetic, accomplished young woman who shares his passion for education. He pines: “I have been to the post office every day to find a letter from you,” he begins his own letter of July 27, “and each time have been disappointed.”<sup>7</sup> He frets: “I hope your work has not proved too much for you . . . I remember Madam Kraus said you should not do so much.”<sup>8</sup> Overjoyed at the arrival of her letter on the afternoon of July 28, he bumbles: “I pause for a little while to enjoy a little



A typical class at the Summer Institute. MV Museum Photo Collection.

chat with you, a one-sided chat you will say but the best I can do under the circumstances (the distance between us).” Then, the headlong tumble of words suddenly losing steam, he sighs: “I wish it were otherwise.”<sup>9</sup> He ends his letter of Sunday, August 5, by noting that she will be returning to Newark on the 9th, but that he will leave the Island on the 7th for two weeks in Melrose, MA. It sounds as if he wishes that, too, were otherwise.

### **“Enjoying Life to a High Degree”**

Meleney’s first letter to Coit paints an idyllic picture of life at the Institute: challenging but not all-consuming, and with plenty of time for relaxation. “You see where I am,” he wrote on July 27. “Mr. Day [a colleague from Newark] is with us and we are enjoying life to a high degree. We

7 Meleney to Coit, July 27, 1883.

8 Meleney to Coit, July 27, 1883.

9 Meleney to Coit, July 29, 1883.

spend the forenoon at the Institute, usually in Col. Parker's department. Then we take the afternoon for recreation and usually go to some lecture in the evening." He admits that he had "a good job of work to do this summer" but has touched none of it thus far "because of so many things that occupy my attention." The August 5 letter adds more details, which have the collective effect of placing more stress on his studies and less on recreation. "I am very busy every day with the Institute work, from 10 am to 1 pm with the class in Didactics, and lectures in the evening. I do not take any special course, but go to some classes almost every afternoon."

"Didactics" was the theory and practice of teaching—a course offered by Col. Francis W. Parker, who had been Superintendent of Schools in Quincy when Meleney had taught there—and it was one of the Institute's mainstay classes, and clearly the centerpiece of Meleney's schedule. Parker had been a mentor and inspiration to him, as Maria Kraus-Boelte had been to Carrie, and it may well have been Parker's presence (or even his direct invitation) that drew Meleney to the Institute.

The mixture of regular courses, special courses, and one-off lectures made it possible for attendees to tailor their experience, and the level of work involved, to suit their interests and energy level. In his August 5 letter, Meleney described his schedule for "one day last week," of which the first three were recurring classes and the latter three one-offs.

7:30	Geography Mr. Frye
9	Desaite method of pronunciation Mrs. Parker
10	Col. Parker lecture
11:30	Lecture on History – Warren
2:30	Clay Modelling – Coolidge
8 pm	Lecture A. D. Mayo

"Afternoons for recreation" on July 27 had, in the space of a week and two letters, become "classes almost every afternoon" on August 5.

The week just past, Meleney reported, "has been a lively one in the way of amusements for people who have had time to attend to it." He mentions the "Annual Tournament," with competitions in running, bicycling, lacrosse, baseball, and tennis, as well as fishing for bluefish, "which is the grandest sport there is."<sup>10</sup> There was also ample opportunity for socialization. "There are people here from all parts of the Union," he wrote on July 27. "Three principals from Newark and three or four lady teachers. I have made new acquaintances and renewed many old ones." George Meleney, who Clarence described to Carrie as "my only bro[ther]," arrived on July 28 (Saturday) having travelled from Boston through heavy thunderstorms and howling winds to spend Sunday with his mother and siblings in Cottage City. Clarence began his letter of July 29 lamenting the lost Saturday

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10 Meleney to Coit, August 5 & July 27, 1883





The Baptist Temple, erected in 1878 and demolished in the 1930s. MV Museum Photo Collection.

("cold, dark, stormy") and the "uncomfort of cottage life," which intensified as "dark night shut down upon us." Sunday dawned much the same, but the storms gave way to bright sunshine and when George agreed to extend his stay by a day, Clarence's mood lightened with them. Relishing the prospect that his beloved brother could now join him on a fishing expedition scheduled for early Monday morning, he concluded, with satisfaction: "I am glad we had the storm."<sup>11</sup>

A number of Meleney's new acquaintances were musical, and the discovery pleased him greatly. He wrote on July 29 that:

There is a whole neighborhood of good singers: Mr. Burr of Brown Univ. '84 the leader of their glee club. His father and sister from N. Y. both good singers. Mr. Ferris of N. Y. a sound Presbyterian. A Yale student who is the college organist and others. Several denominations uniting in songs of praise. I doubt if you could tell the differences that separate us.

His own musical talents were sufficient that he was asked to perform for local religious services. "I was," he confessed to Carrie, describing the still-stormy morning of the 29th, "the only one [of the family] who ventured out at church time, and only because I had promised to sing at the Temple."

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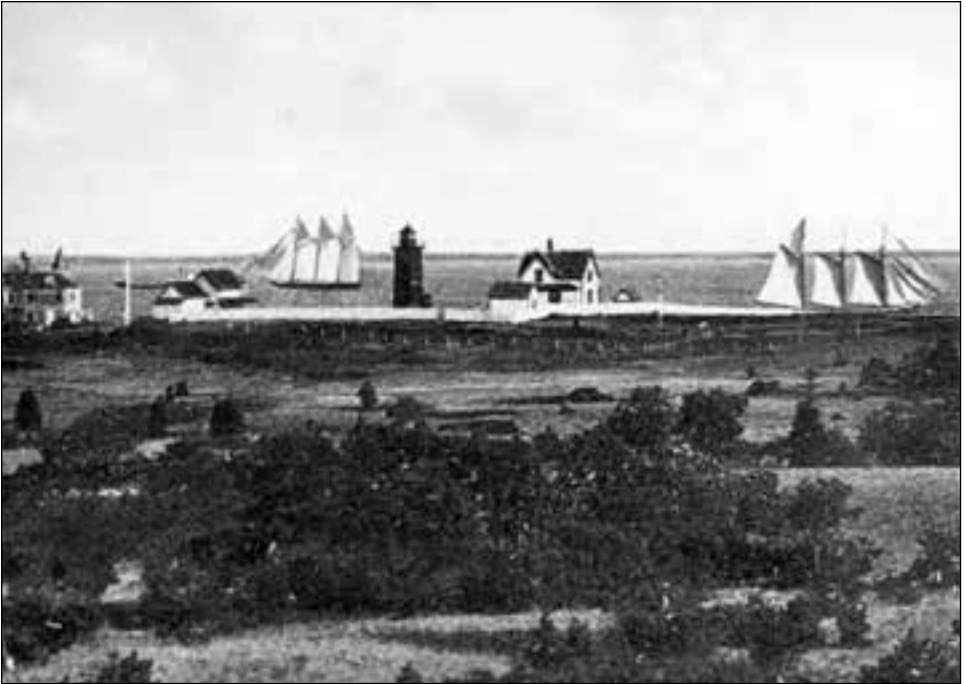
11 Meleney to Coit, July 29, 1883

### **“I Think This is a Glorious Place”**

The Temple at which Meleney was invited to sing had been built by the Baptists for summer worship five years previously, in 1878. A sprawling structure with an octagonal wooden roof and open sides, it was 120 feet across at its widest point and 60 feet tall at its highest. The circular clearing in which it stood, ringed by a circular road, had been a key feature in original plan of the Vineyard Highlands development—a bid to entice the Methodists away from Wesleyan Grove and the rapidly expanding resort of Oak Bluffs, with its noise and abundant secular distractions. The Methodists, however, had made their peace with their less-devout summer neighbors, and the circle in the Highlands had remained empty until 1875, leaders of Cottage City’s growing community decided to establish their own camp meeting. Officials of the Vineyard Grove Company, anticipating that camp meetings would bring visitors eager to rent cottages and purchase lots, offered the circle to the newly formed Baptist Vineyard Association at an attractive price. The wooden temple was an instant success, and so impressed the Methodists that they commissioned their own structure—similar in design, but larger, more elaborate, and made of iron—the following year.

Both denominations’ summer camp meetings were well established by the summer of 1883, the Baptists closing in on their first decade and the Methodists on a half-century. Held on consecutive weeks in mid-August, they brought a surge of visitors that—particularly for devout Christians like Clarence Meleney—marked the peak of the summer season in Cottage City. The pattern of summer visitors arriving before and staying after camp meeting week was, however, well established by 1883. What had begun in the 1830s as a short-lived community of transient pilgrims assembling under canvas had become a sprawling summer colony that lived and worshipped in permanent—albeit fanciful—wooden structures. In his July 27 letter he told Carrie that Cottage City was “a great center for Christian people, especially of the Methodist and Baptist denominations, and the people . . . are very pleasant and agreeable.” He attended informal “praise meetings” and hymn-sings in Highland cottages, and reported that Dr. Eddy of Brooklyn had preached “a sound gospel sermon” titled “Saved by the Lord” on the stormy morning of July 29. The Lord, Meleney seemed to suggest, also took a hand in the morning’s proceedings, and “as [Eddy] drew his picture of Salvation the clouds rolled away and the sun came out in its splendor, lighting up the grove of oaks which surrounds the Temple. How changed was everything around! And what a perfect day it is!

The transformation in the weather, and the beauty that it brought to the Island, transformed Meleney’s mood. Excitement surging through his voice and an unexpected vividness emerging in his words, he told Carrie:



Meleney's view of the ships in Vineyard Sound from the bluff at East Chop might have looked something like this photograph, taken roughly twenty years later. MV Museum Photo Collection.

I now look out upon Vineyard Haven, the greatest anchorage in the U. S., on the West and the broad ocean to the North and East. And this view of the ocean is what has electrified me this afternoon. When the west wind commenced to blow at noon the fleet in the Haven unfurled sail and put to sea. We sat on the "Bluffs" as they sailed away and watched them passing out of sight. I counted over ninety vessels large and small coming from one anchorage and I think it was one of the grandest sights I ever saw.

The letter continues in a similar vein, describing a school of bluefish driving smaller fish toward the shore and "jumping out of the water in their greed," while sea birds swooped in to plunder the baitfish they had concentrated. "Perhaps this is not the proper way to spend the Sabbath," he admits to her, "but I am thoroughly enjoying it."

A week later, in his letter of August 5, he again described the view from the Bluffs: Vineyard Haven Harbor full of ships riding at anchor. He fretted that "they are not there to keep the Sabbath day holy, but to wait for a fair wind or tide," and wondered "how many of the men will take advantages of the little Seamen's Chapel over there." The natural beauty of the Island had, for him, become inextricably linked with a sense of spiritual uplift, vanquishing his doubts about whether he was observing the Lord's day in a fashion of which the Lord would approve.

I have never felt the influence and sweetness of the Sabbath as I do here, where everything is quiet and entirely remote from the noise and bustle of the busy wicked world. I look out now upon the water and see the vessels sailing by with their white wings spread to the wind, but it does not seem like business or Sabbath breaking, they go so beautifully and so still."

Referring to the New Jersey town in which Carrie was relaxing before plunging into preparations for the fall term, Clarence declared: "I do not think I could make you believe that this place is better than Tabor for the enjoyment of Sabbath rest, and to be honest I suppose you have the advantage of me. But I think this is a glorious place."

### **After**

Clarence Meleney and Carrie Coit were married in Newark on May 20, 1885. Clarence had a long and distinguished career in the public-school systems of New York and New Jersey, and—among many other achievements—served as the first principal of the Horace Mann School in New York, and a professor of education at Columbia University. Carrie remained a tireless evangelist for the kindergarten movement, and raised money for hospitals, schools, and foreign missionary work. Clarence served as a director of the Summer Institute, and Carrie lectured there on early childhood education in the summer sessions of 1898-1900. The couple bought a summer home in Cottage City, returning year after year with their (eventually) six children; their descendants return still. Carrie, for fifteen summers, hosted a play group for neighborhood children there. She called it the Pleasant Sunday Afternoon Club . . . thinking, perhaps, of the letters that Clarence had written from the bluffs at Cottage City, back when they both were young.

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# Summering with the Blackwells: Meeting Ghosts in Research And Real Life

by JANICE P. NIMURA

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WHEN I WAS LITTLE, in the mid-1970s, the happiest place on earth was Tashmoo Farm, at the bottom of Lambert's Cove Road. I fell in love with horses there when I was three. I fell in love with Simone and Josepha DeSorcy, the young sisters who taught me to ride. I remember the ponies as if they were people: Cookie, with a backward question mark on her forehead; Robin, who had a nice canter and a nasty temper; Tii, who was ancient and utterly dependable. Thistle and Winkle, Puk and Dinari and Pixie and Wren. I remember the way their shoes scraped on the worn concrete barn ramp, the way the milkweed and goldenrod brushed their sides on the walk out to the lesson ring.

The farm was home to a pair of venerable ladies, Libby Belden and Elsie MacLachlan, one sturdy, with a strong jaw and close-cropped white hair, the other spindly, with high cheekbones and a bun. I remember sleeping over at their farmhouse on the nights before horse shows: a creaky house, full of old and well-used things.

I spent my first thirty summers in West Tisbury, and then the Island chapter of my life ended, though not my Island friendships. Fifteen years passed: I lived in Tokyo and then settled in New York, started a family, wrote articles and essays and a book about nineteenth-century Japan. For my second book, I decided to tell the story of Elizabeth and Emily Blackwell, pioneering women doctors. Elizabeth was the first woman in America to receive a medical degree, in 1849, and Emily had followed her, receiving her degree in 1854. At the beginning of my research in 2016, I sent a blast email to everyone I knew. "If you happen to have inside info

Janice Nimura is a freelance writer. This is her first contribution to the *Quarterly*.



Alice Stone Blackwell (second from left, holding hat) poses with family members and friends in front of the up-Island mail stage. MV Museum Photo Collection (2020.005.032)

on any of the extended Blackwell clan,” I wrote, mostly in jest, “please call me *right now*.”

Within days there was a message from Simone. Remember Libby at Tashmoo? she wrote. Her full name was Elizabeth Blackwell Belden. She was Elizabeth and Emily Blackwell’s great-niece, born in 1910, the year both of her medical great-aunts died.

And there she was, in the Blackwell Family Papers at Radcliffe’s Schlesinger Library. Folder 1006 held Libby’s childhood copybooks from the nineteen-teens, her penmanship practice, her earliest compositions. There was a notebook in which her grandmother, Emma Blackwell (the wife of Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell’s youngest brother, George), recorded a very young Libby’s transgressions: lying to her teacher, cursing at her grandmother, picking her mother’s daffodils and trying to sell them to the neighbors. And there was

a letter from an older Libby to her cousin-once-removed Alice Stone Blackwell, circa 1934, in which she expressed her thanks for an unusual birthday present. "I certainly appreciate being given Aunt Elizabeth's thimble. It is so nice to have it and know that it belonged to her and that she used it," Libby wrote. "I shall treasure it with great pride."<sup>1</sup>

Was that thimble somewhere in Libby's house when ten-year-old me slept over? It made me shiver to think about it.

I had known about the Blackwell-Vineyard connection from the archives. In July of 1866, Elizabeth and Emily Blackwell's brother Henry and his wife, the suffrage activist Lucy Stone, arrived in Chilmark. "Harry has extremely enjoyed his visit to the Vineyard," Emily reported to Elizabeth. "He & Lucy both represent the Island as very picturesque, rolling hills covered with short turf, sheep pastures, fine cliffs, a splendid beach & surf, and delightful temperature." The extended family was intrigued—nature lovers all, with memories of early childhood summers by the sea in their native England, they had been yearning for a place to escape to. "I like the prospect very much," Emily continued, "for the steady reports of Harry & Lucy make me think it must be altogether the finest seaside we have yet found; ground, houses &c are still fabulously cheap, no hotel on the Island; though in Nantucket they have put one up..."<sup>2</sup>

Within a month, more of the Blackwell clan had joined Henry and Lucy for a summer sojourn that extended into September. Chilmark summers became a Blackwell tradition, with Henry Blackwell's family on Quitsa Lane, and his younger brother George's on State Road, near Allen Farm. One of Elizabeth and Emily's nieces, Florence Blackwell, married E. Eliot Mayhew and settled permanently on the island. In 1882, Florence and her cousin Alice—Henry and Lucy's daughter—set up a shelf of thirty-three books as a lending library at the Mayhew Brothers' store; this collection was the beginning of the Chilmark Free Public Library.

Exactly a hundred years after Henry and Lucy's initial visit, my parents came to the island for the first time, and before long they too had built a summer home. I was tickled by this echo across time. In 2017, just as my research was getting underway, a Vineyard visit seemed called for. An old friend in Chilmark generously offered us a place to stay.

By the way, she added, did I know that her own parents had long ago bought their property from the Blackwell family?

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1 Elizabeth Blackwell Belden to Alice Stone Blackwell, circa 1934, Folder 1006, Collection MC411, Blackwell Family Papers, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University.

2 Emily Blackwell to Elizabeth Blackwell, July 21, 1866, Folder 163, Collection MC411, Blackwell Family Papers, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University.



Florence Brown (Blackwell) Mayhew poses with her husband, Chilmark general-store keeper E. Elliot Mayhew, and their son Walter Lloyd Mayhew in 1895. MV Museum Photo Collection (2018.001.124)

No, I did not know that.

“I have to think fate is on board with this Blackwell project,” I wrote in my journal that night. “I can do this. The ghosts are waiting.”

Meanwhile, I had made the acquaintance of Jane Carey Blackwell Bloomfield, a great-grandniece of Elizabeth and Emily’s who spent childhood summers on the Blackwell property. We met for brunch while I was doing research at Radcliffe, and she became an inspiration and an ally. She walked me through her family tree and described how her pioneering aunts had established responsibility, honesty, and courage as cardinal virtues handed from one generation to the next. She remembered each house on Quitsa Lane with vivid nostalgia.





Members of the Blackwell family pose outside their summer home at Quitsa. MV Museum, Gale Huntington Collection (RU 444)

In August my family arrived in Chilmark, and I discovered to my delight that our hostess had invited Carey Bloomfield to visit at the same time. We walked the property together, with Carey annotating the landscape: the clifftop house with blue shutters that they called “Seagull,” the stand of gnarled pine at the head of the beach stairs that provided welcome shade after a hot walk, the path to Quitsa Pond, where they learned to swim and sail, away from the surf. The tangled green scent of huckleberry, bay berry, beach rose, wild grape, and scrub oak was exactly as I remembered it from my own childhood rambling. An osprey circled overhead. In the Blackwells’ time, their own houses would have been the only ones in sight.

I sat in the sun and listened to the goldfinches and catbirds, squinting at the same blue horizon as the Blackwells had. At night, the cadence of the waves was the same sound that lulled them to sleep in the 1860s.

My teenaged son hoped that we would “find something” while we were there—a forgotten cache of letters, maybe, or an antique medicine bottle, at least—but for me the shape of bluff and shoreline and the tracings of fieldstone walls were enough. I was standing where the Blackwells stood, feeling what they would have felt on a breezy August afternoon, the temperature as delightful as Emily had hoped. The veil between past and present was gossamer thin.

My book, *The Doctors Blackwell*, is out in the world now, reintroducing Elizabeth and Emily and their family to the present. This past June I spent another gorgeous blue-and-green-and-gold weekend at Quitsa Lane, reveling not just in the double view of ocean and sound, but in the freedom to travel at all. I made a pilgrimage to Dr. Emily Blackwell’s grave, in Abel’s Hill cemetery: a granite block as stalwart and straightforward as she was, with the markers of the extended Belden family, including Libby’s, spreading before it.

It was Emily Blackwell’s grandson, Elon Gale Huntington—son of Emily’s adopted daughter, Anna (Nannie) Blackwell Huntington—who founded the *Dukes County Intelligencer*, which has evolved into the *MV Museum Quarterly*. Just another circle that connects the Blackwell clan, the island they loved, and another Vineyard sojourner and storyteller, more than a century later.



Emily Blackwell holding her adopted daughter Anna, who would become the wife of Dr. Elon O. Huntington and mother of E. Gale Huntington. MV Museum Photo Collection (1998.042.001)

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# The Federated Church Bell

by HERBERT R. WARD

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The bronze bell and its wooden headstock.  
*Photos in this article are from the author's collection.*

**I**N LATE 1828 and early 1829, the Edgartown Congregational Church did not have enough money to pay the minister, Reverend Martyn, nor had the sale of pews been financially successful. But “there was enough money to buy a bell, the Island’s first. On October 29, 1829, the bell in the [Congregational Church] steeple rang for the first time, according to Thomas Cooke’s diary.”<sup>1</sup> The bell has been ringing ever since, for one hundred and ninety-two years (as of 2021). Since October 1829, and on special occasions (such as the end of World War II, and as recently as January 2021, to honor those who had died from Covid-19, this bell has been heard throughout Edgartown.

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1 Arthur R. Railton, “The 1828 Meetinghouse: It Was Almost Turned Down,” *Dukes County Intelligencer*, May 1992, pp. 223-235, on p. 229.

Herb Ward is the Historian of the Federated Church in Edgartown. His article about the 1910 wreck of the *Mertie B. Crawley*, and the rescue of all aboard by Capt. Levi Jackson and the crew of the *Priscilla*, appeared in the Fall 2010 issue of this journal (then titled the *Dukes County Intelligencer*).



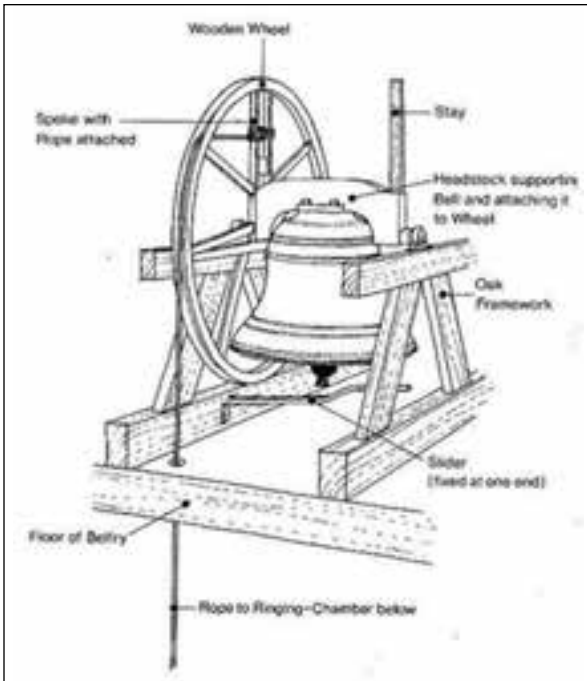
The mark of bellmaker G. H. Holbrook.

Bells. Unfortunately, our bell was not listed as being manufactured between 1828 and 1829. Many bells were not recorded.

George Handel Holbrook was born in 1798 in Brookfield, MA, and moved to East Medway in 1816, where he worked with his father in the manufacture of bells and church clocks. His father, Major George Holbrook fought in the Revolutionary War and apprenticed with Paul Revere when Revere cast his first bell in 1792. Five years later, he set up his own business in Brookfield, MA (in operation from 1797 to 1810). In 1816, Major Holbrook moved to East Medway again, and set up his business and cast a bell for the new Meetinghouse in Attleborough in 1816. He died in 1846.

In 1820, Col. G. H. Holbrook took over the business from his father; he continued to operate it from 1820-1871. There is a time gap, which led to a new business being formed in East Medford (operated from 1834 to 1856). In 1837 Col. Holbrook began building church organs until 1850, in addition to his bell business. He became associat-

ed with the Handel and Haydn Society of Boston. He then formed another business, George H. Holbrook & Son, in East Medway, which operated



Schematic of a typical nineteenth-century church bell. The bell in the Federated Church is similar, but lacks the slider shown here. From: "Do You Like to Hear the Church Bells on a Sunday Morning?" Payhembury Village ([www.payhembury.org.uk](http://www.payhembury.org.uk)), 30 July 2017

from 1865 until his death in 1875. According to campanologist Carl S. Zimmerman of St. Louis, Missouri: “There are no surviving records from the Holbrook bell foundry. The list compiled by the Chepachet Baptist Church is the most comprehensive.”<sup>2</sup>

The height of the Federated Church bell is 30 inches, which includes the 25-inch bell and the 5-inch crown at the top of the bell that is needed to hang it. The bell diameter is 32 inches. It is made of bronze—an alloy of copper and tin—with the two metals in nearly equal proportions. Major George Holbrook, between 1816 and 1820, cast a bell weighing 1,208 pounds that may have served as a prototype, so it is possible that the Federated Church bell weighed that much as well.

After reviewing photographs of the Federated Church bell, Mr. Zimmerman commented: “There are several notable aspects. Firstly, all of the fittings that I can see appear to be original, or nearly so. Secondly, the headstock appears to have been cut from a single piece of timber, which must have come from an old-growth tree ... Thirdly, the two old bolts that appear on top of the bell between the crown and the headstock suggest a most unusual way to secure the Headpiece from which the clapper pivots.”

Zimmerman continues: “The clapper is original, and the clapper staple or headpiece is sufficiently worn (not surprising after almost 200 years!) that the wear spot on the bell is very wide ... I’m fairly sure that all of the woodwork is original too. One of the interesting things about exploring church bell towers is that they are almost always the least-modified part of the building, and so are very likely to contain interesting bits of really old stuff, if one is observant.”



The clapper, which produces sound by striking the wall of the bell as the bell swings.

Commenting on the bell’s clapper, Zimmerman notes: “That is a *very* unusual—perhaps even unique—clapper mounting. Normally, a bell with crown would have had a cast-in iron clapper staple; but I see no evidence of that here. My guess is that the molder of the bell somehow forgot to include the usual clapper staple, and this was rigged as a substitute. The use of the bent sheet-metal predecessor of the cotter pin as a retainer on the ends of the bearing rod shows that this assembly is extremely old, and

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2 Campanology is the study of bell-casting and bell-ringing.



The supporting framework of the Federated Church bell, showing the large wooden wheel that provides the leverage necessary to swing the bell.

probably original to the bell. The clapper shank might be either cast or wrought iron, but the clapper ball is undoubtedly cast iron. It is also very unusual in that it appears to have been made in two castings; quite possibly it was realized that the first attempt yielded a ball that was too small, and rather than remake the whole thing they just cast another layer onto the ball. It's lasted almost two centuries, so it was a pretty good job!"

The bell clapper is 27 inches long, made of iron, and rusty. There are wear marks on the inside bottom of the bell, from where the clapper hits the inside of the bell. Mr. Zimmerman further states that: "While there are many forms of bronze (including gunmetal), bell metal has a copper to tin ratio that typically is in the range 78:22 to 80:20, often with a fraction of one percent being impurities of various kinds. Copper oxide is greenish in color (as you may recognize from having seen copper roofs), while tin oxide is grayish in color. Variations in the color of the bell are due to variations in which of the two metals is predominant at any particular point on the surface. Copper and tin oxides do not corrode away as iron oxide (rust) does; instead, they form a distinctive patina. This is why there

is such a significant difference between the appearance of the clapper and the appearance of the bell.”

Commenting on the wear marks visible on the inside surfaces of the bell, Zimmerman explains that they “are a different color because any oxides formed there have been pounded away by the clapper. The shape of the wear marks on the bell is typical, and they show that the clapper pivot has become quite worn over the years. The bearing blocks for the gudgeons (the pins on which the bell swings) are recessed into the horizontal timbers that carry the weight of the bell. That is typical for pre-Civil-War bells. The bellfounder would have supplied the bell, clapper, headstock, wheel and bearing blocks, while a local carpenter would have constructed the frame, which in this case is practically part of the structure of the tower. All of the timber that I can see looks to be in excellent condition.”

To install the bell, it needed to be raised up from the ground, up to the open arched shuttered window, swung inside, and then set inside. The structure which allows the bell to ring may have been assembled before the bell was raised up. This seems likely considering the tight amount of space to work in the bell tower. The bell is attached to a large block of wood, called the headstock, and secured in place. The block is then attached to a large diameter wheel which is grooved in the center. The rope is laid in the track of the wheel (you can see where it is tied off to the right of the photo) and—in the Federated Church—extends through the third floor (“attic”) space to the second floor, also known as the balcony. There, it hangs against a section of the wall behind the back of the organ.



In the belfry, the rope attaches to a large wheel that provides leverage.



Third floor (“attic”) where stairs lead up to the bell tower; the bell rope passes through this space to the fourth floor..

When the rope is pulled down by the bell ringer, the wheel is pulled down counterclockwise, which raises the bell far enough for the clapper to hit it. When the bell is raised, the open part is facing the north side of the bell tower, overlooking the church courtyard. Ringers only see a short piece of rope, and nothing more; they pull on it, and the bell rings. So, the next time you hear the Federated Church bell ringing on a Sunday morning, close your eyes and imagine the work it took to place and secure the bell, and the equipment needed to make it ring. What you will hear is probably the same exact sound made on October 29, 1829.

Special thanks to Mr. Carl S. Zimmerman, Campanologist and webmaster for [www.TowerBells.org](http://www.TowerBells.org), for providing most of the information in this article.

#### **Further Information:**

A National List of Holbrook Bells, <https://www.chepachetbaptist.org/national-list-holbrook-bells-htm>.

Holbrook Bells and Bell Foundries, [www.towerbells.org/Holbrook-Foundry.html](http://www.towerbells.org/Holbrook-Foundry.html).

The Holbrooks & the Holbrook Bell Foundry, by Francis D. Donovan © 1989; [www.medwaylib.org/History/Holbrooks/Holbrooks.htm](http://www.medwaylib.org/History/Holbrooks/Holbrooks.htm).



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# The Cleaveland House Poets

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by NED STERNICK

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Cleaveland House, pictured in a woodcut by Sidney Noyes Riggs. All images in this article are courtesy of the author.

THE CLEAVELAND FAMILY emigrated from England to America's Massachusetts Bay Colony in the 1630s. Born a few miles from Boston, Moses Cleaveland (1651-1717) became the first family member to settle on Martha's Vineyard. As a teenager, he joined an Edgartown militia company formed to deal with possible local community unrest caused by King Philip's War (1675-1676). The conflict pitted several Native American tribes against English settlers joined by supportive Indian allies. Bloody battles erupted throughout the Northeast; but the Wampanoag chose to remain neutral, resulting in an absence of violence on the Island. Moses was later married with several children, and acquired Edgartown property.<sup>1</sup>

A future descendant, whaling captain James Cleaveland (1824-1907), relocated to Martha's Vineyard after his mid-1800s retirement from a busy nautical career. He purchased an old West Tisbury home built in Revolutionary War times, and welcomed boarders with a "Cleaveland House" sign on the roof.<sup>2</sup>

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1 "Original Vineyarders: The Island's First Settlers," *New York Times*.

2 "Welcome to the Cleaveland House," *Cleaveland House B&B*, <http://www.cynthiariggs.com/cleavelandhouse/>

Ned Sternick, a retired medical physicist and former director of the Medical Physics Division at the Tufts New England Medical Center, is an MV Museum docent and library volunteer. This is his first contribution to the *Quarterly*.



Cynthia Riggs, age 2, on the beach at Quansoo in 1933.

James Cleaveland's granddaughter, Dionis Coffin Riggs (1898-1997), originally from Edgartown, lived off-Island for many years. In the 1950s, Dionis returned to Martha's Vineyard with husband Sidney N. Riggs (1892-1975), a career educator and talented artist. They began a new life at the historic Cleaveland family residence and made significant upgrades to it, installing electricity, running water and an indoor bathroom.<sup>3</sup>

Dionis emerged as a serious writer of many poems that appeared in Martha's Vineyard and New York newspapers. Community-oriented, she invited other Vineyard poets to share creative efforts on a regular basis in her living room during the 1960s. Participants subsequently became known as the Cleaveland House Poets.

Cynthia Riggs, the daughter of Dionis, was born in 1931 and grew up on Martha's Vineyard, but spent much of her adult life in Washington, DC. There she worked as a museum aide, associate news editor, press secretary for a congressman, and freelance writer, editor, and researcher at the National Geographic Society.<sup>4</sup>

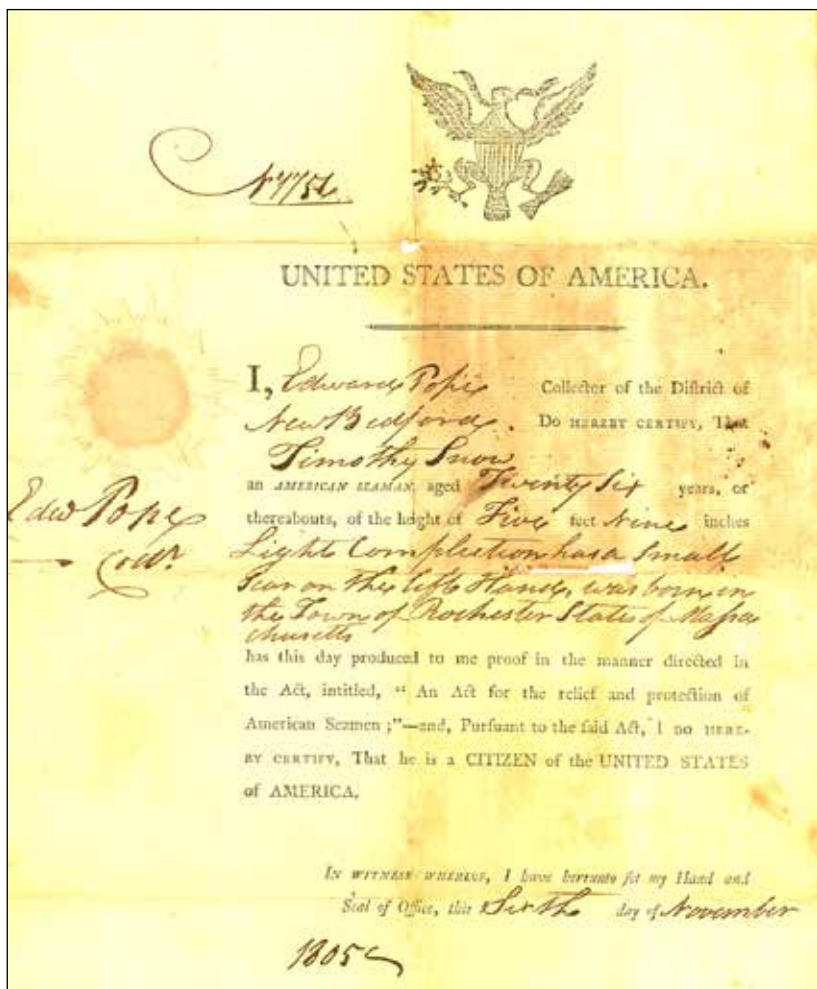
Coming back to the Vineyard in the early 1980s, Cynthia assisted her widowed mother with transformation of the Cleaveland home into a bed and breakfast that would cater to poets and writers. When Dionis passed away at age 98, Cynthia, an acclaimed author of mystery novels set on Martha's Vineyard, continued to host the Cleaveland House Poets, who have remained active for more than a half-century.



*In the Company of Poets: Cleaveland House Poets Anthology 2021* will be published this August.

3 Robert McG. Thomas, Jr. "Dionis C. Riggs, New England Poet, Dies at 98." *New York Times*, May 11, 1997.

4 Cynthia K. Wolfson, "Cynthia Riggs: Her Mystery Revealed," *Vineyard Style* (2018). <http://cynthiariggs.com/profilevt.html>



Seamen's protection certificates, like this one issued to Timothy Snow in 1805, were a legal document stating that the bearer was a citizen of the United States. The Royal Navy, perpetually short of trained seamen, claimed the right to force British sailors serving on merchant vessels into naval service. Certificates like Snow's, issued through Customs Houses in port cities like New Bedford and backed by the authority of the United States government, were intended to save American sailors from impressment (which became one of the causes of — or pretexts for — the War of 1812. Products of an age before photography, the certificates included a detailed physical description that could be used by authorities to verify that the bearer of the certificate was the person to whom it had been issued. Timothy Snow's certificate is part of Record Unit 139 (Edgartown Customs House House Records) in the Museum archives.

# The Last Voyage of Captain William Martin



The image shows a close-up of a handwritten signature in cursive ink on aged, slightly yellowed paper. The signature is written in three lines: 'Yours', 'Truly', and 'William A. Martin'. The ink is dark brown or black, and the handwriting is fluid and characteristic of the late 19th century.

Signature of Capt. William A. Martin, from a letter written to Samuel Osborn Jr, owner of the Eunice H. Adams, in 1890. Martha's Vineyard Museum, RU 335 (Osborn Family Papers), Box 1, Folder 7.