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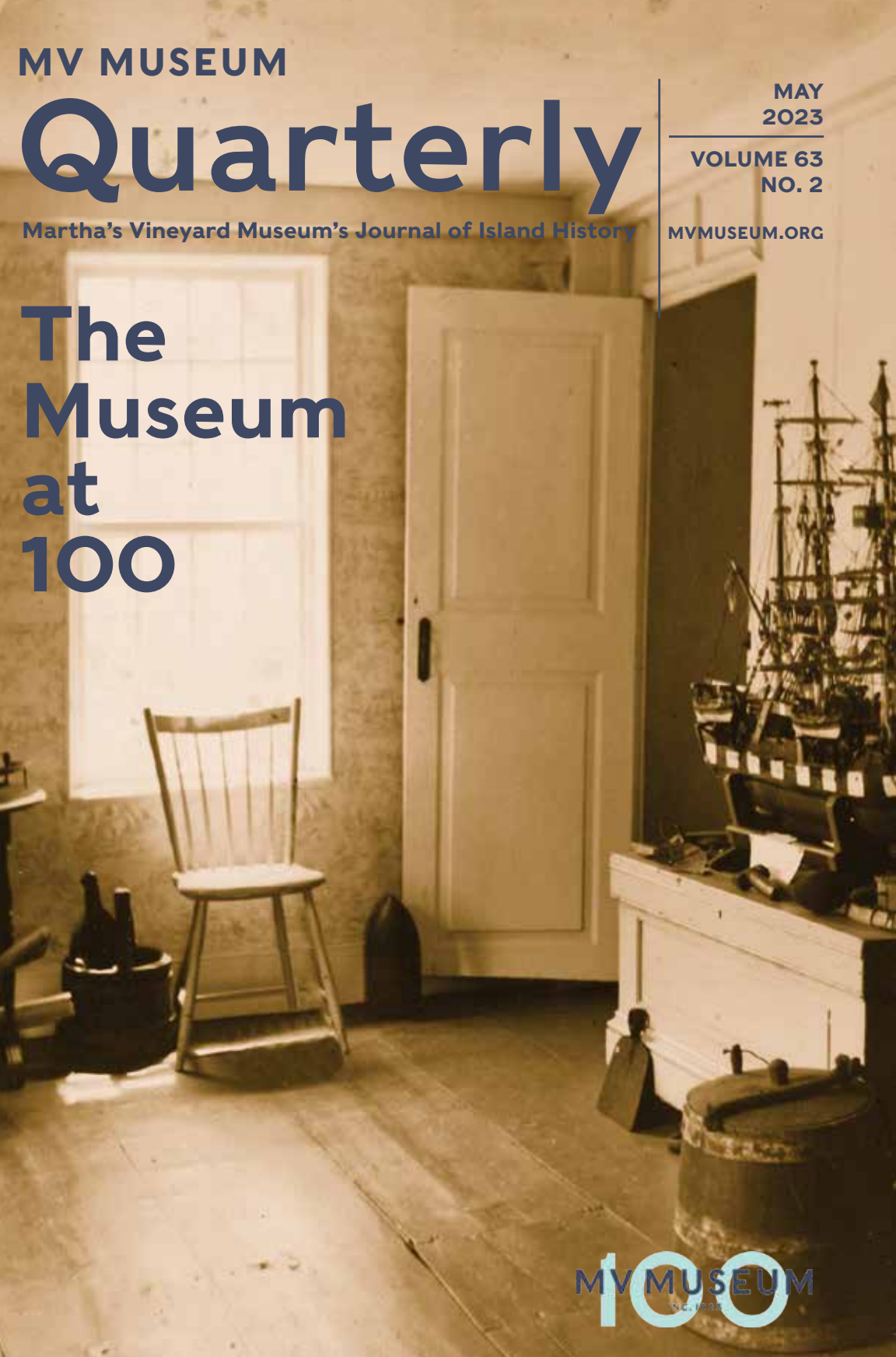
The Museum at 100



From the Executive Director

As the Museum turns 100 years old, we celebrate a century of progress, slow progress at times, but progress nonetheless. We are both looking back with gratitude and using this opportunity to dream big about where the Museum will go in its second century.

The pages of this issue of the *Quarterly* walk through many important moments of expansion and change, underscored by a persistent need for more space and more funding, and an institution coming to terms with whose stories it tells. Spoiler alert: we finally arrive at a place where we are embracing anyone who loves this Island, anyone whose heart calls this Island home. This is a more expansive vision than anyone imagined in our early years, and given the rich cultural diversity of Martha's Vineyard (even in 1923!), provides the Museum with endless opportunities for storytelling.

At our Evening of Discovery, I shared a story about my seven-year-old daughter, who recently gave me a new way of looking at the Museum's work. One evening at bedtime, she said "Mommy, I am so glad we don't live in the black and white times" and when I asked what she meant, she said "well, in old photos you can see that they didn't live with color back then and I'm glad we get to live in color." To her mind, an incredible moment happened at some point between the black and white photos of her great grandparents' time and the color Polaroids of mine, when color washed across the world. Here at the Museum, we have the privilege of revisiting stories about the Island's past and looking at what might have been left out of previous tellings. We have the privilege of filling in the colors, telling a truer, more complete story about our Island. It's the color that adds context and flavor to this community, the color that makes us so vibrant. And, the color helps us understand how far we've come.

The journey to the perennial now is long and complex with many people doing their part to transform the Dukes County Historical Society of yesteryear to the MV Museum of 2023. Each generation of Board members, volunteers, and staff wrestled with important decisions and contributed to the forward momentum in big ways and small. Countless dedicated hands, hearts, and minds ultimately led to the valued and vibrant institution we are today and we are deeply grateful for them all.

May the Museum's story continue to evolve and expand, and may you continue to be part of our collective vision!

With gratitude,
Heather L. Seger

MARTHA'S VINEYARD MUSEUM
QUARTERLY

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The Museum at 100:
How We Got to Where We Are

A. Bowdoin Van Riper

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Introduction

The history of anything—a person, a group, a thing, an organization, an idea—involves both continuity and change. Nothing exists for long without changing, but (so long as it continues to exist) nothing is ever transformed entirely. Traces of the children we once were remain within the adults we have become. Every spring, bright-eyed college graduates don ceremonial robes and headwear that nod to the medieval roots of university education. Decisions taken in the age of parchment and quill pens—in 1619, 1776, and 1787—still shape, deeply and profoundly, the life of a nation that has parsed the code of life, made deserts bloom, and left its footprints on the moon.

Both continuity and change are continually present, and continually in tension with one another, but we tend not to see them with equal clarity. At the level of day-to-day life, continuity dominates our perception of the world. The bed we wake up in, the clothes we put on, the car we drive, the tools we work with, and the food we eat for dinner are the same today as they were yesterday, and will be the same tomorrow as they are today. If a detail or two *is* different today (or tomorrow), a thousand others will still be comfortingly the same. The number of the exit where we leave the highway to go to work may be different today, but the curve of the ramp and the identities of the gas stations at the bottom will be the same. It is only when we take the long view—when we compare today not to the literal yesterday of 24 hours ago, but to the metaphorical "yesterday" of a decade or a lifetime ago—that we remember when gas pumps didn't read credit cards, when Exxon was Esso, or when the strip mall a quarter mile from the ramp was a farmer's field. Placing "then" and "now" side-by-side, we find that the once-stylish clothes at the back of our closet have become quaint, and that the child whose hand we held as they learned to walk is now reaching out that same hand for the car keys.

The ways in which continuity and change interact to shape human affairs are rarely straightforward. Humans are messy, irrational, contradictory creatures, and placing humans in groups amplifies all three qualities. The historian's job is to wade into that complexity and attempt to untangle it: to make sense, in Arthur R. Railton's memorable phrase, of "how we got to where we are." What follows is an attempt to do that for the Martha's Vineyard Museum, on the occasion of its 100th year in existence.

— A. Bowdoin Van Riper

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Remembrance and Commemoration
1880-1922

A VOGUE FOR commemorating history—particularly local history—took hold on both sides of the Atlantic in the last decade of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth. Markers, monuments, and museums gave tangible form to local memories of historically significant people, places, and events. Historical pageants, in which local residents donned historical costumes and acted out important scenes from local or national history, brought the past to life for participants and audiences. Town histories—handsomely bound, meticulously detailed, and marginally readable—proliferated, as did published volumes of birth, marriage, and death records; gravestone inscriptions; and proceedings of town governments.

In the United States, this upwelling of popular interest in history was bracketed by nationwide historical celebrations of the 400th anniversary of Columbus's "discovery" of the New World (1893), and the 300th of the Pilgrims' arrival at Plymouth (1920). It came hard on the heels of the Census Bureau's declaration (1890) of the closing of the western frontier, and historian Frederick Jackson Turner's explication (1893) of what he saw as the frontier's critical role in defining American history and the American character. It coincided with the fiftieth anniversary of the Civil War (1911-1915) and the flurry of symbolic "reconciliations" between Union and Confederate veterans that those years generated. Above all, it unfolded as the United States became a major imperial player in the Pacific and Caribbean, while absorbing waves of immigrants from the Mediterranean, Eastern Europe, and East Asia who—even more than the Irish in the mid-nineteenth century—challenged America's image of itself as a White,

Protestant nation solidly rooted in the culture of northwest Europe.[1]

The mainstream view of American history in the first decades of the twentieth century—the one taught in schools, expounded in textbooks, and embroidered by novelists, playwrights, and filmmakers—reflected that backdrop. It presented the history of the United States, from Columbus and the Pilgrims onward, as a steady, linear march toward a gleaming present and an even brighter future. The spread of White, Anglo-Saxon culture (thoroughly Protestant, but leavened with Enlightenment ideas about freedom and equality) across North America was central to the narrative. The heroes of the narrative were men (and the occasional stalwart woman) who not only embodied it but, by their heroic actions, spread it to and through North America. Supporting players from other cultural backgrounds entered the story only sporadically. They appeared for as long as it took them to embrace and be ennobled by WASP culture or to oppose and be swept away by it, then disappeared again.[2] Local commemorations of history retold this story in miniature, substituting local luminaries for William Bradford, George Washington, and Davy Crockett, while scouring historical records for any direct connection to such Great Men.[3]

This first history-themed monument erected on Martha's Vineyard was Charles Strahan's privately funded statue of a Union soldier, placed at the foot of Circuit Avenue in 1891.[4] The Island's embrace of public history began in earnest five years later, however, with the foundation of two local chapters of the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR). An association of women who could prove descent from a Revolutionary War "patriot," the DAR's mission and purpose were inherently historical. A woman who gained admission to the DAR had, by doing so, linked one of her ancestors, and thus her family and herself, to *the* defining event in the

1 This was, of course, nonsense. The history of North America is, equally, the story of Spaniards, Africans, dozens of Native American nations, and individuals whose race and ethnicity are plural in rich and complex ways.

2 The ranks of the ennobled include Pocahontas, Squanto, Crispus Attucks, Sacagawea, Fredrick Douglass, and Booker T. Washington. The ranks of those defeated and swept away include Metacomet (King Philip), Santa Ana, Nat Turner, Sitting Bull, and Geronimo.

3 Historical plaques reading "George Washington Slept Here," a familiar comic trope in mid-twentieth-century popular culture, gently satirized this search for local connections to the "Great Men" of history.

4 On the history of the statue, see: Judith Shively, "The Civil War Monument and the Soldier Behind It," *Dukes County Intelligencer,* February 1996, pp. 115-127; S. David Wilson, "Saving the Civil War Monument: A Remarkable Community Effort," *Dukes County Intelligencer,* Spring 2011, pp. 3-13; and A. Bowdoin Van Riper, "The Oak Bluffs Civil War Monument: Background and Context," *MV Museum Quarterly,* May 2019, pp. 38-45.

mainstream narrative of American history. Both local chapters followed the lead of the national society in collecting and exhibiting historical artifacts. The Sea Coast Defense Chapter was staging exhibits in its Vineyard Haven headquarters as early as 1899, and the Edgartown-based Martha's Vineyard Chapter was doing so by 1912 and perhaps earlier.[5]

Both DAR chapters placed metal emblems on the gravesites of Revolutionary War soldiers in Island cemeteries, and bronze plaques on the home of Capt. Benjamin Smith (a Revolutionary War militia commander) and a flagpole outside the headquarters of the Sea Coast Defense chapter.[6] The latter commemorated three young women of the town who, in 1777, had sabotaged a "liberty pole" that stood nearby in order to prevent its seizure by a British warship for use as a mast.[7] The DAR's turn-of-the century commemorative impulses, though, extended well beyond the Revolution. A plaque on the side of the Edgartown Inn hallowed the memories of Senator Daniel Webster and writer Nathaniel Hawthorne, who had stayed there. Others, mounted on granite boulders, marked the site of Rev. Joseph Thaxter's home in Edgartown,[8] the chapel where the "praying Indians" of Christiantown had worshipped,[9] and the "Place by the Wayside" where Thomas Mayhew, Jr. had preached to his Wampanoag followers for

5 Part of the Museum's archives, RU 350 (DAR Collection) includes both organizational records of the two Martha's Vineyard chapters and historical documents collected by the Edgartown chapter.

6 Benjamin Smith's house at the corner of Davis Lane and South Summer Street, built in 1760, has housed the offices of the *Vineyard Gazette* since 1938. For a brief account of its history, see: "Purchase Completed: Vineyard Gazette Is to Occupy Office, Pre-Revolutionary House, in Fall," *Vineyard Gazette,* 19 July 1938. **Note:** All *Gazette* articles referenced in this essay are available on the *Gazette* website unless otherwise noted.

7 Elizabeth W. Trotter, "The Liberty Pole: New Light on a Vineyard Legend," *Dukes County Intelligencer,* Winter 2015, pp. 3-18; A. Bowdoin Van Riper, "Writing the Liberty Pole: Two Hundred Years of Stories," *Dukes County Intelligencer,* Winter 2015, pp. 19-30.

8 A hero of the Revolution, present at Concord, Bunker Hill and Valley Forge, Thaxter settled in Edgartown after the war and served, for nearly fifty years, as pastor of the First Church of Christ (later the First Congregational Church). See Thomas E. Norton, "The Rev. Joseph Thaxter: A Vineyarder at the Battles of Concord and Bunker Hill," *Dukes County Intelligencer,* August 1976, pp. 3-10; Arthur R. Railton, "The Tribulations of Reverend Thaxter," *Dukes County Intelligencer,* August 1992, pp. 35-69; "Rev. Joseph Thaxter and His Politics," *Dukes County Intelligencer,* November 1992, pp. 85-97; and "Parson Thaxter: Chaplain and Poet of the Revolution," *Dukes County Intelligencer,* November 1997, pp. 44-49

9 Eleanor Ransom Mayhew, "The Christiantown Story," *Dukes County Intelligencer,* August 1959, pp. 3-11, is a brief recounting. A more extensive package of materials related to Christiantown is available, on request, from the Museum library.

Members of the Seacoast Defense Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution dedicate a historical marker at Christiantown in 1910. All images in this issue are from the photo collections of the Martha's Vineyard Museum.

the last time in 1657.[10] The plaques and grave markers alike were symbolic touchstones: They marked places where the history of the Vineyard intersected the larger narrative of American history.

The DAR wasn't alone in its desire to memorialize the Island's connection to that larger history. Memorial Park in Edgartown—a narrow triangle of grass between Main and Cooke Streets, dedicated on the 4th of July, 1901—was one product of it. The wide end of the triangle was dominated by a metal-and-granite obelisk bearing the names of 70 Vineyard men who had died in the Civil War. Three decommissioned cannons and pyramid-shaped piles of cannonballs from the Charlestown Navy Yard accentuated the park's role as a commemoration of the Civil War, while nodding toward the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812. A trypot from a decommissioned whaling ship, added later and used as a planter, nodded to Edgartown's glory days as a whaling port.

The nation's turn-of-the-century enthusiasm for published local histories and locally staged historical pageants spread to the Vineyard roughly a decade after the dedication of Memorial Park. Charles G. Hine's *The Story of Martha's Vineyard,* the first attempt to put the history of the Island between hard covers, appeared in 1908. Charles Banks' two-volume *His-*

10 The "Place by the Wayside" memorial is at the apex of a semi-circular driveway on the south side of the Edgartown-West Tisbury Road, between the Barnes Road intersection and the airport entrance.

tory of Martha's Vineyard followed in 1911. Hine's book, drawn (its subtitle declared) "from the lips of its inhabitants, newspaper files, and those who have visited its shores," was quirky and chatty; Banks' book, drawn from state, county, and town records, was dense and ponderous. Both, however, presented similar narratives: tales of progress in which government, religion, and war were the dominant themes and propertied, literate, Christian men of English descent were the principal actors.

Banks, whose stiff-necked seriousness appealed to the middle-American mania for "self-improvement," became a fixture of well-to-do Vineyard households, particularly those of the old Yankee families—Mayhew, Pease, Norton, Luce, Tilton, and West—whose ancestors figured prominently in its narrative. It became "the bible" for a group of historically minded Vineyarders who gathered on the shore of Luce's Pond in West Tisbury to stage a historical pageant about the Island in August 1911. Organized as a series of separate scenes presented in chronological order, the pageant began with a fantasy of pre-contact life among the Wampanoag and, from there, unspooled what its organizers saw as the high points of Vineyard history from the arrival of Bartholomew Gosnold in 1602 to the end of the American Revolution. English characters were portrayed, where possible, by their own descendants, often dressed in vintage clothes pulled from dusty attic trunks. The Wampanoag characters, with one exception, were also played by white Vineyarders in swarthy makeup and cloth costumes dyed to look like deerskin.

After three successful performances in 1911, the pageant was revived for four more performance at Luce's Pond in 1912. A similar pageant was staged in Tisbury the following summer, with Lake Tashmoo substituting for Luce's Pond as the "sea" from which Gosnold. Mayhew, and other key players made their entrance. The lineup of scenes varied from pageant to pageant: The story of John Pease, absent in 1911, was interpolated between Gosnold and Mayhew in 1912, and the 1913 pageant included several new vignettes specific to the history of Tisbury. All three, however, were cut from the same narrative cloth. They were—like virtually all the locally centered histories of the era, and like Katharine Lee Bates' 1893 poem-turned-song *America the Beautiful*—tales of heroic figures who sowed the seeds of Christianity, Democracy, and Civilization in the wilderness.[11] The organizers of the pageants—like Bates, the members of the DAR, and the creators of Memorial Park—sought not just to recreate the past as they understood it, but to kin-

11 Arthur R. Railton, "Historical Pageants," *Dukes County Intelligencer,* May 1987, pp. 167-178; Laura Shelby Lee, "The West Tisbury Pageant: An Insider's View," *Dukes County Intelligencer,* May 1987, pp. 179-185. Programs, scripts, photographs, and postcards of the 1911-1913 pageants make up the bulk of RU 639 (Historical Pageants Collection).

Dressed in seventeenth-century costumes, participants in the West Tisbury Historical Pageant prepare to enact a scene from the Island's past.

dle, in their audiences, a sense of connection with and pride in it.

The history that Vineyarders learned from books, in schoolrooms, and at the feet of their spiritual leaders involved long-ago times, distant lands, historical figures who had been so thoroughly canonized—their quirks and foibles buffed away and covered by an impenetrable sheen of nobility and seriousness—that they were closer to demigods than human beings. The history memorialized by the DAR's plaques and brought to life in lakefront pageants was populated by similarly canonized figures, but it was *local*. Vineyarders could walk in the places, and step into the buildings, where it had happened; they could visit the graves of those who had made it happen. Local history offered something that schoolroom history could not: the *possibility*, at least, of a sense of personal connection. The Dukes County Historical Society (DCHS)—the forerunner of the Martha's Vineyard Museum—was conceived as a way of creating such a sense of connection.

Beginnings
1921-1930

Enthusiasm for popular history remained alive and well in Massachusetts in the early 1920s. The 300th anniversary of the arrival of the Pilgrims had been celebrated across Cape Cod, and the 150th anniversary of the Revolution lay in the near future. The dedication ceremonies for memorials to what was still called "the World War" were attended, in both Edgartown (1920) and Tisbury (1922) by aging veterans of the Civil War, and a plaque was added to Charles Strahan's "Soldier's Memorial" in Oak Bluffs "in honor of the Confederate soldiers."[1]

In April 1921, a "Vineyard Bibliography Committee" was formed "to preserve, to create greater interest in, and to make available for all, our Vineyard literature, published and unpublished." The group, chaired by Marshall Shepard of Edgartown, compiled a "movable collection" of 118 items, and called on Island libraries to join forces "for greater cooperation and broader accomplishments." One of those "broader accomplishments" was the DCHS, formed on October 23, 1922 with Shepard as president, William J. Rotch and Ulysses E. Mayhew as vice-presidents, and Francis A. Foster as secretary-treasurer. The Society was incorporated on July 12, 1923 with twenty-seven charter members. By year's end, it had eleven life members (who had paid $25 for the privilege) and 120 annual members paying dues of $1 per year.[2] The original four officers continued after incorporation, joined by three new ones: Charles H. Brown as Historian,

1 Van Riper, "Oak Bluffs Civil War Monument," pp. 42-43; A. Bowdoin Van Riper, "Monuments and Memory: Commemorating the Great War in Edgartown and Tisbury, 1920-1922, *MV Museum Quarterly,* August 2020, pp. 22-36.
2 Dorothy Cottle Poole, "The Dukes County Historical Society, 1923-1973," *Dukes County Intelligencer,* August 1973, pp. 3-11.

Islanders gathered at the 1925 rededication of Charles Strahan's "Soldier's Memorial" in Oak Bluffs. The ceremony unveiled a plaque – removed in 2019, and now displayed at the Museum – placed by citizens of the town "in honor of the Confederate soldiers."

Emma Mayhew Whiting as Librarian, and Florence Blackwell Mayhew as Membership Chair.

The Society met between two and four times annually in its early years, in the homes of members or one of the Island's public libraries. The substance of the meetings, once routine business such as dues and reports had been attended to, consisted of presentations by members or outside speakers, often accompanied by displays of artifacts and documents related to the subject at hand. The meetings "floated" from one venue to another, and the exhibits were on display for only a single night, because the Society did not yet have a home of its own. The meetings were, and would remain for many decades to come, events at which the members of the Society talked to one another. The fact that they could be held in private homes suggests that attendance was only a fraction of the hundred-plus individuals on the Society's rolls.

The same month that it was incorporated, the Society began publishing brief pamphlets under the series title "Dukes County Historical Society Publications." Most pamphlets reprinted the text of an address given before the Society: a way to reach both absent members and historically minded non-members. *Let Your Light So Shine,* an overview of relations between the Mayhews and the Crown by Charles H. Brown, appeared in July 1923, *Vineyard Indian Relics* by Emma Mayhew Whiting in Decem-

ber 1924, and *Tramping on Martha's Vineyard,* by Blanche I. Goell in December 1925. Edward Sanford Burgess's *The Old South Road of Gay Head* was published in October 1926, and Annie Daggett Lord's biography of Major Peter Norton concluded the venture in April 1927.[3] Along the way, the newborn society organized the publication of a third volume of Banks' *History of Martha's Vineyard,* rounding up subscribers who, by paying in advance for their copies, covered the cost of production.

DUKES COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

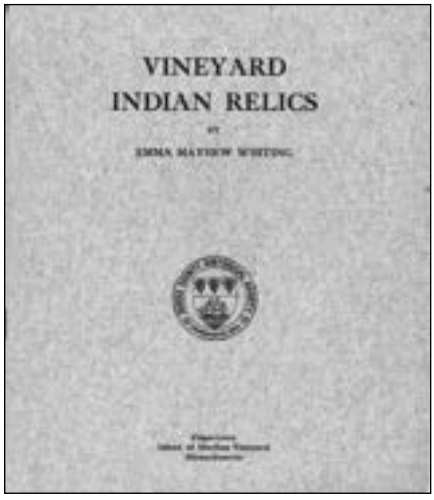
Organized This Week with Much Promise for Future

The first meeting of the Dukes County Historical Society, for purpose of organization, was held at the Public Library, Oak Bluffs, on Monday afternoon, Oct. 23rd. Mr. Marshall Shepard presiding. The meeting adopted by-laws and elected the following officers for the ensuing year: President, Marshall Shepard; 1st Vice President, William J. Roteh; 2nd Vice President, Ulysses E. Mayhew; Secretary and Treasurer, Francis A. Foster.

The annual dues for both resident and Associate members was fixed at one dollar with the privilege of commuting by the payment of twenty-five dollars for Life Membership.

The 1922 founding of the Dukes County Historical Society (DCHS), as recognized by the *Vineyard Gazette.*

The Society's early publications were the work of earnest amateurs. Their authors were not scholars, devoted to a subject and driven by a desire to understanding it in all its richness and complexity. Nor were they academics: scholars collectively engaged in a far-flung, multi-generational conversation designed to sift, winnow, and weave together the products of their individual labors into something of greater scope and more lasting value.[4] The publications themselves were reflections of the author's personal enthusiasms: Brown and Burgess were writing history, Lord biography, Whiting archaeology, and Goell (who had delivered her talk to the Appalachian Mountain Club of Boston before reprising it at the DCHS) a travel narrative. Their appearance under a series title, with volume and number designations, a fig-leaf designed to give the appearance of a planned enterprise, rather than evidence of actual planning.[5] The third volume



Vineyard Indian Relics by Emma Mayhew Whiting, one of five pamphlets issued by the DCHS in its first five years of existence.

3 All five are available in digital form under the "Research" tab of the Museum website.

4 Burgess *was* an academic—a botanist on the faculty of Hunter College—but his pamphlet on the nineteenth-century history of Gay Head (now Aquinnah) was far outside his professional expertise.

5 Each of the five pamphlets appeared in a different calendar year, and the spacing was erratic, with roughly five months elapsing between the first and

of Banks' *History* was in a different league—a landmark work, invaluable to scholars and still in constant use—but it represented the completion of an existing project conceived by someone else, rather than the beginning of a new project conceived by the Society.

The publications of the 1920s reflected the organization that produced them. Name notwithstanding, few of the Society's members were, even avocationally, historians. Dorothy Cottle Poole declared in a 1973 article that they shared a long connection with the Island and "a deep and abiding love of the Vineyard and its history."[6] Cottle's use of the possessive ("*its* history") highlights a subtle, but critical, distinction. The founders of the DCHS were not, as a group, deeply interested in history generally, but they—like many Americans from their era and their place in society—were deeply and intensely interested in the history of their community. They felt, and sought to deepen, the connection to the place and its people by collecting, preserving, and sharing relics of that history.

The founders' intention is evident in their declaration that the society would be "a corporation constituted for collecting, preserving, and occasionally publishing historical and analogous material related to the County of Dukes County."[7] The trio of verbs they used—collect, preserve, and publish—are all acts of memory-keeping. Like a box filled with a fond parent's mementos of a now-grown child, or by a couple with traces of their life together, the Society's collections would be shaped by the creators' desire to maintain their connection to a thing (in the Society's case, the Vineyard) that they loved.

A second quality that bound the charter members of the DCHS together was their ability to act on that desire for a deeper connection to Vineyard history. The founders were not, in any way, a cross-section of the Island's population in 1923. They were uniformly white and almost exclusively white-collar: prosperous, leisured, and socially well-connected. None of the surnames on the list of charter members is Wampanoag, Portuguese, or Jewish.[8] Seasonal residents—"summer people" in the vernacular of the day—are well-represented on the roster of annual members from 1923, but none of them are from the African American families that had come to Oak Bluffs for a quarter-century. Farmers and fishermen, carpenters and blacksmiths, are noticeably absent. Middle-class "club women" like Sydna Eldridge and wealthy "spinsters" like Chloe Coffin and Lucretia

second (as well as the fourth and fifth), but nearly two years between the second and third. All five were designated part of "Vol. 1," with no clear indication of when "Vol. 2" would begin.

6 Poole, "Dukes County Historical Society," p. 3.

7 Poole, "Dukes County Historical Society," p. 7.

8 Two Portuguese names *do* appear on the list of annual members for 1923: Lester de Frates and Joseph K. Sylvia.

Norton are present in force; working-class "shop girls" are not. Two of the four original officers (Shepard and Foster) were independently wealthy, and the other two (Rotch and Mayhew) were successful West Tisbury businessmen.[9]

Francis Apthorp Foster, founding secretary-treasurer of the DCHS.

The shared motivations, and shared social background, of the early members of the Society shaped its collections in its first decades. Whaling loomed large not only because it represented the (perceived) peak of the Island's fame and influence, but also because the children and grandchildren of whaling captains and shipowners were heavily represented on the Society's early membership rolls. Images and souvenirs of Victorian-era tourism accumulated quickly for the same reason. The well-to-do Islanders, year-round and seasonal, who had bought those materials new were the parents and grandparents of the Society members who donated (or solicited their friends to donate) them to the collection. The records of Island churches, businesses, and community organizations flowed to the Society because its most active members (or their ancestors) were also likely to be deacons of the churches, owners of the businesses, or officers of the organizations. The items in the collection reflected Island history, as the society intended them to, but they reflected that history from a particular point of view. They resonated with those who collected them for the society, but the collectors represented a particular subset of the population.

Early accessions also had something else in common: They were compact. They could be packed in boxes and stacked on shelves. There were

9 Ulysses E. Mayhew and his brother Sanderson were founders and co-owners of S. M. Mayhew Co., the West Tisbury general store now known as Alley's. Rotch, who owned the *other* general store in West Tisbury and a feed-and-grain store in Vineyard Haven, brokered West Tisbury's separation from Tisbury in 1892 and was the town's leading municipal official for more than 30 years after.

no larger objects—no boats, no carriages, not even any large furniture –in the collection because the Society had no quarters of its own, and thus no place to store them. The Edgartown National Bank offered storage space in its fireproof brick building at the corner of Main and South Water Streets, which the Society gratefully accepted, but it (and rooms in other public buildings) were stopgap solutions at best. The Society needed a home, and created a building fund in which to accumulate the money for it. The opportunity to acquire such a home came, unexpectedly, in the fall of 1930.

A scrimshaw rubber, used by sailmakers to flatten seams before sewing, donated to the DCHS by Benjamin Pease in 1923.

Finding a Home
1930-1945

Built in 1766 for a successful Edgartown attorney, the Thomas Cooke house had once been among the finest in town. Set on a large lot, its north end tucked next to the road leading to the Congregational meetinghouse, its front windows looked out over South Summer Street toward the harbor. In the unsettled years before the Revolution, its numerous windows, spacious first-floor parlors, and expansive kitchen would have signaled to even the least attentive passerby that a man of wealth, power, and influence dwelt within. Forty years later, as the new republic found its political and economic footing and the Vineyard began to experiment with offshore whaling, "Squire" Cooke had moved to a new house across the street, leaving the old one to his son, Thomas Jr. The younger Cooke was, like his father, a man of wealth and influence, and the house still conveyed his status, but the Island was starting to change and Edgartown would change with it.

Thomas Cooke, Sr. died in 1820, as the first Vineyard whaleships headed for the Western Pacific to hunt in the newly discovered "Offshore Grounds" off the coast of Japan. Whales caught there, and on the fringes of the Bering Sea, made many Vineyard captains and shipowners fabulously wealthy. The cash they brought home changed the face of Edgartown, funding two Methodist churches, a courthouse, and a bank on Main Street and a new Congregational meetinghouse (now the Federated Church) on South Summer Street. Fine new homes built with whaling and merchant-shipping money along Water and Summer Streets made them the most desirable neighborhood in the village, while lots further inland along Meetinghouse Way (now Cooke Street) began to slip slowly

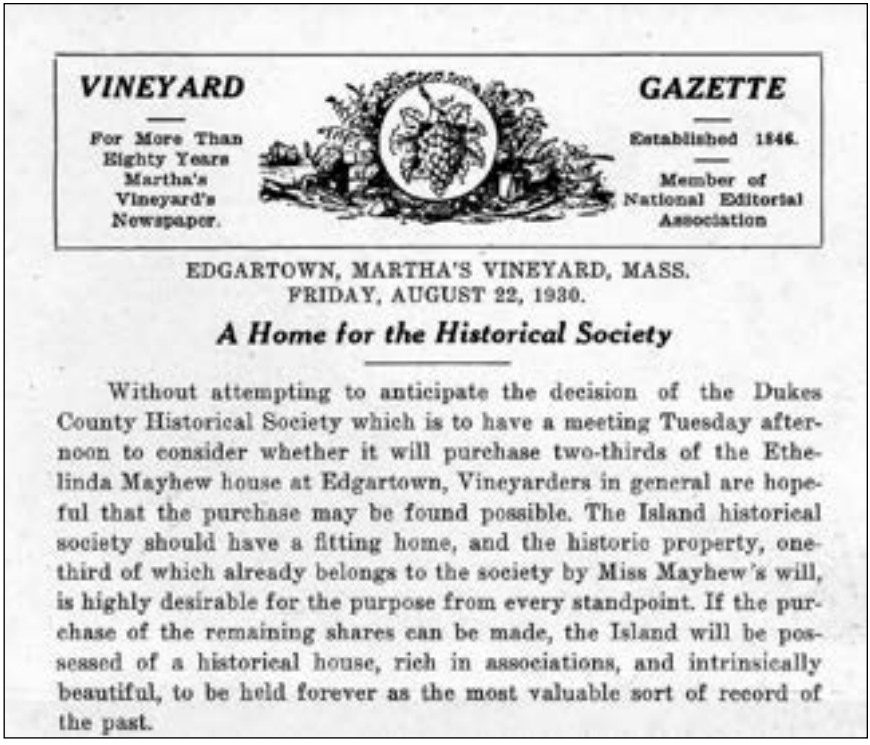
View of the Thomas Cooke House (1766) from Cooke Street after its acquisition by the DCHS. The "boat spade" at right is part of a signpost.

down-market. Thomas Cooke, Jr. died in 1852, in a village his father would barely have recognized, and the house passed down through and eventually out of the family. The whaling industry died in the 1870s, and in the decades-long depression that followed children and grandchildren of once-prosperous Edgartown families sold out to wealthy "summer people" from the mainland eager for a second home. It was a buyer's market, and the Cooke House, pushing a century-and-a-half old and showing its age, failed to attract interest. It became a boarding house for a time, and then the residence of an elderly single woman named Ethelinda Mayhew.

Ethelinda Mayhew died, in 1930, at the age of 80. The sole resident, but not the sole owner, of the Cooke House, she left her share of the house and all its furnishings to the Dukes County Historical Society. The bequest presented both an opportunity and a challenge. The *Gazette,* in an unsigned article almost certainly written by editor Henry Beetle Hough, captured the opportunity: "The bequest, evidencing Miss Mayhew's warm interest in the historical work of the Island and her love for the Island itself . . . assures to the Island historical society, which was formed in 1923 and has since that time steadily accumulated valuable material from the earliest times on the Vineyard, an appropriate permanent home for its collections and its activities." President Marshall Shepard concurred, stressing both the Society's need for a permanent home and the opportunity to preserve a historic Vineyard house. "So far as is known," the *Gazette* noted, "this is the first instance in which

preservation and care for a historic Vineyard house have been assured."[1]

The bequest may have been received, as the *Gazette* put it, "with expressions of gratitude on every hand," but it also presented the Society with a challenge. With the United States spiraling downward into what became the Great Depression, and banks failing nationwide at an alarming (and accelerating) rate, the leaders of the DCHS had to raise enough money to buy out the other owners of the Cooke House: Ethelinda's two nieces. The price was a little over $6,600, and the Society moved quickly. At a meeting held on September 30, 1930, the Council voted to authorize use of the entire contents of DCHS savings account and $882.00 from the Cash Account—a total of $2,666.66—as a down payment on



VINEYARD GAZETTE

For More Than Eighty Years Martha's Vineyard's Newspaper.

Established 1846.

Member of National Editorial Association

EDGARTOWN, MARTHA'S VINEYARD, MASS.
FRIDAY, AUGUST 22, 1930.

A Home for the Historical Society

Without attempting to anticipate the decision of the Dukes County Historical Society which is to have a meeting Tuesday afternoon to consider whether it will purchase two-thirds of the Ethelinda Mayhew house at Edgartown, Vineyarders in general are hopeful that the purchase may be found possible. The Island historical society should have a fitting home, and the historic property, one-third of which already belongs to the society by Miss Mayhew's will, is highly desirable for the purpose from every standpoint. If the purchase of the remaining shares can be made, the Island will be possessed of a historical house, rich in associations, and intrinsically beautiful, to be held forever as the most valuable sort of record of the past.

The *Vineyard Gazette* editorial announcing the Society's 1930 purchase of the Cooke House.

the remainder of the house, and take out a mortgage with the Edgartown National Bank to cover the remaining $4,000. The down payment represented roughly three-quarters of the Society's cash reserves in the fall of 1930. Like another purchase of a historic building, eighty years later, it was an extraordinary (though carefully calculated) risk, taken in pursuit of a once-in-a-life opportunity.

1 "Wills Property to Historical Society," *Vineyard Gazette,* 21 September 1930.

DCHS displays at the Cooke House, probably from the 1930s or 1940s.

The other heirs to the Cooke House signed over their interests, and by the end of the year the Society owned it outright. As a headquarters, the old structure had significant drawbacks: It had no central heat, no electricity, and only indoor plumbing, which made it less-than-attractive for a permanent staff and less-than-comfortable in the colder months of the year. Remedying any of those deficiencies would have cost significant amounts of money and, more importantly, compromised the Colonial-era elements of the house, which represented a large part of its appeal to the Society.[2] The effects of these drawbacks were muted, however, by what the

2 This history—summarized briefly in Doris C. Stoddard, "Thomas Cooke, Thomas Cooke, Jr., and the Cooke House," *Dukes County Intelligencer*, May 1976, 121-130—will be the subject of an article in the August 2023 issue of the *Quarterly*.

Society was—and what the *Vineyard* was—in the 1930s. The DCHS was an association of like-minded amateurs that occasionally met to exchange information and transact business. There was no paid staff tasked with managing the organization and working on the collections, and thus no need for year-round offices and workspaces to house them. Martha's Vineyard was a small fishing and farming community that, for ten weeks between late June and Labor Day, became a bustling summer resort. Tourist Season—even including its late-spring and early-fall "shoulders"—fell squarely within the warm months of the year, when neither heat nor artificial light was required to make the Cooke House feel welcoming.

Another early display in the Cooke House.

The Cooke House was a year-round symbol of the Society's presence in Edgartown, but its identity changed seasonally. From mid-September to mid-May, it was a private space where the Society stored its collections and occasionally held meetings. From late May to early September, it was a quasi-public space that members of the public were invited to visit, in order to experience the Society's collections first-hand.

"Historic artifacts, displayed in a historic house," was a well-established concept in the United States by the 1930s, and the Society embraced it. A summer visitor who stepped into the Cooke House in the late 1930s would have walked through rooms filled with historic furniture, past walls hung with gilt-framed portraits, other artwork, and framed original documents. Wall nooks, mantelpieces, and cupboards were filled with dishes, candlesticks, and other small items. Butter churns and trunks stood in out-of-the-way spaces. Whaling tools leaned in the corners. Outside on the lawn, near the kitchen door, one of the last surviving examples of a Nomans Land Boat (donated to the Society in 1937) sat in a wooden cradle. Photographs believed to have been taken in the 1930s show the rooms of the Cooke House far less crowded with

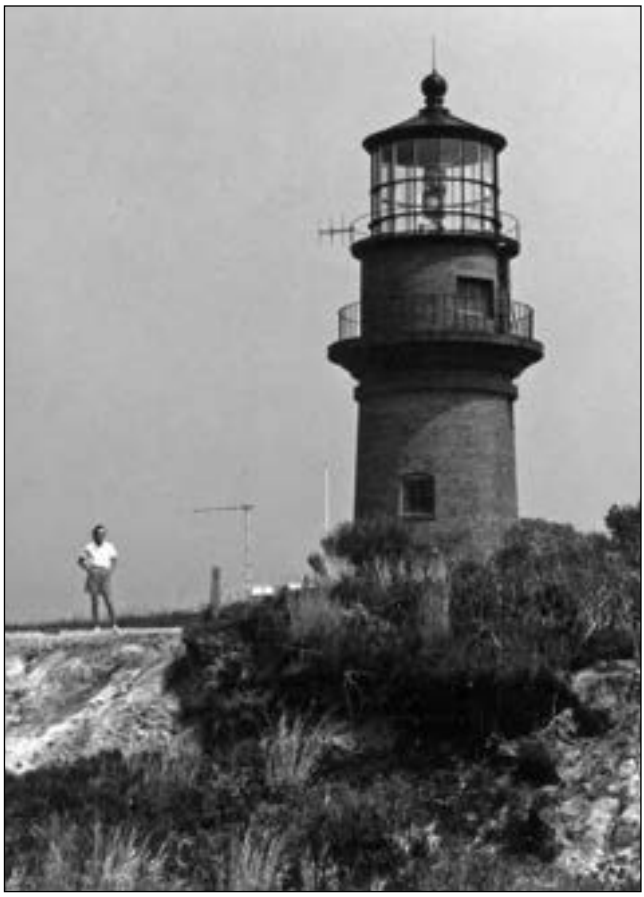
artifacts than they would one day be. They also reveal the near-complete lack of labels, let alone interpretive text, to identify or explain the collection items to visitors. The objects were, as in most historic-house museums of the era, expected to speak for themselves, or to have volunteers for the Society speak for them.

No larger narrative—no attempt to coherently tell the story of the Island as a whole, or any specific section of it—shaped the arrangement and presentation of the objects on display in the Cooke House. The displays of the 1930s and 1940s were predicated on the idea was that the objects on display were interesting *because* they were old, and *because* they were connected to the Vineyard. Individual items connected to well-known individuals or famous events—a sword carried during the Revolution, or a letter-of-appointment for a local customs collector signed by Abraham Lincoln—might acquire additional interest from those associations, but the Society's focus was still on the acquisition, and display, of individual artifacts. The transition to using artifacts as a means of interpreting history would be decades long, and slow, in coming.

The Great Expansion
1945-1960

Seventeen years and a world war separated the Society's acquisition of the Cooke House from its purchase of the adjacent parcel of land, described in Council-meeting minutes as "the Meyer Property" The new property, empty of buildings, represented the potential for expansion: space for a multi-building campus that—although the Cooke House would remain its centerpiece—would meet the Society's needs better than the colonial-era house alone. The Meyer Property cost the Society $4,000 for the land alone, but the figure was less daunting in an era of burgeoning postwar prosperity than it had been in the early years of the Great Depression. Once acquired, it opened up unprecedented opportunities.

The first of those opportunities surfaced in 1951, when electrical service was established in Gay Head (now Aquinnah) on April 14. The availability of electricity in Gay Head meant that the Gay Head Light could, at last, be electrified and automated. Incandescent bulbs would replace the existing kerosene-burning lamp as a light source, and an electric motor would replace the gravity-driven weight-and-clockwork mechanism that rotated the light in order to produce its distinctive white-white-white-red flash pattern. Electrification would render the Gay Head Light's first-order Fresnel lens obsolete after ninety-five years of service, and the Coast Guard was eager to retire it. A technological marvel when it was installed atop the then-new brick tower in 1856, the beehive-shaped lens used 1008 precision-cut glass prisms to focus the modest light from a whale oil (later kerosene) lamp into a beam visible for up to 25 miles. The new electric lamps could achieve similar results without a lens, at



The electrification of the Gay Head Light enabled a two-tiered electric beacon (shown here in 1987) to replace the Fresnel Lens, which was donated to the DCHS. This beacon was, itself. replaced in the 1990s and is now on display at the Martha's Vineyard Museum.

a fraction of the maintenance costs.[1]

Aware of the lens's historic value, the Coast Guard solicited offers from museums interested in displaying it.[2] The Museum of Science in Boston, eager for a Fresnel lens to display in the new facility it was building at Science Park on the Charles River, had tried to acquire the second-order lens from Sankaty Head Light on Nantucket when it was decommissioned in 1950. When the Sankaty lens went instead to the Nantucket Historical Association, Museum of Science director J. Bradford Washburn put in a bid for the Gay Head lens when *it* became available. The Museum of Science was thus the front-runner, but the DCHS—in an April 16, 1951 letter citing the precedent of local stewardship set in Nantucket the year before—requested that the Gay Head lens come to Edgartown. The plan drew wide support from Vineyarders, and DCHS president Gerald Chittenden lobbied both the Coast Guard and the Massachusetts congressional delegation on its behalf. Washburn formally withdrew the Science Museum's request for the lens on June 8, 1951 and the Coast Guard approved the DCHS bid "in principle" on June 13.

The Coast Guard's approval stipulated that the DCHS must have a

1 William Waterway, *Gay Head Light: The First Lighthouse on Martha's Vineyard* (History Press, 2014), pp. 125-129.

2 The transfer of the Fresnel lens from the Coast Guard to the Society is discussed briefly in Waterway, *Gay Head Light* (above) and documented in news clippings in VREF 1111.002 (Transfer of Gay Head Lens to DCHS).

structure capable of housing and protecting the lens—eight-and-a-half feet high and weighing over six tons—ready to receive it.[3] The Society unveiled plans for one in July 1951: a fifteen-foot-high replica of the upper portion of the Gay Head Light that would allow visitors to see the lens as it had appeared when in service. Funded with donations from the public, including dimes and quarters contributed by Vineyard schoolchildren, the tower was built in the spring of 1952. The Fresnel was formally decommissioned and disassembled at Gay Head in June, and ownership was transferred to the DCHS that summer. Fitted with an electric light, it was illuminated on summer evenings. Charles Vanderhoop, who tended it for thirteen years (1920-1933) as keeper of the Gay Head Light, presided over its first illumination in Edgartown.[4]

The Fresnel Tower and the original (1952) Library building at the DCHS campus.

The Fresnel tower cost the Society $10,000 to build in 1952. The following year, a Library ($14,000) and a boat shed ($2,450) joined it on the former Meyer property. The boat shed, modeled on the carriage barn of the Chilmark Methodist Church, was a one-story, open-plan building with three wide doorways. It gave the Society a place to safely store, and permanently display, its growing collection of artifacts too large for the Cooke House: the Nomans Land boat, a racing whaleboat built by Uriah Morse (donated in 1934), a hand-pumped Button fire engine (1937),[5] and a dugout canoe and three surfboards from Hawaii (1941). The Library—a single-story building with an unfinished attic above and a semi-finished

3 A bid to keep the lens in Gay Head, launched in late 1951 by residents of the town, made little headway because its backers had neither for a facility to house the lens nor for an organization to look after it.

4 A. Bowdoin Van Riper, "Gay Head Light," *MV Museum Quarterly,* Nov 2019, pp. 3-25, on pp. 21-23.

5 The engine, donated by the Edgartown Fire Department after decades of use, is currently on display at the Fire Museum behind the Edgartown Fire Station.

The Boat Shed at the DCHS campus.

basement below the reading room on the main floor—served a multitude of needs. The attic and basement provided much needed storage space for logbooks, papers, maps, and other small collection items, and the reading room served as meeting space for the Society and workspace for visiting researchers. Designed in the style of a small nineteenth-century New England house, the Library had two features that the expanding Society saw as critical. First, it was fireproof, with cinder block walls rising above a poured concrete foundation. Second, unlike the Cooke House, it was equipped with the full mid-century range of modern conveniences: electricity, indoor plumbing, and central heat. An oil-fired furnace in the basement provided hot water to the sinks and, via cast-iron radiators, heat to the main floor and basement.

The Cooke House fitted, almost invisibly, into the neighborhood that had grown up around it in the 180 years since it was built. The three structures erected by the Society in 1952-1953 stood out from both the neighborhood and the Cooke House itself. The Cooke House had been designed as a dwelling and, even in its second life as a museum, it remained one: The artifacts inside were arranged so as to suggest what the house might have looked like when it *was* inhabited. The new structures were different. They were purpose-built museum buildings: designed, from the ground up, to serve the Society's needs for work, meeting, and collection-storage space. With their construction—and the establishment of a two-lot "campus" at the corner of Cooke and School Streets—the Dukes

Space for researchers was at a premium in the first-floor reading room of the Library, which (prior to 1977) also served as office space and a display area for collections.

County Historical Society took its first step toward being a museum.

A few blocks up School Street from the Society's newly expanded campus, the Martha's Vineyard Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution was reaching a different kind of turning point. The chapter had, for roughly half a century, owned a building at the corner of School and Main Streets that served as a meeting space and a storage and display area for its historical collections. In 1954, faced with shrinking membership rolls and a dwindling treasury, the chapter voted to sell the building to the Dukes County Savings Bank (now part of Martha's Vineyard Bank). The bank accepted, and the Martha's Vineyard Chapter turned over some of its historical collections—more than 450 items—to the Dukes County Historical Society. The DAR donation was as diverse as it was expansive. It included scrimshaw and logbooks, deeds and historic letters, buttons and boat bungs. It included gilt-framed portraits of whaling masters—including Thomas Adams Norton of Edgartown, who captained the legendary *Charles W. Morgan* on her first voyage in 1841-1845—and a pair of framed poems by Nancy Luce, handwritten in her distinctive folk-art calligraphy.

The Society's proximity to the Martha's Vineyard Chapter headquarters smoothed the way for the donation, as did the availability of storage space in the newly constructed Library. The two organizations also, however,

Mid-twentieth-century displays in the Library (above) and the Cooke House (on facing page) reflect the Society's focus on topics such as whaling, religion, warfare, and the domestic lives of well-to-do Vineyarders.

shared similar membership demographics, similar views of history, and similar collecting agendas. The collections of the Edgartown DAR merged seamlessly into those of the DCHS because, in the mid-1950s, the two organizations shared a common sense of what topics in Vineyard history were important, and what objects were meaningful. The donation thus expanded the size and depth of the Society's collections without significantly broadening their scope. The Mayhew missionary enterprise, the whaling industry, the Revolutionary and Civil Wars, and everyday life among the Island's prosperous, leisured, literate Yankee elite remained the focus.

A similar vision shaped the Society's return to publishing in the immediate postwar era. *Bartholomew Gosnold and Martha's Vineyard,* appeared in 1946. A twenty-page version, adding nine pages of introduction and three of notes and bibliography, followed in 1950 under the title *A Voyage of Discovery to the Southern Part of Norumbega.*[6] Both were the work of Warner Foote Gookin—an Episcopal clergyman, teacher, and summer resident of Oak Bluffs—who had retired to the Island in 1944. A dedicated member of the DCHS, Gookin held the office of Historian within the Society. Gookin's approach to writing history mirrored the Society's approach

6 Both publications are available for download in the "Research" tab of the Museum website.

to preserving it. Like Banks, he focused on assembling masses of factual detail rather than on using those details as a basis for narrating, analyzing, or contextualizing historical events. Gookin's style of research reached its peak in *Capawack: Alias Martha's Vineyard,* a fifty-page monograph on the name of the Island published by the Society, in hard covers, in 1947. A deep dive into a narrow topic—the geographical and linguistic minutiae of early European encounters with one corner of New England—*Capawack* is meticulously researched but narratively dry and interpretively barren.

The Society's next publication, *Martha's Vineyard: A Short History and Guide* (1956), was really two books in one. The first half is an 86-page history of the Island in five chapters, penned by a total of eight different, well-known Vineyard authors. The second half is a 74-page driving tour of the Island written by Eleanor Ransom Mayhew with input from fourteen named collaborators and uncounted others "called by phone or accosted on the street corner" for the purpose of filling in details. Both halves reflect the Society as it was in the mid-1950s. The historical essays center on familiar themes (religion, whaling, war, and commerce), and—despite brief, broad nods to those who plowed the fields, salted the cod, and pulled the oars of whaleboats—the story they tell is centered on the Yankee elite. The tour is a cornucopia of facts—names, dates, distances, and events—about, seemingly, every significant street, landmark, and historic structure on the Island: enough to satisfy the most zealous disciple of Sgt. Friday or

Mr. Gradgrind.[7] It is, like the works of Banks and Gookin, invaluable as a reference, but deadly dull as a narrative.[8]

Despite the heavy mantle of seriousness in which it came wrapped,[9] *Martha's Vineyard: A Short History and Guide* was, in a modest way, revolutionary. The "DCHS Publications" series, and the works of Banks and Gookin, were produced by members of the Society writing for people like themselves: antiquarian collector-scholars fascinated by historical relics and the past they represented. *Short History and Guide* was written for members of the general public for whom history was a subject of interest but not a full-fledged obsession. The authors of three of the five narrative chapters had already written full-length books about the Vineyard that had sold well with general audiences. One of them, Henry Beetle Hough, was a (minor) national figure, thanks to the success of his memoir *Country Editor* (1940). The publication of *Short History and Guide* was not a transformative moment in the Society's history, like the acquisition of the Cooke House or the postwar establishment of an Edgartown campus, but it marked the beginning of the transition from inward-focused society to outward-focused museum.

7 Sergeant Joe Friday of the radio (later television) police procedural series *Dragnet* routinely admonished witnesses to supply him with "just the facts." Thomas Gradgrind, the humorless schoolmaster of Charles Dickens' *Hard Times,* declared: "Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else. You can only form the minds of reasoning animals upon Facts: nothing else will ever be of any service to them."

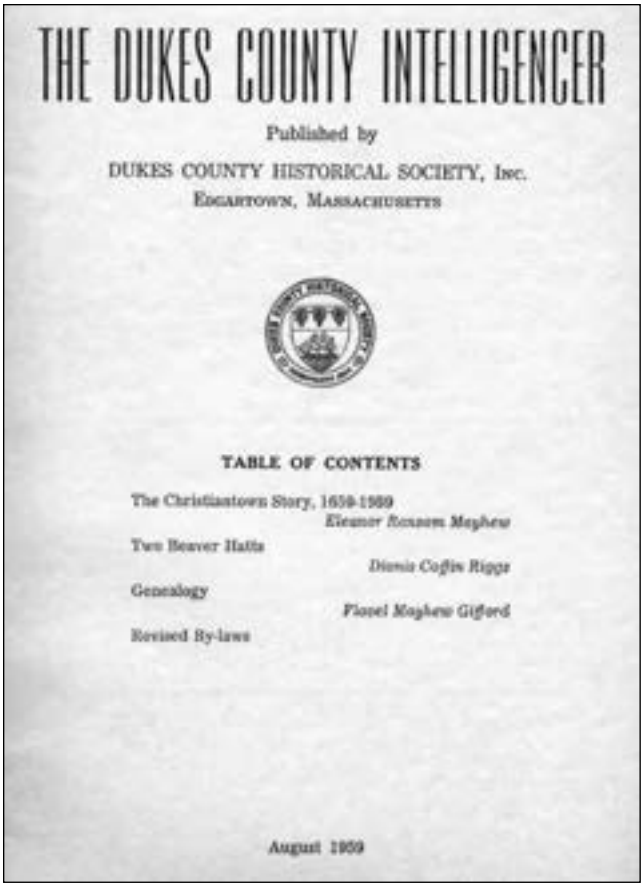
8 The "Tour" section shares the geographic organization, but not the whimsical spirit, of C. G. Hine's *Martha's Vineyard* (1908). Hine uses the natural and artificial landmarks he describes as hooks for entertaining (if not always well-documented) stories from the Island's past. Mayhew's descriptions are brisk to the point of being telegraphic, without a colorful character or amusing anecdote in sight.

9 Even the cover, decorated only with the title and the seal of the society, was bland. The hardcover edition had muted gold lettering on dull dark-green cloth; the paperback was muted purple on tan.

Turning Outward
1960-1980

The Dukes County Historical Society had declared itself, in 1923, to be an organization focused on "collecting, preserving, and occasionally publishing" historical material related to Martha's Vineyard and its neighboring islands. Its evolution, over the succeeding four decades, was shaped by those goals. The acquisition of the Cooke House in 1930, and the creation of an Edgartown campus after World War II, were driven primarily by its need to safely house the increasing numbers of items (and increasingly large items) that were offered to it. Most of the Society's publications, between 1923 and 1960 were, likewise, acts of collection and preservation. The third volume of Banks' *History* (1926) gathered, in a single book, vast quantities of Vineyard genealogical information that had previously been scattered in town, county, church, and family records. Gookin's publications in the late 1940s made once-obscure information about the voyages of Gosnold and other early explorers readily and inexpensively accessible.

Relations with the public were a secondary (or possibly even tertiary) consideration. The Society welcomed visitors to the Cooke House and (later) the other buildings of its expanding Edgartown campus, but serving visitors was incidental to, and taking steps to actively court them was well beyond, its mission. The Society's archives from the 1930s through the 1960s include dues notices and fundraising appeals for special projects—the acquisition of the Cooke House, the building of the Fresnel tower—but not brochures, posters, or other materials designed to advertise it to nonmembers. This approach was common to Vineyard organizations that maintained museum-like collections: The Camp Meeting Association, the



THE DUKES COUNTY INTELLIGENCER

Published by

DUKES COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY, Inc.

EDGARTOWN, MASSACHUSETTS

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August 1959

Cover of the first (August 1959) issue of the *Dukes County Intelligencer.*

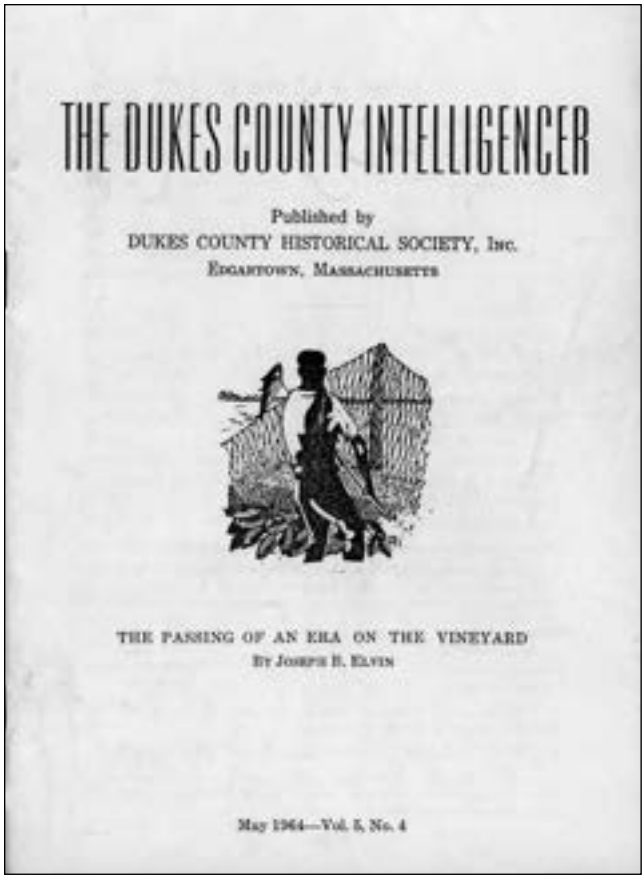
Seaman's Bethel, and the DAR. Their collections were open to the public, but serving the public was incidental to their various primary missions. So it was with the DCHS, which saw itself serving (first and foremost) the needs of posterity rather than present-day visitors.

The *Dukes County Intelligencer,* the first issue of which carried a cover date of August 1959, was—initially, and for many years afterward—an extension of that mission. Published by the Society and mailed to members as a benefit of membership, it was (like the DCHS Publications series of the 1920s) an insular publication: a tool for the Society to talk to itself. Even its name was a kind of shibboleth, rewarding insider knowledge and rebuffing the casual interest from outsiders. "Martha's Vineyard" had, by 1959, become a widely recognized place name, but "Dukes County" remained a geographical curiosity known only to residents and those who scrutinized the masthead of the *Vineyard Gazette*. "Intelligencer" was an archaic word for a person or thing that conveys news or other useful information. It had been used by Jonathan Swift and Thomas Sheridan for a short-lived (1728-1729) journal of political commentary, and subsequently attached to a handful of newspapers in small, provincial North American cities.[1] Combined, they formed a title calculated to appeal to a middle-class, antiquarian-minded audience fascinated by the minutiae of the past: the Society's core audience.

The early issues of the *Intelligencer* were slim publications printed (be-

1 Belleville, Ontario (1834); Edwardsville, IL and Wheeling, WV (both 1862); Ames, IA (1868); and Doylestown, PA (1876).

ginning with the second, November 1959 issue) in black ink on glossy white paper, a look it would retain until the late 1970s. Illustrations, a feature from the beginning, were a mixture of photographs, line art, and linoleum-cut prints by local artist and DCHS member Sidney Noyes Riggs. Members of the Society received each new issue free in the mail, and nonmembers could purchase them from the Society for fifty cents a copy. A statement by founding editor Gale Huntington, printed inside the front cover of the first issue, declared that the *Intelligencer* would "present brief articles dealing with the history, geology, archaeology, and folk lore of Martha's Vineyard and the Elizabeth Islands, that will be both of general and scholarly interest."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THE PASSING OF AN ERA ON THE VINEYARD
BY JOSEPH B. ELVIN

May 1964—Vol. 5, No. 4

The linoleum cuts of Sidney Noyes Riggs, husband of poet and author Dionis Coffin Riggs, were familiar sights to 1960s readers of the *Intelligencer.*

That was the plan. The reality, in the *Intelligencer's* first decade of publication, was somewhat different. News of the Society's activities appeared regularly in the early years, despite being of *neither* general nor scholarly interest. The very first issue, for example, devoted three pages to revisions in the Society's by-laws. The first three issues of 1964 each included a feature headed "Society News," and the fourth contained reports of the annual meeting. The November 1965 issue included reports from the President (Nelson Coon), Genealogist (Flavel Gifford), and Curator (Dorothy R. Scoville).[2] Reprints of documents from the archives—diaries, deeds, logbooks, songs, poems, fliers, and even (in November 1960) a page of

2 Curator was then a volunteer position, concerned primarily with record-keeping and held by a member of the Society with no particular qualification beyond an interest in historical artifacts.

historic holiday recipes—were also regular features. Themed collections of historic photographs with brief captions first appeared in 1963 and became a regular feature by mid-decade. "Martha's Vineyard in the 1880s and 1890s" (August 1965) was followed by "Glimpses of Vineyard Haven Harbor (November 1965), "Wesleyan Grove Campground" (November 1966), "Edgartown—Some Old Photographs" (November 1967) and more.

All of this material was a straightforward extension of the work that the Society had been doing since 1923: collecting, preserving, and—when circumstances allowed—displaying relics of the past. The reprinted documents and historic photographs that filled the early issues of the *Intelligencer,* like the exhibits in the rooms of the Cooke House or the glass-doored cabinets of the Library, were exhibition without interpretation. The items on display were consistently identified, but rarely (and never deeply) contextualized. They were presented as objects of interest in their own right, rather than as details that illuminated the larger story of the Island's (or the region's) past.

The contemporary articles interspersed with the reprints took, for the most part, a similar approach. Pieces like Lloyd C. M. Hare's "Vineyard Whaling Captains and Fabulous Frisco (February 1960), John M. Leavens' "Recollections of Vineyard Wildfowling" (May 1963), and Henry Beetle Hough's "Martha's Vineyard and the Theatre" (August 1966) are, like the first two volumes of Banks' *History,* chronicles. They are compilations of historical facts about a particular historical topic, arranged according to chronology or geography. They were (and are) valuable to scholars and to members of the public with a deep interest in the subject at hand. Especially in the later part of the decade, when articles and issues grew longer, they often achieved extraordinary depth. Joseph Elvin's "The Passing of an Era on the Vineyard" (May 1964) is, behind its vague and unsuggestive title, still the definitive study of the last years of the once-thriving trap-fishing industry. Allen Keith's "Mammals of Martha's Vineyard," which filled all forty pages of the November 1969 issue, remains an excellent introduction to the subject for non-biologists. Their depth, however, came with a resolute narrowness. Alice Forbes Howland's article on the Pasque Island Club (February 1962) says a great deal about that specific institution, but little about the social, cultural, and economic forces that gave rise to it. Dorothy Cottle Poole's biography of Wampanoag whaleman-turned-medicine-man Napoleon Madison ("Full Circle," August 1968) reveals much about *his* life, but little about the community—Gay Head (now Aquinnah)—that shaped him.

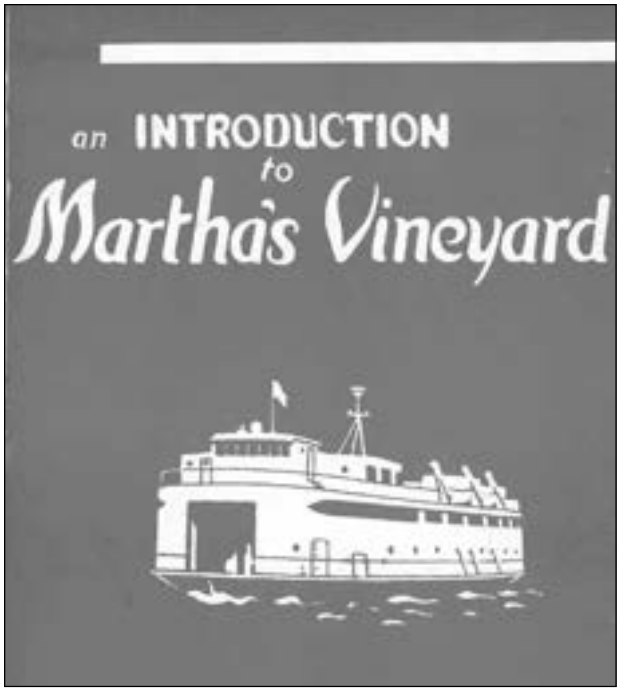
Gale Huntington's twenty-page "An Archaeological Study from Martha's Vineyard," which occupied the entirety of the second (November 1959) issue, was an early outlier to this pattern: a meticulously detailed

report on his excavations at the Bayes Norton site at the head of Lagoon Pond. By the end of the 1960s, such ambitious efforts were becoming, if not common, at least *more* common. Edward L. Thomas's "The New Bedford, Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket Steamboat Company" (November 1968) was distilled from the corporate history of early Cape-and-Islands steamship lines that had been his 1966 MA thesis at the University Rhode Island.[3] James Richardson's "Death's Heads, Cherubs, Urns, and Willows: A Stylistic Analysis of Martha's Vineyard Gravestones" (February 1969) went beyond a straightforward catalog of designs to ask how fashions in Island headstones reflected those on the mainland, and whether Vineyard stones were produced by mainland artisans. Joseph H. Waters' "Temporal Fluctuations in Marine Mollusc Populations as Indicated by Pre-Columbian Shell Heaps on Martha's Vineyard" (May 1969) could have been published in a professional journal of paleontology or archaeology. The *Intelligencer* was growing up.

The growth continued as the 1960s gave way to the 1970s and the journal entered its second decade of publication. Articles became longer, the range of topics broader, and reprints of documents more selective. Amid the thematic collections of historic photos, accession reports, and "DCHS News" columns, there were a half-dozen important articles on Wampanoag history and culture, the first profile of a Vineyarder of African heritage (Dorothy Cottle Poole's "Antone Fortes, Whaleman" in May 1970), and explorations of Vineyard whalers' cultural impact in the Arctic (August 1971) and Peru (February 1977). The *Intelligencer* also began to establish itself as a natural venue for groundbreaking articles on Vineyard-specific topics. Janet Van Tassel surveyed the Island's mid-nineteenth-century flirtation with industrial manufacturing (November 1975), Peter Colt Josephs documented a trio of brick barns in Chilmark that resulted from it (May 1974), and Gene Baer resurrected the decades-long history of the Island's horse-drawn and electric trolley lines (May 1977).

Alongside the *Intelligencer,* the Society published a growing range of single-topic books and pamphlets under its name. Having entered the reprint business in 1949 with a reissue of Joseph Chase Allen's *Tales and Trails of Martha's Vineyard* (1938) it went on to reprint Emma Mayhew Whiting and Henry Beetle Hough's *Whaling Wives of Martha's Vineyard* (1952) in 1965, and George Fred Tilton's autobiography *Cap'n George Fred Himself* (1932) in 1969. Even more significant was its decision (also in 1969) to issue a facsimile reprint edition of all three volumes of Charles Banks' *History of Martha's Vineyard* (1911, 1926), making the increasingly scarce

3 The thesis itself is in RU 131 (Steamers and Ferries Collection), Box 2, Folders 23-25.



Gale Huntington's Introduction to Martha's Vineyard (1969) began an ambitious DCHS publishing program that lasted through the 1970s.

and expensive set widely available again.

Beginning around 1970, the Society shifted to original publications: Gale Huntington's *An Introduction to Martha's Vineyard* (1969), Dorothy Scoville's *Indian Legends of Martha's Vineyard* (1970) and *Martha's Vineyard Shipwrecks* (1972), Dionis Coffin Riggs' *People to Remember: 300 Years in Tisbury and West Tisbury* (1972), and Dorothy Cottle Poole's *A New Vineyard* (1975) and *Vineyard Sampler* (1978).[4] It also "reskinned" three single-topic issues of the *Intelligencer* in newly designed glossy covers and sold them as stand-alone pamphlets.[5]

The Society's physical campus also grew in the 1970s. A gatehouse and flagpole were erected at the corner of Cooke and School Streets, and a garden filled with Colonial era plants and brick-paved walkways was establiushed behind the Cooke House. An addition to the Library building was completed in 1977, doubling its size and providing additional storage space for collections in its basement and attic. The original Library building, though constructed with utilitarian concrete-block walls to fulfill the Society's desire for a "fireproof" building, was filled with elaborate architectural details: "twelve-over-twelve" windows, a fireplace, built-in bookcases, plank floors, and attractive wooden railings and bannisters around the stairs leading to the basement. The addition, however, was utilitarian in both design and construction. Its wood-framed walls, sheathed with plywood on the outside and drywall on the inside, were interrupted only by a handful of narrow, horizontal windows placed just below the ceil-

4 Scoville's *Shipwrecks* is still in print, and available in the Museum shop; the rest, long out of print, are available to download from the Museum website.

5 Joseph Elvin, *The Fishes in Vineyard Waters* (originally published as the February 1965 *Intelligencer*); Allan Keith, *Mammals of Martha's Vineyard* (November 1969); and James Freeman, *Dukes County 1807* (May 1971).

The expanded Library building, with the original, windowed 1953 structure in the foreground and the (nearly) windowless 1977 addition in the background. Photo by Jill Bouck.

ing. Its flooring was plywood, covered with foam padding and wall-to-wall synthetic carpet. The cedar-shingled exterior—chosen to match the Cooke House and, by extension, the neighborhood—was the only visible concession to aesthetics over function.

Christened the "Francis Foster Museum" in memory of the founding secretary-treasurer of the Society, the first floor of the Library addition gave the Society something it had never had before: A blank canvas of a room—open floor space, surrounded by smooth, uninterrupted walls—in which it could stage exhibits and display collections. The exhibits that filled the new gallery, mounted on the walls and laid out in custom-built display cases, were denser and more complex than those in the Cooke House. They looked and felt (as was the Society's intention) like a museum rather than a historic house, and they were designed—like the original Library building of 1952—to be accessible to the public (at least for a few hours a week) throughout the year, not just in the warm-weather months of June through September. Behind the new look, however, lay familiar content. A visitor from 1923 would not have been surprised, let alone puzzled, by anything they found in the new displays. There were logbooks and whaling tools, scrimshaw and exotic artifacts brought back from distant lands, immense gilt-framed oil portraits and tiny Daguerreotypes. There was also, amid scrupulously precise labels specifying names, dates, and

The Francis Foster Museum, on the first floor of the Library addition, gave the DCHS its first purpose-built exhibition space.

donors of individual objects, very little attempt at interpretation. Visitors were invited to admire the collections but—as in the Cooke House—not to contemplate how they fitted into the larger picture of Vineyard history. The Francis Foster Museum reflected an organization that, for all its post-war growth, had not substantially changed.

The Dukes County Historical Society was, in 1977, still very much a *society*: a group of like-minded people who banded together for a common purpose and elected officers from within their ranks. The Francis Foster Museum was—like the *Intelligencer* and the other publishing ventures—a project undertaken *by* the Society in the service of the common purpose that motivated the members. Other Island organizations of the era had similar projects. The DAR and the Seaman's Bethel in Vineyard Haven, the Camp Meeting Association in Oak Bluffs, and the Edgartown Fire Department all maintained collections of interesting items related to their mission in spaces that the public was encouraged to visit. None of those organizations, however, regarded the maintenance of the collections and the management of the space in which they were displayed as their primary mission. Not until 1981, when Sydna White established the Tisbury Museum in the Jireh Luce House on Beach Street, did the Island gain an organization formed for the specific purpose of displaying and interpreting historical artifacts to the public.

South Pacific artifacts, brought to the Vineyard by whalers, on display in the Francis Foster Museum.

The Society was also, in 1977, almost exclusively an organization of amateurs. To describe it as such is not to denigrate it. Many of the Society's members were highly accomplished, and the Society as a group was capable, collectively achieving extraordinary things (like the postwar expansion of the campus, and the acquisition of the Fresnel lens). The members, however, were amateurs in both the technical and figurative senses of the word. Most did not have formal credentials in history, archaeology, or historic preservation, nor did they derive their income from those fields. Rather, they pursued those subjects (as the Latin root of "amateur" implies) out of love—specifically a love for the Island and its history. The members' interest in the Island's history and the artifacts that embodied it remained, as it had been since the 1920s, the glue that bound the Society together. Each member's interest, however, was personal and idiosyncratic: specific to *them* as an individual. The Society's holdings, and the contents of the exhibits, reflected—in the 1970s as they had in the 1920s—the sum of those individual interests. The Revolution and the Civil War, whalers and missionaries, elaborate housewares and gilt-framed portraits still loomed large. Eras, demographic groups, and aspects of human experience to which the members felt little personal connection remained underrepresented or entirely absent.

Change was coming, however, and over the course of the 1980s its effects were increasingly apparent. The Society had, by the end of the de-

Scrimshaw on display in the Francis Foster Museum.

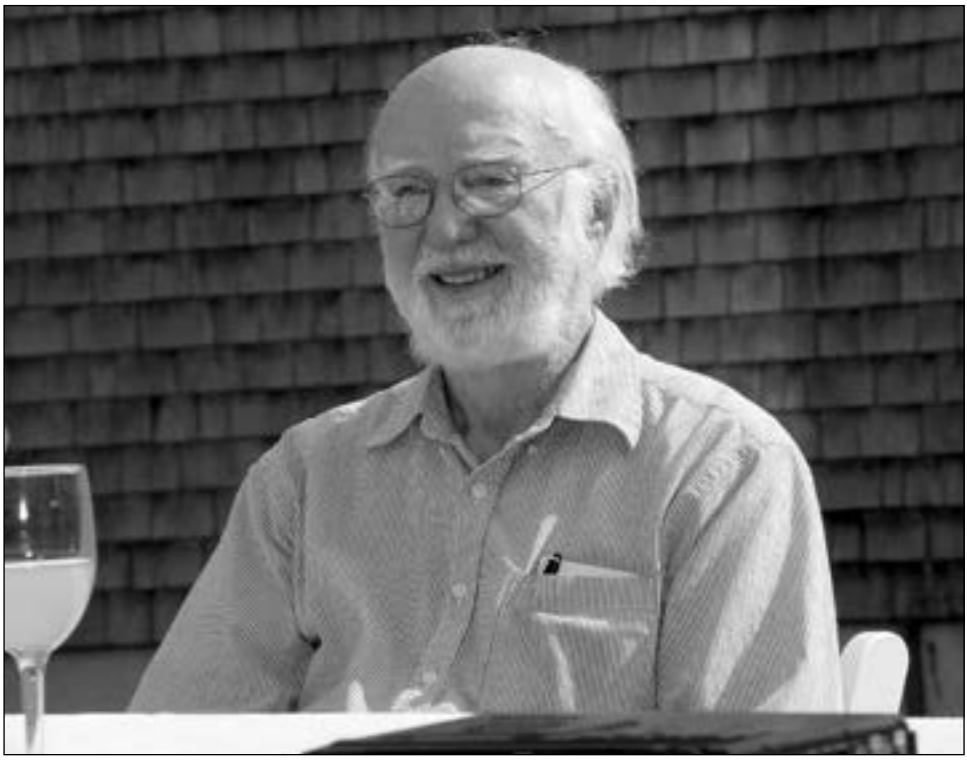
cade, expanded its Edgartown campus for the third and final time; hired its first professional staff members; and significantly broadened and deepened its engagement with the wider Island community. Most importantly, it had begun to broaden its approach to Island history, and —for the first time—to examine the history of Islanders whose lives were unlike those of its core membership.

New Horizons And Further Expansion
1980-2000

The broadening of the Society's historical consciousness in the last two decades of the twentieth century was a group project. Many hands contributed to it, and it was guided by their individual enthusiasms rather than any larger, centralized plan. Two individuals, however, stand out for the breadth and depth of their impact: *Intelligencer* editor Arthur "Art" Railton and oral historian Linsey Lee.

Born in Regina, Saskatchewan in 1915, Railton—who studied journalism at the University of Iowa—served in the Army Air Forces for the duration of World War II.[1] After the war, he moved from Midwestern newspapers to *Popular Mechanics,* where he was automotive editor, and finally to the communication department at Volkswagen. He retired from Volkswagen in 1977 and moved with his wife Marjorie to the Vineyard, which he had first visited as a boy of 8 in 1923 and to which he had returned in adulthood to visit an aunt who had married a Chilmark fisherman. He met Gale Huntington through his aunt and in 1978—now retired and living in Edgartown—agreed to take over the editorship of the *Intelligencer* on a temporary basis. Huntington, who had founded the journal in 1959 and edited it from 1959-1961 and again from 1964-1977, had retired from the editor's chair on the grounds that, at seventy-seven, he was "too old" for the work. Railton, who was sixty-two when he took the job, agreed to do it for a year until a permanent editor could be found. He stayed for twenty-eight years and more than a hundred issues, retiring in 2006 at the age of ninety.

1 The next two paragraphs are based on, and quote from: Tom Dunlop, "Arthur Railton, Editor of Intelligencer, Chronicler of Island History, Dies at 95," *Vineyard Gazette*, 19 May 2011.

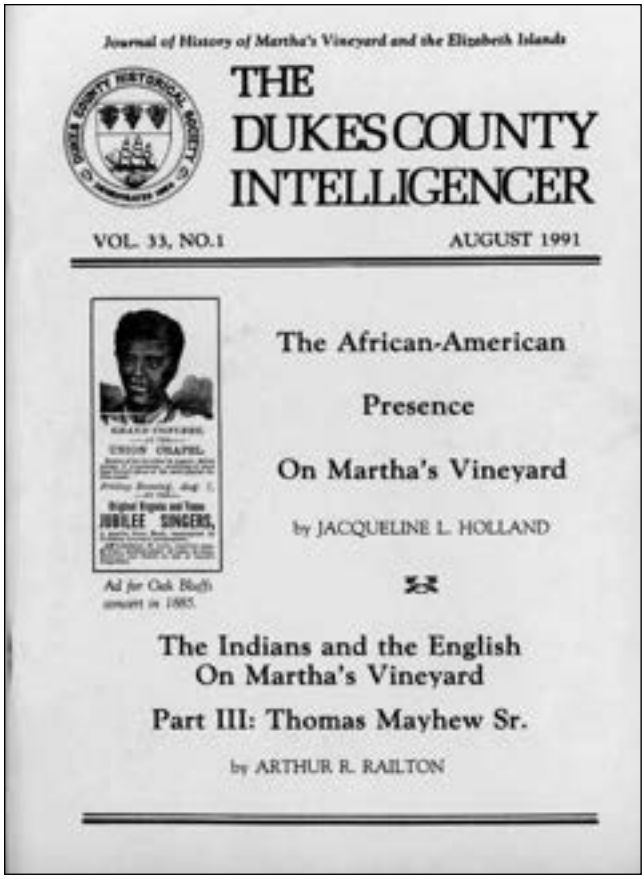


Art Railton in 2006, at the book launch party for *The History of Martha's Vineyard*. Photo by Nis Kildegaard

As editor of the *Intelligencer,* Railton remained a newspaperman at heart. Longtime *Gazette* writer Tom Dunlop noted, in Railton's 2011 obituary: "He often said that he had little interest in the big ideas of history, especially when it came to telling the tale of a small Island off the southeastern coast of Massachusetts. Instead, he thought of himself as a journalist who happened to be looking for stories that were old." His articles had a distinct feel: narrative rather than analytical, focused on the Island to the exclusion of the wider world, brimming with facts but short on interpretation. Dunlop, a master stylist himself, described Art's distinctive literary voice as "the elemental subject-verb-object Railton style — at once warm and journalistically skeptical, personal and yet bashfully removed from the action."

The *Intelligencer* expanded in size during Railton's editorial tenure, the average issue growing from 24 pages to 48 or even more, but it expanded even more in scope. Railton published Adelaide Cromwell's article on the rise of Oak Bluffs as an African American summer resort in 1984 and Jacqueline Holland's survey of African American life on the Island in 1991: the journal's first engagements with African American history. Richard Miller's article on "Two Vineyard 'Men of Color' Who Fought in the Civil War"

followed in the August 1994 issue, and the three were combined reprinted as "special issue" (really a thematic pamphlet) in 1997. The February 1981 issue carried two landmark articles on the Chilmark deaf community, one by Gale Huntington recounting his personal experiences with its last surviving members in the 1930s, and one by Nora Ellen Groce summarizing her PhD thesis, which became *Everyone Here Spoke Sign Language* (1985).


Journal of History of Martha's Vineyard and the Elizabeth Islands

THE DUKES COUNTY INTELLIGENCER

VOL. 33, NO.1 AUGUST 1991

The African-American Presence On Martha's Vineyard

by JACQUELINE L. HOLLAND

Ad for Oak Bluffs concert in 1885.

The Indians and the English On Martha's Vineyard

Part III: Thomas Mayhew Sr.

by ARTHUR R. RAILTON

Under Railton's editorship, the *Intelligencer* broadened its coverage of the lives of Vineyarders of color.

Railton's most important broadening of the Society's approach to history, however, was a five-part series of articles that appeared between August 1990 and February 1993 under the title "The English and the Indians on Martha's Vineyard." Nominally a chronicle of five generations of the Mayhew family's missionary activities on the Vineyard, the series also traced the process by which the Wampanoag lost most of their ancestral lands and were pressed by the English to abandon their traditional culture. Outside the series, Railton penned three more articles on the Wampanoag, writing about "the Vineyard's first Harvard men" in February 1988, Indian schools on the Vineyard in February 2000, and the case of Eunice Rocker (a multiracial woman from Cottage City who fought institutional discrimination in the courts and won) in February 2006. The Society had, since its inception, largely approached the Wampanoag as an all-but-vanished people, accessible primarily through their stone tools, pot sherds, and legends. Railton, with his journalist's eye, approached them first and foremost as people with stories—both individual and collective—waiting to be told.

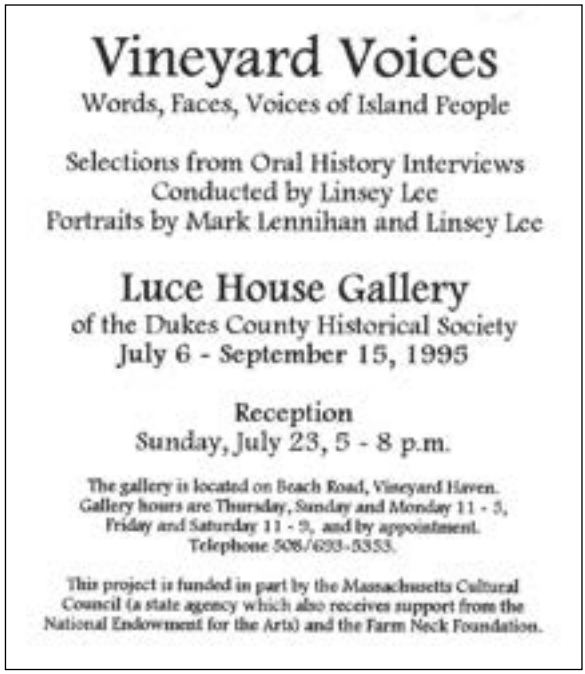
Linsey Lee in 2005, at the book launch party for *More Vineyard Voices.*

Linsey Lee's work on Vineyard history also revolved around people and their stories, but where Railton focused the stories of the dead, Lee gathered the stories of the living.[2] Born and raised outside of Boston, she visited the Island as a child and moved there year-round at three different points in her adult life, finally settling permanently in West Tisbury. Her fascination with Islanders and their stories began on the docks of Menemsha, where she listened to fishermen's stories of the old days while shucking scallops for Everett Poole's fish market. Her first formal interview, done for a college class in Irish folklore, featured Craig Kingsbury of Tisbury, who discoursed on rumrunning, cranberry farming, and the proper way to make moonshine, as well as rumors that he was responsible for introducing skunks to the Vineyard. She returned to the Island after college in the late 1970s and, with a $5,000 grant from philanthropist Mary Wakeman and donated audio equipment, began building a library of interviews. With a handful of exceptions, like photographer Alfred Eisenstaedt and artist Loïs Mailou Jones, Lee eschewed the famous in favor of everyday people. "It was really my focus to get the stories from people who aren't heard."

Lee's cast of interviewees was a true cross-section of the Vineyard's diverse population: Portuguese, African American, Wampanoag, and Yankee. Gratia Eldridge Harrington spoke of the devastating Gale of 1898, which she had lived through as a child. Dean Denniston recalled growing up in the Island's first majority-Black church, of which his father, Rev. Oscar E. Denniston, was pastor. Maximena "Maxie" Mello remembered coming to Edgartown as a new bride in the 1920s and being introduced, in rapid succession, to seven of her husband's Portuguese friends and neigh-

2 The next three paragraphs are based on, and quote from: Louisa Hufstadter, "Journey of the Heart for Collector of Island Stories," *Vineyard Gazette,* 4 August 2022.

bors—all named Manuel. Some of the stories Lee recorded involved world- changing events, such as Ted Morgan describing how he had parachuted into Normandy on D-Day as an Army medic. Others were deeply personal, such as Donald and Patsy Malonson of Aquinnah reflecting, in a joint interview, on how his traditional Wampanoag spiritual beliefs and her devout Christianity brought them, by separate paths, to what they regarded as a single truth. Collectively, the interviews provided a deep reservoir of insight into life on the Vineyard and the extraordinary lives of seemingly ordinary people.


Vineyard Voices
Words, Faces, Voices of Island People

Selections from Oral History Interviews
Conducted by Linsey Lee
Portraits by Mark Lennihan and Linsey Lee

Luce House Gallery
of the Dukes County Historical Society
July 6 - September 15, 1995

Reception
Sunday, July 23, 5 - 8 p.m.

The gallery is located on Beach Road, Vineyard Haven.
Gallery hours are Thursday, Sunday and Monday 11 - 5,
Friday and Saturday 11 - 9, and by appointment.
Telephone 508/693-5553.

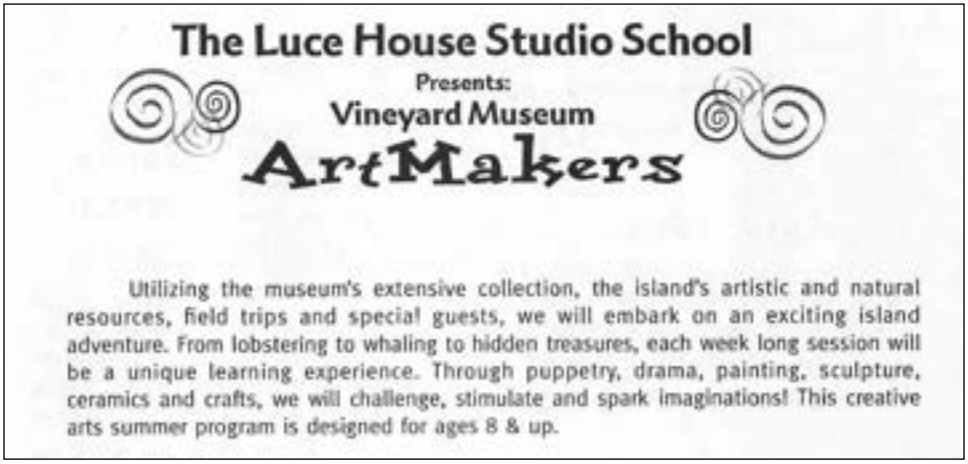
This project is funded in part by the Massachusetts Cultural Council (a state agency which also receives support from the National Endowment for the Arts) and the Farm Neck Foundation.

Vineyard Voices, the first in a three-book series of Linsey Lee's edited oral history excerpts, was published by the DCHS in 1995.

When she became affiliated with the Society in the early 1990s, first as a volunteer and then as a paid staff member, Lee brought this extraordinary resource with her. *Vineyard Voices,* a collection of edited interviews illustrated with black-and-white photos of the subjects, appeared under the Society's imprint in 1998, and *More Vineyard Voices* followed in 2005. The interviews themselves were added to the Society's archives where, over time, they joined others done by Nancy Safford, Robert Post, Helen Manning, Basil Welch, and others. Quotes from oral history interviews became a regular feature of, and—as the Society began integrating audio and video clips into gallery spaces in the 2010s—occasionally the focus of exhibits. The Society's oral history collections gave it, by the end of the twentieth century, a basis for claiming that its collections reflected the population of the Island, not just its own supporters.

This gradual broadening of the Society's focus coincided with a flurry of more tangible projects that, in the late 1980s and 1990s, expanded its physical presence and range of activities. The first of these was its absorption, in 1988, of the struggling Tisbury Museum and the acquisition of its headquarters: the 1804 Jireh Luce House on Beach Street in Vineyard Haven. The second was its acquisition, the following year, of the lot adjacent to its Edgartown campus and, with it, the Captain Francis Pease House.

The Jireh Luce House proved to be a white elephant. Nearly 200 years



The DCHS made several attempts, in the mid-1990s, to make the Jireh Luce House a viable adjunct to its Edgartown campus. None of them, including the children's art school advertised here, was successful.

old and on the National Register of Historic Places, it was in serious need of historically and architecturally sensitive repairs. It was also, however, too large and too distant from Edgartown to be easily managed by the Society's limited staff. After completing the necessary renovations in 1988-1989, the Society experimented with using the building as exhibit space, programming space, an art gallery, and an art school for young people. None of these uses, however, proved practical over the long term. Unable to use it effectively or provide for its upkeep, the Society closed it in 1998 and sold it to a private owner shortly afterward. The Tisbury Museum's collections remained behind, incorporated into the Society's holdings along with some of those from the now-merged DAR chapters, which had disbanded their museum on Main Street in Vineyard Haven in 1995.

The Pease House, in contrast, was a boon. The Society was, in the early 1990s guided by a governing council (equivalent to today's Board) led by a president, two vice-presidents, a secretary and a treasurer, but it was managed on a day-to-day basis by mixture of paid and volunteer staff: the director, curator, registrar, librarian/archivist, genealogist, and editor. The staff's technical expertise was critical to the Society's success. Thomas E. Norton and Marian R. Halperin, who served as the Society's first and second directors, brought the sensibility of a professional historian and curator (respectively) to the position, and Halperin (who had previously served as registrar) was instrumental in upgrading the Society's collection-management and cataloging. The acquisition of the Pease House provided office- and workspace for the staff and, beginning in 1993, a cohort of 4-6 summer interns. It added space for a gift shop (opened in 1991), for indoor programs during the cold-weather months, and for temporary exhibits—complements to the permanent ones in the Francis Foster Museum and

The original part of the Capt. Francis Pease house, seen here from School Street, was built in 1845; a rear wing was added in the early 1970s. The acquisition of the Pease House in 1990 gave the DCHS critically needed office, exhibit, and storage space.

the Cooke House—to be mounted. For all practical purposes, the Society's ability to *have* a calendar of changing, short-term exhibits began with the acquisition of the new building. The addition of the Pease House also brought with it the lot on which the house stood, effectively doubling the size of the Edgartown campus, adding a modest off-street parking area, and creating a second outdoor greenspace (between the Library and the Pease House) for outdoor programs in warm weather.

Along the older one bounded by the Cooke House, Gate House, Fresnel Tower, and Library, the new greenspace supported a growing slate of programs, including summer programs for children, concerts and ice cream socials for families, and the adults-only cocktail party that kicked off the Society's summer season each June. These outdoor spaces, able to seat much larger crowds than any room at the Society's disposal, also hosted lectures and fundraising events, like the annual auction of donated art and antiques held each August throughout the 1990s and the "Catboat Clambakes" staged, in 1996 and 1997, to raise money for the restoration of *Vanity*. Larger events, beyond the seating capacity of the campus and the parking capacity of its immediate neighborhood, were held offsite. Ernie Boch hosted the Society's 1996 tribute to Alfred Eisenstaedt on the lawn of

The June 2017 season-opening party was among the last in a long line of events held on the lawns of the Museum's Edgartown campus.

his Edgartown mansion Katama Bay, and the Vose family hosted Evening of Discovery—the Society's premier summer fundraiser—at their Tower Hill estate for more than a decade, beginning in 1999.

The Society voted, in June 1991, to christen the newly expanded campus "the Vineyard Museum." President Edward W. Vincent declared in the August issue of the Society's newsletter, the *Messenger*, that the DCHS would retain the name it had used for seventy years, but the new name for its physical campus would be "more informative and attractive to our visitors." Another official of the Society, quoted in the same *Messenger* story, elaborated: A visit to the "Vineyard Museum" would, for visitors wondering what to do on a rainy day, be more appealing than a visit to the "Dukes County Historical Society." The new name was duly added to letterhead, posters, and signage, and the "Francis Foster Museum" became the "Francis Foster Gallery," but the distinction thus drawn between the organization (the Dukes County Historical Society) and the public attraction it operated (the Vineyard Museum) was clearer to the council than it was to the membership, let alone the general public. It lasted only five years before another name change eclipsed it.

"We made this change," President David B. Vietor declared in the May 1996 issues of the *Messenger* newsletter, "only after a great deal of delibera-

tion. We are the Island's oldest historical institution, and we did not make the change lightly." Nevertheless, he added, the change was necessary: "Our new name resonates with today's reality, just as our old name reflected our environment 73 years ago."[3] That summer, by vote of its members, the Dukes County Historical Society became the Martha's Vineyard Historical Society. The official pretext for the change was organizational tidiness. The Cuttyhunk Historical Society, founded in 1978, had taken over the job of preserving, interpreting, and disseminating the history of the Elizabeth Islands, which (as the Town of Gosnold) constituted the balance of Dukes County. The real—or at least more pressing—reason was the same one that had led to the creation of "The Vineyard Museum" five years earlier: visibility. "Dukes County" was an insider name, legible to residents of the Island but not resonant to casual visitors or recent arrivals. It belonged, as Vietor said, to the world of 1922, when the Island was still not well-known outside of southern New England or known at all outside of the greater Northeast, but much had happened in the intervening years to make the Island nationally famous: the Bass Derby and the Black Dog, the Chappaquiddick Incident and the release of *Jaws*. "Martha's Vineyard" was now a household name, and the Society—more public-facing with every passing year—changed its name to reflect that.

The name change also subtly reinforced the idea that, though physically located in Edgartown, the Society was concerned with the history of the entire Island. Two years after the name change, as if to underscore that point, the Society launched a fundraising campaign to underwrite repairs to the Gay Head, East Chop, and Edgartown Harbor Lights. Slated for demolition by the Coast Guard in the early 1980s, they were spared thanks to a Congressional lobbying campaign organized by the Vineyard Environmental Research Institute (VERI). In 1985, the Coast Guard granted VERI a 35-year license to maintain and operate the historic structures, retaining responsibility, in each case, only for the beacon and its power source. The license was transferred from VERI to the Society in 1993.[4] In a way that the transfer of stewardship had not, the lighthouse campaign publicly underscored, that the Society now had a presence in three of the Island's six towns, and had only recently (by selling the Jireh Luce house) vacated a fourth.

As the twentieth century gave way to the twenty-first, the Society had used Edgartown as a base of operations for seventy-five years, but it had become increasingly apparent that its future lay elsewhere, and in a radically different form. The organization would spend the next dozen years grappling with what that future would look like, and where it would unfold.

3 Anthony K. Van Riper, "Historical Society Gets New Name," *Vineyard Gazette,* 17 September 1996.

4 Waterway, *Gay Head Light,* 130-135.

The 2006 shift from "Historical Society" to "Museum" was a bold step forward, but the iconography of its seal (grapes, arrowheads, and a whaling ship) continued to evoke the organization's past.

Leap in the Dark
2000-2011

"We want to make what and who we are better known," Executive Director Matthew Stackpole told a *Gazette* reporter in June 2006. "We believe the term museum means something in our culture, and this is another way to make people aware of the remarkable resources available in our collections, in our exhibits and through our educational, library and oral history programs." Those words announced a decision already taken by the Historical Society's council, which would be ratified by the membership at the annual meeting in July. After more than eighty years as a historical society, the organization had embraced a new identity as a museum.

The new name acknowledged a change that had been decades in the making. The establishment of the Cooke House as a venue for displaying collections, the postwar creation of the Edgartown campus, the expansion of the Library, and the acquisition of the Pease House had all been steps in a process. The late-90s rebranding of the campus as "The Vineyard Museum" had been a reflection of where those steps had led. The collections and the structures that housed them—the "Museum" of the rebranding—were, by the turn of the century, no longer one Society enterprise among many. They had become the Society's *principal* enterprise: the one that absorbed the largest share of its resources, and the one with which it was most associated in the public eye. The change of name from Martha's Vineyard Historical Society to Martha's Vineyard Museum represented not merely an acknowledgement of the transformation, but an embrace of it. It signaled a shift from an organization built around members' interactions with one another to one built around the institution's interactions with the community. To do that, it needed space.

The Edgartown campus in its final configuration, around 2001: beautiful and welcoming, but inadequate in critical ways. Photo by Jill Bouck.

The Dukes County Historical Society had come into existence in a library meeting room in Oak Bluffs, but it had settled—and grown to maturity—in Edgartown. The twice-expanded Edgartown campus had evolved into an impressive site: seven structures,[1] two crushed-shell parking areas, and an herb garden, all surrounded by broad lawns and linked by brick walkways. It was beautiful, it was inviting, and—for a growing organization with growing collections, an expanding audience, and ambitious dreams—it was a crippling liability.

The seemingly idyllic location of the campus—an in-town neighborhood of historic houses and tree-shaded streets—was two blocks from the tourist thoroughfares of Main Street and Water Street, and Edgartown by-laws effectively prohibited any kind of directional signage large or bold enough to be effective. The surrounding streets themselves were narrow and mostly one-way, requiring visitors arriving by car to approach the campus in sweeping arcs comprised of turns at seemingly random intersections. School buses bringing students on field trips were obliged to load and unload blocks away, and tour buses larger than vans could not even get within sight of the campus. On-site parking was limited to less than ten cars, street parking was at a premium in the summer, and neither could effectively accommodate visitors with limited mobility. Staff members

1 Gate House, Cooke House, Library, Fresnel Tower, Boat Shed, Tryworks, and Pease House

Above: archives stored in the basement of the Library addition, before the Francis Foster Gallery was emptied in 2005 to give them a safer home. At right: framed art stored in the eaves of the Pease House in the early 2010s.

were obliged to park at the Boys & Girls Club, a half-mile away, or park on the street and, in the summer, risk an overtime ticket or periodically interrupt their work in order to move their car and hunt for a new space.

The buildings themselves also suffered from space issues. Collections were, by the early 2000s, packed into every enclosed space not actively being used for exhibits: attics and basements, closets, and the tiny bedrooms on the closed-off second floor of the original (1845) wing of the Pease House. Framed artworks were stored in plywood racks under the eaves of the modern wing of the Pease House, and doors salvaged from the wreck of the *City of Columbus* leaned against the wall in the back corner of the Pease House garage. The Francis Foster Gallery was dismantled in 2005—collections and cases removed, windows covered, carpet taken up—so that the room could be filled with gray steel shelving and used to store the Society's archives, previously located in the Library basement, just inches beneath the building's network of water pipes. Portable air conditioners and dehumidifiers provided a measure of climate control in the Pease House and the Library, but even that fell well short of museum-industry

An exhibit on the Bradley Memorial Church staged in the Main Gallery of the Pease House in 2014. The doors to the Wampanoag Gallery (left), Northeast Gallery (center) and Hands-On History Gallery (right) are visible in the background.

standards. Worse still, the existing storage spaces were all virtually full.

Spaces for human activity were, likewise, limited and overburdened. The finance office was housed in a converted bathroom; the copier was on a stairway landing, and the development assistant's desk was tucked into a nook at the top of the same stairs. Other offices—located mostly in the 1845 wing of the Pease House and the basement of the Library—had (comparatively) expansive floor space but lacked storage and, surprisingly often, doors. Exhibit preparation was done on folding tables in what had been the master bedroom of the Pease House, and the caterers who supplied food for on-campus events worked out of a closet-sized kitchen in the basement of the Library building. The reading room of the Library, the largest enclosed space on campus and thus the only place to hold events in cold or rainy weather, doubled as a classroom, program area, and meeting room as needed.

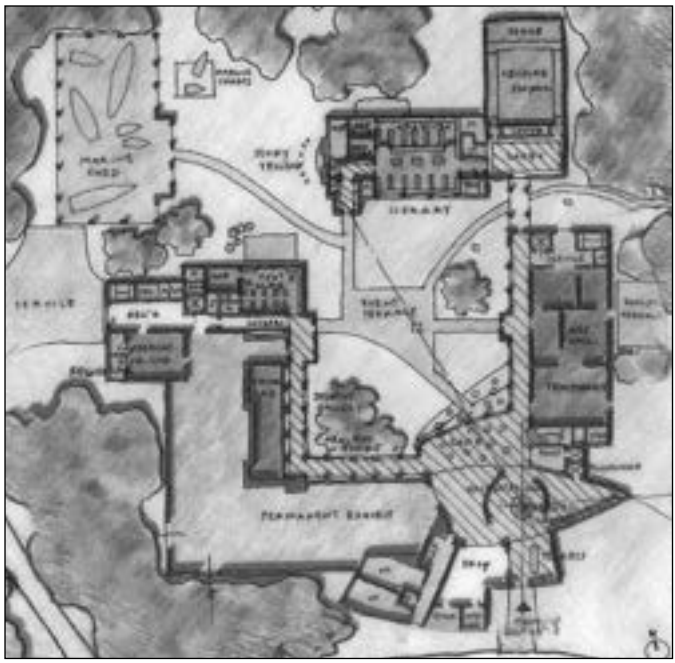
Exhibit space presented its own challenges. The first floor of the Pease House had, in the early 2000s, a mixture long-term exhibit spaces whose content remained stable from year to year and temporary spaces for changing exhibits. Around 2012, the former meeting room was transformed into *Enchanted Isle,* an overview history of the Island from first contact to the twentieth century, and a smaller space at the other end of the first floor was remade into Hands-On History, a "please touch" space

for young children and their families. Intermingled with them, by the early 2010s, were three additional spaces devoted to temporary exhibits: the compact Spotlight Gallery, the Northeast Gallery, and the Central Gallery. The last offered the most floor space, but also the greatest challenges for curators. It was irregularly shaped, and its walls were broken up by four open doorways, one sealed door, and a curtained staircase, leaving only limited space for mounting artifacts, images, or text panels. Its central location—between the Museum entrance and the Wampanoag, Northeast, and Hands-On History galleries—limited the opportunity to place free-standing panels and display cases in the central space, lesr they obstruct visitors' movement.

In principle, these problems could have been diminished, if not solved, by expanding the size of the Edgartown campus or by clearing the existing buildings and replacing them with new, purpose-built structures that used the space more efficiently. In practice, neither was possible. None of the surrounding properties were available for sale, and the corner of Cooke and School Streets was a residential neighborhood solidly in the midst of the Edgartown Historic District. A building large and modern enough to meet the Society's space needs would have been in violation of zoning laws, at odds with the aesthetics of the neighborhood, and *still* hamstrung by inaccessibility and lack of parking. The only practical solution, the Society concluded, was to move. But where?

Initially, the answer appeared to be "West Tisbury."[2] The Museum acquired a potential site—10 acres of land off State Road, between the Agricultural Society and the Polly Hill Arboretum, in 2002—and commissioned an architectural firm to draw up plans for a new facility. The site was expansive, and the plans were ambitious. The new project would triple the size of the existing campus, expanding it from 10,000 to 30,000 square feet of enclosed space. A historic barn, purchased off-Island with the intention of dismantling it and then re-erecting it on the West Tisbury site, would take over the role of the boat shed in Edgartown, holding vehicles, vessels, and other large objects that required protection from the elements but not temperature and humidity controls. A set of multi-story purpose-built structures facing a central courtyard would house exhibit spaces, climate-controlled storage areas, offices, and visitor amenities. There would be access for busses, and ample on-site parking for cars. Turning the empty West Tisbury site into the new home of the Museum was projected to require $25-35 million, and a capital campaign to raise it was launched in 2006 under Executive Director Matthew Stackpole. The campaign achieved some success, but the financial crisis that became known as the

2 James Kinsella, "Historical Society Moves Ahead with $25 Million Building Plan," *Vineyard Gazette,* 31 August 2006.



Artist's conception of the proposed Museum campus in West Tisbury, circa 2008.

Great Recession of 2008 caused donations to sputter to a halt, and the capital campaign was put on hold in 2009. Librarian/Archivist and Program Director Keith Gorman, who had been promoted to the new post of "museum director" in late 2007, replaced Matthew Stackpole as executive director in 2008, and was himself replaced by David Nathans in August 2009.

The West Tisbury site had always posed challenges. Beyond the expense of building a museum from scratch on an empty site, it was far from any downtown—even West Tisbury's—and almost entirely dependent on visitors who arrived by car. Its isolation would discourage short-stay tourists and other casual visitors, complicate the logistics of school field trips, and potentially reduce attendance at programs and on-site fundraisers. With the capital campaign on hold, the board considered other options, such as repurposing the Edgartown School, then slated for replacement. The Edgartown School option was rejected in 2009, and the Museum's future seemed stuck in a holding pattern of indefinite length.[3] Then, in April 2010, another option unexpectedly opened. The US Marine Hospital building in Vineyard Haven, located on a hilltop overlooking Lagoon Pond and Vineyard Haven Harbor, was going on the market.

Opened in December 1895, the Marine Hospital was one of a chain of federal facilities established in ports across the United States to provide medical care to sick and injured sailors.[4] The Marine Hospital Service (established in 1798 and renamed the Public Health Service in 1912), was funded by small

3 Martin, "Museum Explores a Possible Move."

4 Holly Herbster, "Five Thousand Years on the Bluff: The Archaeology of the New Museum Site," *MV Museum Quarterly,* February 2019, pp. 3-15, on pp. 11-14; for the broader context, see A. Bowdoin Van Riper, "Tisbury at 350: The Town at the Center of the Island," *MV Museum Quarterly,* August 2021.

The 1895 US Marine Hospital in Vineyard Haven, c. 1900, overlooking a harbor filled with the coastal ship traffic it was built to serve. Photo by Richard H. Shute.

deductions from the sailors' paychecks—an early prototype for Medicare and Medicaid—and free to the patient at the point of service. The staff of a Marine Hospital like the one in Vineyard Haven could sew up a gashed arm, set a broken leg, treat diseases picked up in foreign ports, perform appendectomies and dental surgery, or oversee a long-term convalescence. The presence of the 1895 Marine Hospital, which replaced an earlier facility established on the same site in 1879, reflected Vineyard Haven's status as a major port of refuge on one of the busiest shipping lanes in the world. Until the opening of the Cape Cod Canal in 1914, every ship moving along the Atlantic coast of North America travelled through Vineyard Sound and Nantucket Sound. Tens of thousands of ships a year transited the waters between the Cape and the Island, and many pulled into Vineyard Haven to make repairs, take on supplies, wait for the tide to turn, or take shelter from a storm. The shores of Vineyard Haven Harbor were lined with businesses and organizations that existed to cater to the needs of passing ships and their crews. The Marine Hospital was one of them.

Vineyard Haven's importance as a port steadily declined over the course of the twentieth century. The Cape Cod Canal diverted ship traffic away from Vineyard and Nantucket Sound (much as the Interstate Highway system would later pull traffic away from Route 66 and the Dixie Highway), and the gradual shift from sail to steam power reduced the sizes of crews, the need for wind- and weather-related layovers, and the ability of traditional boatyards to perform even temporary repairs. The growing size and sophistication of the Martha's Vineyard Hospital (opened in 1922) provided a second source of medical care on the Island. The Marine Hospital was expanded, in 1938, by a two-story fireproof addition (brick walls, slate roof, and poured concrete floors) that housed a new, state-of-the-art X-ray lab and operating theater. It served uniformed service mem-

bers stationed on the Island, as well as commercial sailors, during World War II, but its days were clearly numbered. In 1952 it was declared redundant and shut down, its records sent to Boston, and much of its furniture and equipment abandoned in place.

Proposals were floated, in the 1950s, to repurpose the structure as a school, as town offices, or as a retirement home for aging sailors. None, however, got beyond the initial planning stages. Raoul and Dorothy St. Pierre, summer residents of Vineyard Haven who had been running a summer camp—the St. Pierre School of Sport—out of their Main Street home for 20 years, rented it for the summer of 1959, and bought it outright two years later. Medical equipment was shoved into storage, wards were converted (with furniture salvaged from the old US Navy barracks at the airport) into bunk rooms, and the lawns became fields for archery practice and games of capture the flag. The St. Pierre Camp (as it was known informally) operated out of the Marine Hospital for nearly fifty summers before closing its doors in 2007. The family placed it on the market in 2010.[5]

An article in the *Gazette* brought the impending availability of the Marine Hospital to the attention of Calvin Linnemann, a summer resident of Vineyard Haven, at his winter home in Cincinnati. When he arrived on the Island for the summer, Linneman toured the property with and his friend and summer neighbor Denys Wortman, a former member of the Tisbury Select Board, and realtor Tony Tobia. Long interested in historic buildings, Linneman was determined to save the Marine Hospital from developers (who were said to be eager to demolish it and put up houses in its place), and the trio gathered on Wortman's porch to discuss how it might be done. Wortman suggested that it might become a bed-and-breakfast, and Tobia proposed a restaurant, but Linnemann felt that the way forward lay with an Island non-profit organization. The trio narrowed the field to two possibilities and soon found that one of them, the Martha's Vineyard Preservation Trust, had already concluded that the structure did not meet their needs. The other was the Martha's Vineyard Museum.[6]

Returning home from the meeting on Wortman's porch, Linnemann told his wife: "We're going to save the Marine Hospital and move the Museum there." Bemused, she responded: "Does the Museum know?" In response, Linnemann called contacted Christopher Morse, owner of the Granary Gallery and a member of the Museum board since the 1990s. The Marine Hospital was, he suggested, a better option for the Museum than West Tisbury would have been. Morse had only one question: How much would he be willing to give to help make it happen? Hearing the reply,

5 Abby Remer's article on the St. Pierre Camp will appear in the August 2023 issue of the *Quarterly*.

6 Calvin Linnemann, Personal Communication, 7 August 2023.

Morse responded that he would "have a meeting within the week."[7]

When representatives of the Museum board toured the Marine Hospital they found a majestic, historically significant building in desperate need of rehabilitation. Decades of deferred maintenance had taken a toll in the form of peeling paint, rotting wood, cracked glass, and pervasive dampness. The attic, basement, and outbuildings were filled with relics of both the summer camp and the hospital, and a line of trees and bushes along the front edge of the property cut off the sightlines between the building and the harbor. Wortman remembered: "It really looked very, very rough, but [it had] tremendous potential to be something absolutely spectacular. One thing it had was this view—or potential view once we took the trees down— just a world-beater. It's like: 'Where could you get a better spot on the Vineyard for a public place for people to enjoy?'"[8]

The board agreed, and in late 2010 Linnemann put up the money to allow the Museum to take an option on the property and engage a team of architects and builders for a feasibility study, giving it until January 2011 to decide whether meeting the asking price—$3.19 million for a 10,000 square foot, 29-room building on 4 acres of land—was a wise investment in the future. Buying the Marine Hospital would be a significant challenge. It would likely mean, a Museum spokesman told *Gazette* reporters, selling the West Tisbury property and, in Edgartown, both the Pease House and the "middle lot" on which the Library, Boat Shed, and Fresnel Tower stood. It would mean figuring out how to preserve a historic building while adapting it for a purpose it had never been designed to serve. It would mean figuring out how to create the campus of the Museum's dreams—where to put offices, storage, parking, and roads—while remaining a good neighbor to abutters. And it would mean once again reconnecting the Marine Hospital building, literally invisible for decades, to the life of the harbor and the town. The report of the feasibility study was reassuring, but cautious. Linnemann summed it up as: "We think you can do it."

Negotiations proceeded through the spring of 2011, and in June the Museum and the St. Pierre family—excited by the prospect of selling the historic building to an organization committed to its preservation—agreed to a price substantially below the original listing. Linnemann's original pledge to Morse, along with funds from the Gund and Ziff families raised by board chair Elizabeth Beim, met the agreed-upon price. The Museum had a building. The next task was to make it a home.

7 Calvin Linnemann, Personal Communication, 7 August 2023.
8 Denys Wortmann, Interview with Abby Remer, October 30, 2019.

Drone image of the Marine Hospital at the beginning of the rehabilitation process, with the 1938 brick wing still standing. Photo by Denys Wortman.

Building on a Hill
2011-2019

The Museum purchased the 1895 Marine Hospital in June 2011, and opened its doors to the public in March 2019. The (nearly) eight years between the two events were filled with hundreds of hours of meetings and tens of thousands of details related to the new site, along with efforts to raise the tens of millions of dollars necessary to pay for it. The renovation not just of the Marine Hospital but of the four acres around it had to be planned. New exhibits needed to be designed, created, and installed. The entire collection needed to be inventoried, packed, moved from Edgartown to Vineyard Haven, and resettled in its new storage spaces. Plans had to be made to sell the Pease House and middle lot as soon as the move of the collections was complete. Disposal of anything that *wasn't* moving—worn-out office furniture, obsolete photocopiers, and three immense steel safes from the basement of the Library—had to be planned for.

All this had to happen while the Museum continued what had become its normal portfolio of exhibits, programs, field trips, and research appointments in Edgartown, and set out to broaden its role in the life of the Island. *Girl on a Whaleship*, an elaborate, multi-layered website presenting Laura Jernegan's journal and surrounding it with a rich historical context, premiered in 2010, drawing attention to the Museum from schools across the country. The Museum transferred its electronic catalog to a new software, PastPerfect, and began the long, time-intensive process of upgrading existing records and creating new ones for items that had never been cataloged electronically before. A "Hidden Collections" grant from the Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR) funded a multi-year collaboration between staff members and contract archivists to identify, organize, catalog, and make visible online collections that had re-

mained inaccessible to researchers and staff—sometimes for years—since their acquisition. A $500,000 challenge grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, received in 2014 with the stipulation that it be matched by $1.5 million in private donations, endowed the education program and enabled a significant expansion of its offerings.[1]

Plans for the Marine Hospital site were established even before the sale contract was drawn up. The Marine Hospital itself would be renovated into a mixture of exhibit galleries, program spaces, offices, storage, and visitor amenities while retaining the original interior layout of the building, with its multitude of tiny rooms, as much as possible. Original architectural details—windows, doors, staircases, trim, and elm-plank flooring—would be refurbished and reinstalled or (if they were beyond repair) replicated. A glass-walled pavilion with a ground floor and basement would be added to the north end, connected to but architecturally distinct from the 1895 building. The pavilion, in turn, would connect to a modern "West Wing," also with a first floor and basement, that extended perpendicular to the axis of the Marine Hospital. The 1938 addition to the Marine Hospital, architecturally undistinguished and expensive to modify because of its brick-and-concrete construction, would be demolished along with the remaining outbuildings. In its place would be a grassy courtyard framed by the Marine Hospital, the West Wing, and a barn-like structure that would (like the unbuilt barn in West Tisbury) house large objects such as wagons and boats. The open (south) side of the courtyard would face the new two-level parking area and serve as a welcoming space for visitors as well as a warm-weather program space.

The renovation plan, as outlined by the Museum in 2010-2011, was predicated on using the Marine Hospital building primarily for offices and visitor amenities: the welcome center, classroom, gift shop, and library. A small first-floor gallery at the center of the building would be allocated for community-curated exhibits. A first-floor "Lead-In Gallery" at the north end of the building would open into the pavilion and serve as an introduction to the rest of the exhibit spaces, which would be housed in the two floors of the pavilion and the first floor of the 7,500-square-foot West Wing. This arrangement would facilitate the preservation of the Marine Hospital's original layout by repurposing its small rooms as offices and its larger ones as work- and gathering spaces. It would (mostly) sidestep the familiar challenge of staging exhibits in rooms with limited floor area and little uninterrupted wall space. It would also mean that most of the

1 *Laura Jernegan: Girl on a Whaleship,* http://www.girlonawhaleship.org;"Museum Receives Record Grant to Bring Archives Online," *Vineyard Gazette,* 2 February 2013; Ivy Ashe, "Giving the Gift of Education; Museum Receives Large Grant to Expand Programs," *Vineyard Gazette,* 9 December 2014.

Oudens Ello artist's rendering of the proposed Museum complex in Vineyard Haven, showing the West Wing.

collections, most of the time, could be kept in purpose-built spaces designed, from the ground up, to have carefully controlled levels of light, temperature, and humidity. Achieving those conditions in the Marine Hospital—designed around patient-care best practices from the 1890s, which used numerous large windows to admit sunlight and fresh air—would be harder, and more expensive. Tantalizing possibilities would have to be tempered by practical realities.

David Nathans stated on the eve of the sale in June 2011 that: "We know now we can do it; the next step is to think about how we do it — all at once or in phases." The ideal solution, he noted would be to do it all at once, but "we will likely do it in phases, much as the YMCA did it." His assessment proved accurate. Work commenced, new details emerged, and the plan—like most complex plans—had to be modified as a result. The original estimate of $15-20 million for the entire project proved to be too low, and fundraising targets and time horizons had to be expanded accordingly. Rising project costs led plans for the West Wing to be shelved indefinitely and added to a notional "Phase II."

The loss of the West Wing had a significant impact on the look-and-feel of the Museum's not-yet-built Vineyard Haven campus, and an enormous one on the use of the Marine Hospital. The long-term exhibit that would provide visitors with an overview of Vineyard History, expected to occupy two-thirds of the first floor of the West Wing, was shifted to the Lead-In Gallery (now the Roberts Gallery), displacing an exhibit on the geology and natural history of the Island that was still in the conceptual stage. The short-term exhibit spaces that would have been housed in the remaining third of the West Wing were relocated to the second floor, becoming the Hollinshed,

Cox, Fleischner, and Grain Family Galleries. The workshop for exhibit preparation moved to the basement of the Marine Hospital. This high-stakes game of musical rooms solved the problem of *finding* exhibit space, but intensified the problem of making it usable. Instead of two confined galleries in the Marine Hospital and one large, flexible space in the West Wing, the Museum now had six galleries of varying size, all in the Marine Hospital and all with complex layouts involving windows, doors, and fireplaces.

The Museum was also short most of the collection-storage space it had anticipated having in Vineyard Haven (planned for the basement of the West Wing) and, after the reshuffling of the exhibit spaces, office space for all of the Curatorial Department, who had been scheduled to occupy the second-floor rooms at the north end of the Marine Hospital. Eventually, rented units in climate-controlled off-site buildings provided (and, at this writing, continue to provide) temporary relief for the collection-storage problem, albeit at a continuing cost in both staff time and money. The property at 212 Skiff Avenue, a private home whose lot backed up to the Museum's parking area, became the unexpected key to solving the office-space problem. Put on the market in 2018 and bought by the Museum in May with funds pledged by generous donors, it currently accommodates eight staff members with room for growth. Taking advantage of similar opportunities and using a similar funding process, the Museum acquired the condemned house at 200 Skiff in August 2018 and the house at 174 Skiff in January 2019. A long-term, integrated plan to address the Museum's ongoing need for office, programming, and storage space, as well as the fact that demand on-site parking exceeds supply during special events, will likely involve all three Skiff Avenue properties.

Rehabilitating the Marine Hospital was a years-long series of unexpected challenges, compromises, and improvisational adaptations. Reimagining the project without the West Wing was the largest and most significant of them, but there were thousands of others at varying sizes and varying levels of seriousness. For the purposes of this article, two examples can stand for them all.

The first involved the pedestrian pathways that led from the parking areas and the original (water-side) front entrance to the Museum-era (courtyard-side) front entrance of the building. Traditionally, the surface of such pathways would have been paved with asphalt to ensure a smooth, hard, even surface, but environmental concerns about runoff into Lagoon Pond made it important to keep the use of impermeable surfaces (such as asphalt and concrete) to an absolute minimum. The pathways were, therefore, "paved" with a polymer aggregate with a texture between clay and very fine gravel that, if properly applied, compacted into a flat, reasonably solid surface that remained permeable to rain water. The material's limitations—the extent of the raking and brushing required to maintain a neat appearance, and tendency for heavily loaded carts and dollies to bog down in the friable surface

layer—did not become fully apparent until the campus opened, but were judged to be outweighed by the environmental benefits.

The second, more visible compromise involved the enormous windows that were an integral part of the Marine Hospital's overall appearance. The original frames and were removed and refurbished, and the original glass reinstalled wherever possible; where the original material was beyond repair, they were replaced with period glass and new wood milled to match the existing designs. Behind each of the original 1895 windows, however, the design added a second layer of modern glass mounted in a frame designed to harmonize with the originals. The second layer served multiple purposes: It was coated to filter out ultraviolent light that could damage books, paper, and textiles on display in the galleries; it was shatterproof, to reduce vulnerability to wind-blown debris from severe storms; and it created a layer of dead air between the two layers of glass, providing (some of) the insulating benefits of double-pane windows without their distinctly modern look. The outer windows—including the floor-to-ceiling ones in the four wards that had once given patients access to the balconies—were deliberately sealed as part of the renovation. This helped facilitate climate control by making the building "tight," but it also resolved another design dilemma. Had the floor-to-ceiling windows been left unsealed, leaving the balconies outside them accessible, the balcony railings (too low for safety, by modern standards) would have had to be raised to meet contemporary building codes. Faced with a choice between balcony access and preserving the historical appearance of the building, the Museum chose the latter.

Hundreds of individuals—too many even to list—contributed to the nine-year process of designing, financing, and building the Museum's new home. The contributions of several however, were broad and deep enough to deserve particular notice here. Executive directors David Nathans (2009-2016) and Phil Wallis (2016-2020), along with board chairs Elizabeth Beim (2008-2016) and Stever Aubrey (2016-2020), steered the project with the help of a changing cast of board members who contributed expertise in areas ranging from fundraising and branding to architecture and archaeology. The financial and project-management acumen of Dale Garth was deemed so essential to the success of the project that his tenure as board treasurer—which, by the Museum's by-laws should have ended, after five one-year terms, in 2020—was extended to 2021 to enable him to see the job through.[2] Kathryn "Katy" Fuller, who went from intern to director of operations in less than a decade, lived in the weeds of the project for more than two years, becoming the Museum's principal liaison with the architects (Oudens Ello of Boston), the general con-

2 In July 2020, the Board approved a change in the bylaws that allowed an officer to be granted a single additional one-year term (beyond the standard five-term limit) by two-thirds vote. Garth's sixth and final term as treasurer was approved by the Board in August 2020.

Katy Fuller leading a "hard hat tour" of the Vineyard Haven site in 2018.

tractor (Consigli Construction of Milford, MA), and the press.[3] Chief curator Bonnie Stacy oversaw the design and fabrication of the new exhibits and the packing and moving of tens of thousands of collection items, working with Experience Design of Providence, RI on the former project and Museum & Collector Resource of Fort Lauderdale, FL on the latter.

The move would be the most significant change in the history of the organization, and other projects—designed to smooth the change—unfolded in parallel with it. Early in their respective tenures as executive director and board chair, Phil Wallis and Stever Aubrey oversaw a revision of the Museum's branding that would accompany the move. The existing "ship and grapes" logo based on the corporate seal was replaced by a stylized representation of the Island made up of six colored stripes (pointed at the ends to evoke the prisms in the Fresnel lens) to symbolically representing its six towns. The *Dukes County Intelligencer* was retitled the *MV Museum Quarterly* and given a refreshed, more colorful cover design. The collections-centered mission statement adopted in 2012 was revised into one that focused on the visiting public.[4] The rebranding was part of an ongoing process (elec-

3 Noah Asimow, "From Behind the Scenes to Front and Center, Katy Fuller Raises the Bar," *Vineyard Gazette,* 7 March 2019.

4 The 2012 version: "The mission of the Martha's Vineyard Museum is to preserve and interpret collections that engage and connect the public to the Island's history, art, and culture." The 2016 version: "The mission of the Martha's Vineyard Museum is to inspire all people to discover, explore, and strengthen their connections to this Island and its diverse heritage."

tronic records contain notes and minutes of similar discussions going back to the early 2000s), but it was also a quiet-but-decisive shedding of some of the last major elements of the Museum's origins as a highly localized, demographically narrow, inward-looking historical society.

On an operational level, the Museum's decision to move its headquarters after more than eighty years at the corner of Cooke and School Streets was straightforward. The Cooke House and the lot on which it stood would remain part of the Museum's holdings; the Pease House and its lot, along with the middle lot, would be sold. On a public-relations level, the decision presented a delicate problem. Even in its early days as the Dukes County Historical Society, the organization had drawn members from across the Island, and concerned itself with the history of the Island. The presence of the organization's headquarters was in Edgartown, however, gave some Edgartonians propriety feelings toward it that—with the announcement of the move--manifested themselves as a sense of loss. In 2018, seeking both to confirm its ongoing commitment to Edgartown and to answer the question of what the Cooke House would become when it was no longer part of a larger campus, announced the creation of the Cooke House and Legacy Gardens project. When completed, it would turn the re-landscaped lot surrounding the Cooke House into a park available to Edgartown residents and visitors from sunrise to sunset. Beds around the perimeter of the lot would feature plants that illustrated the botanical history of the Island, and other interpretive materials would place the house itself in historical context. The Legacy Gardens, could be used for programming and special events in the warm weather months, but would remain an attraction even when nothing particular was going on. "We are looking to create spokes from the hub," Executive Director Phil Wallis declared, "and Edgartown is one of them. We will look to protect that asset as much as we can moving forward."

A groundbreaking ceremony was held at the Marine Hospital site on Memorial Day weekend of 2017.[5] The project was projected to take approximately a year, with the move taking place in the spring of 2018 and the Vineyard Haven campus opening in September. Unexpected complications led to continual revisions of the schedule, however, and in late April of 2018—eleven months into the project—an article in the *Martha's Vineyard Times* reported that the project was on schedule for a "soft opening" in December. The Library was closed to researchers at the beginning of May, and turned into workspace where retired Coast Guard "lampist" Jim Woodward and his crew disassembled the Fresnel lens, cleaned it, and packed it into custom-built wooden crates for the move. The curatorial staff staged one more round of exhibits in the Pease House, and the visitor services as-

5 Chloe Reichel, "Museum Breaks Ground on $24 Million Expansion," *Vineyard Gazette,* 28 May 2017.

An excavator demolishes the empty Fresnel Lens Tower in October 2018.

sociates held sales to clear out old gift shop stock. Summer events, including the season-opening party and the popular "Discovery Days" program for children, continued under tents on the lawn. As the complexities of leaving Edgartown while simultaneously completing construction, and preparing to open, in Vineyard Haven became apparent, the opening date was quietly slipped to mid-March of the new year.

When fall came, the Museum closed the Edgartown campus to the public for the last time, and the move—an "all-hands-on-deck" operation—began in earnest. The contents of the Pease House and the Library were packed onto boxes and carts, loaded onto trucks, and dispatched to their new homes. A crew from a local boatyard loaded the whaleboat onto a trailer and snaked it out of the Boat Shed for the overland journey to a now-completed Doherty Hall. The horse drawn hearse and S. M. Mayhew Co. peddler's wagon were wheeled onto a flatbed truck and dispatched to Carlisle, PA, where they spent the winter being restored by conservators at B. R. Howard Associates. The empty Fresnel lens tower was demolished on November 16, the front door of the now-empty Library building was locked for the last time two weeks later, and the papers transferring the Pease House and the middle lot to their new owners were signed in early December.

Staff members moved their offices to Vineyard Haven—to the Marine Hospital and 212 Skiff—late in 2018. The heavy lifting of the renovation project was largely done, but hundreds of details remained to be attended to: Books and archives settled into their new storage areas, computers hooked up, supplies organized, collections unpacked, and temporary exhibits installed. Those preparations ran down to the wire, consuming the first ten weeks of 2019. On the night of Tuesday, March 12, Phil Wallis welcomed 200 guests to a members-only preview. The new Museum opened its doors to the public at 10:00 AM on Wednesday, March 13, 2019.[6]

6 Noah Asimow, "New Museum Opens with Quiet Fanfare," *Vineyard Gazette,* 12 March 2019.

Hidden Collections And Untold Stories
2019-2023

The new Vineyard Haven location created opportunities to show off collection items that would have been literally unimaginable in Edgartown. The extent to which that was true became apparent the moment it opened. Heather Neill's immense painting *Strider's Surrender*, never permanently displayed in Edgartown because of the lack of space, hung on at the top of the main staircase.[1] A glass-fronted case running the length of the basement hallway, dubbed the "Saltzman Cabinet of Curiosities," showed off a more than two dozen ship models from the collection, rarely seen individually, and never together, in the preceding 96 years. Three large, framed charts of the Vineyard and Nantucket by Royal Navy cartographer Joseph F. W. des Barres hung in the Cox Gallery on the second floor. Steps away, a black-walled room held a case containing an eighteenth-century account book whose cowhide cover had been decorated, by an unknown Wampanoag craftsman, with an embossed emblem of a thunderbird. Downstairs, in the Linnemann Pavilion, visitors got a close, clear look at the Fresnel lens for the first time since the Museum acquired it in 1952.[2]

Our Own Beat, an exhibit on the history of music on the Vineyard that premiered in the Hollinshed Gallery on opening day, highlighted another virtue of the new Museum: The exhibit was larger, richer, and less constrained by the architectural oddities of the space that held it than it could ever have been in Edgartown. The next temporary exhibit in the space, de-

1 Sam Bungey, "Anonymous Donor Buys Painting for Island Museum," *Vineyard Gazette,* 11 August 2008.

2 The tower on the Edgartown campus enabled visitors to get a close view of the lens only from immediately below it, or from a distance through the glass panes of the lantern.

The Fresnel lens on display in the light-filled Linnemann Pavilion in 2019.

voted to the work of American regionalist painter (and longtime Chilmark summer resident) Thomas Hart Benton, raised the bar even further. It was filled with Benton paintings and artifacts loaned by collectors and mainland museums that would never have consented to them being displayed in the old space in Edgartown. The renovated Marine Hospital, with more effective climate control and more advanced security systems than the Pease House and Cooke House, opened up new opportunities for collaboration, both by providing a better venue and by signaling that the Museum had achieved a new level of professionalism.

The Museum was approaching its one-year anniversary in Vineyard Haven when reports of an emergent virus called COVID-19 began appearing on the news. On March 11, 2020, citing 118,000 cases and over 4,000 deaths in 114 countries worldwide, the director-general of the World Health Organization declared the disease to be a pandemic.[3] Two days later, the staff of the Martha's Vineyard Museum gathered in the café for champagne and pizza at the end of the Friday workday. The intent was celebratory—toasting a year in the new facility—but the mood was somber and vaguely surreal. By noon the next morning, an electronic message confirmed what everyone was anticipating: Meet in the classroom at 10:00 AM Monday, prepared to gather everything you'll need to work from home for an undetermined length of time.

Weekly staff meetings and other gatherings moved online, initially using Go To Meeting software package and then shifting to the pandemic's

3 "WHO Director-General's Opening Remarks at the Media Briefing on COVID-19," 11 March 2019. https://www.who.int/director-general/speeches/detail/

most spectacular success story: Zoom. The exhibits in the Museum's indoor galleries, some opened only weeks before the closure, remained in place. Gradually, others joined them: outward-facing art, and portraits of local front-line workers, mounted on the inside surfaces of the Linnemann Pavilion's glass walls and the trademark bedazzled mannequins of local artist Jacqueline Baer stood in the windows of the Marine Hospital, creating an "Inside-Out Museum" that could be enjoyed from the lawn and walkways.

Curator of Exhibitions Anna Barber (L), Chief Curator Bonnie Stacy (C), and Chris Decker of Tisbury Printer examine graphics for the Our Own Beat exhibit in the Hollinshed Gallery of the Marine Hospital.

The strangest summer in living memory quietly arrived and, as it began to unfold, the closure was slowly lifted. Staff members were allowed to return in limited numbers beginning on June 1, 2020, visitors welcomed back to the outdoor campus in early July, and the interior of the Marine Hospital reopened (with capacity limits, a timed ticketing system, and adhesive arrows on the floor marking a one-way path through the exhibits) in early August. The widely discussed "new normal" was fully in place by Labor Day, and responses from those who returned to the Museum in person were overwhelmingly positive, but visitor numbers remained low. It would take another two years—until the summer of 2022—before the "old normal" felt as if it had crept quietly back to the hill overlooking the Lagoon.

The once-obscure phrase "virtual programming" became commonplace, and ideas for what programs to offer and how to deliver them—as well as how to use digital channels to gather the community's experiences of, and reactions to, the unfolding pandemic—filled countless meetings.

Having spent the preceding decade-and-a-half cautiously dipping its toes into the shallows of the digital ocean, the Museum learned to swim by throwing itself into the deeps. The *Quarterly* became a digital-only publication for five issues (November 2019 through November 2020), and every back issue (along with every out-of-print original publication issued by the Historical Society or the Museum) was made available free on the website. The "Introduction to Martha's Vineyard History" adult-education course underway when the pandemic began shifted from in-person to virtual in mid-session, and a subsequent offering of it, along with a course on the history of whaling, took place entirely online. Other projects were conceived from the outset for digital spaces. "Hidden Collections," a series of programs highlighting the stories behind objects, images, and documents from the Museum's storage areas, was inaugurated in the summer of 2020, and "One Island, Many Stories"—a series of seven interviews keyed to the seven themes in the exhibit of the same name—ran in the spring and fall of 2021. The Museum's social media stream also took on a new prominence, becoming a venue for sharing collection items, highlighting virtual programs, and furthering the Museum's goal of telling Island stories.

One of a series of "Wear a Mask" posters by Island artist Gretchen Baer acquired by the Museum during the COVID-19 pandemic. Originally displayed around the building as reminders to visitors, they became part of the permanent collection.

Finding the content for this plunge into digital space proved comparatively easy; mastering the complexities of delivering it (particularly to a core audience that was, itself, learning to swim) was more challenging. Comparing the first and last episodes of "Hidden Collections" reveals just how steep the learning curve was.[4] As virtual programming became the pandemic-era norm, the same questions bubbled to the surface again and again: How many people are we reaching? How do we measure success? How do we give virtual programs a digital (after)life? How do we monetize them? *Can* we monetize them? Over the near term, the answers didn't matter. Like a fledgling software company working to bring its flagship product to market, the Museum spent resources—particularly staff time and attention—at

4 All episodes of the *Hidden Collections* series are, as of this writing, available on the Museum's YouTube channel.

a furious rate order to ensure that, even with the campus closed and potential visitors confined to their homes, the sense of connection between the Museum, its members, and the Vineyard community remained unbroken.

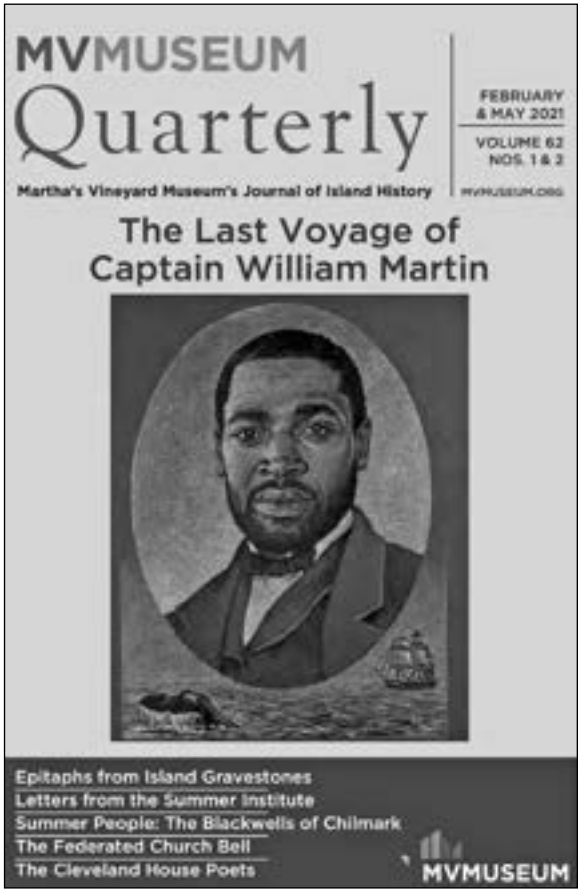
The closure was a little more than two months old, and the process of adapting the Museum to the operational realities of the pandemic was picking up speed, when reality intruded a second time. The murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis police officers on May 25, 2020, brought calls for a nationwide discussion of, and reckoning with, the impact of systemic racism in American life and culture. Calls for such a reckoning led the Museum, then beginning the triannual process of revising and updating its strategic plan, to embrace a reckoning with its own approach to the Island's history. The Museum had, since the 1980s, slowly and haltingly moved beyond its original focus on the Island's Yankee aristocracy, but that focus—near-exclusive for the first sixty years of the organization and strong for the next twenty-five—had left its mark. It had shaped the Museum's collections to a profound degree and, in doing so, shaped its exhibits, programs, and publications. Committed to a style of exhibit design that emphasized the stories of individuals and groups, and foregrounded objects concretely associated with them, the Museum could not tell stories for which it did not have objects in the collection.

There were work-arounds, of course, and the Museum had begun experimenting with them while it was still in Edgartown. Using loaned objects, borrowed-and-scanned photographs, and interviews from the ever-expanding oral history collection, it had staged exhibits on African American organizations such as the Cottagers and the Polar Bears and on Hanukkah as experienced by the Island's Jewish community. *One Island, Many Stories* and the other long-term exhibits designed for the Marine Hospital in 2018 highlighted Wampanoag, African American, Portuguese, and Jewish objects, images, and voices that *were* in the collection to a degree that the Museum had never attempted before. Important as they were, however, these interim measures underscored (for the staff members who created them) the thinness of the Museum's collections in these areas. Having settled into its new space, the Museum set out to redress that imbalance.

"Untold stories," the phrase that became associated with the new initiative, was protean. The Museum, like the Historical Society from which it evolved, had traditionally focused on telling a relatively narrow range of stories—centered on government, war, religion and international commerce—in which able-bodied, literate, Christian men of northern and western European ancestry were (or were perceived to be) the principal actors. In principle, shifting the Museum's focus to untold stories threw open the interpretive doors to a wide range of never-explored subjects (foodways, infrastructure, housing, domestic life, medicine, education,

agriculture, and coastal shipping) and unexamined or seldom-examined identities (post-contact Wampanoag, African American, Portuguese, Jewish, women outside the elite "one percent," children of all classes, and wage-laborers of all identities). In practice, "untold stories" became shorthand for a significant, and long overdue, expansion of the Museum's attention to racial and ethnic minorities.

Untold stories—in the second, narrower sense—shaped the Museum's strategic plan for 2021-2023, which was drafted in the immediate aftermath of George Floyd's murder and approved in October 2020. The plan called for the Museum to focus on establishing broader, deeper connections with the Island's African American, Wampanoag, Portuguese, Brazilian, and Jewish communities, and to actively expand its efforts to collect artifacts, images, and archival materials that represented the histories of those communities. It called for the Museum to expand coverage of racial and ethnic minorities in all its public-facing enterprises: exhibits, education, public programming, and the pages of the *Quarterly*.



The *Quarterly* returned to print in 2021, after a five-issue digital-only hiatus, with an article by Skip Finley highlighting recently discovered letters written by Edgartown whaling master Capt. William Martin.

Like all ambitious undertakings, the "untold stories" initiative was more successful in some areas than in others. More exhibits on African American history and culture were mounted in the three years between mid-2020 and mid-2023 than in the previous 97 years of the institution's history. The same three-year period also saw the Museum stage its first exhibit in the history of the Island's Jewish community, host the North American premiere of the traveling exhibit *Wampum: Stories from the Shells of Native America,* and display a Wampanoag *mishoon* as part of

The Perfect Craft, its Centennial-year exhibit on wooden boatbuilding. Programs by Wampanoag tribal members Juli Vanderhoop and David Vanderhoop of Aquinnah, Alexis Moreis of Chappaquiddick, and Darius Coombs of Mashpee drew large and attentive audiences, both live and virtual. In three issues—February/May 2021, August 2021, and February 2023—the *Quarterly* published as much content related to African American history on the Vineyard as it had in its preceding 60 years of operation. Public-facing projects focused on the Island's Portuguese-speaking communities—Azorean, Cape Verdean, and more recently Brazilian—lagged by comparison, as did attention to LGBTQ+ history on the Island. In both cases, The "untold stories" initiative was, however, conceived as a long game. The exhibits, programs, and articles of the mid-to-late 2020s and beyond will depend on materials yet to be gathered, and connections that are only beginning to be forged.

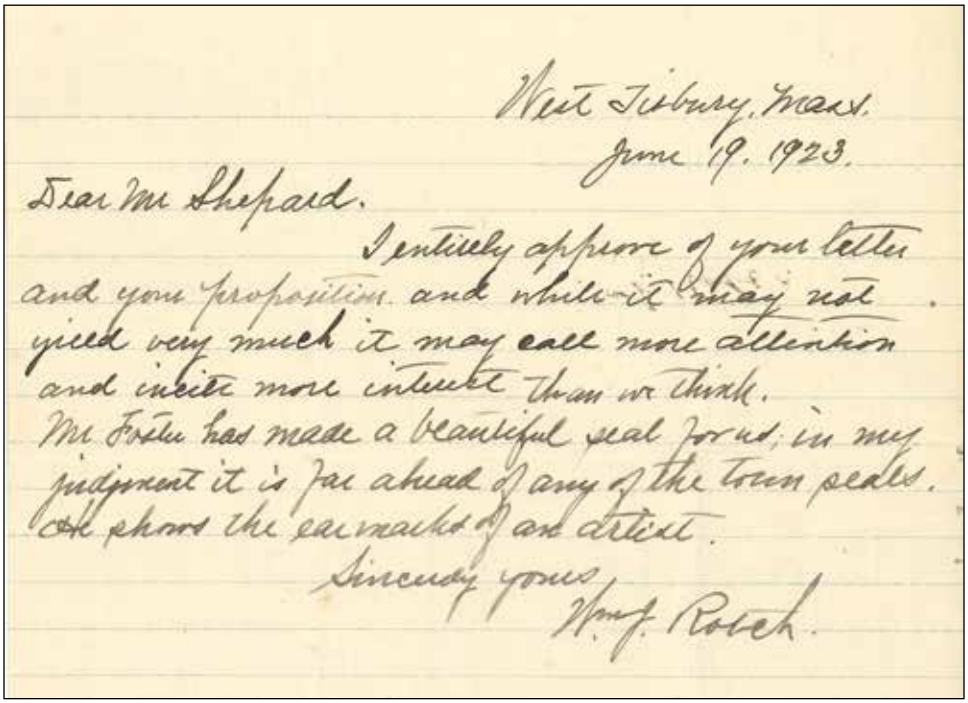
As part of its focus on "untold stories," the Museum hosted the North American premiere of the Wampanoag-curated exhibit, *Wampum: Stories from the Shells of Native North America*, in the winter of 2022.

The Open Ledger, 2023–

There is, buried deep in the archives of the Museum, a slender hardbound book whose black cloth covers are overlaid at the spine and corners with burgundy-colored leather. On its pages, written in meticulous script with crisply drawn horizontal lines between the entries, are accession records for the very first items added to the Dukes County Historical Society's collection in 1923. "Gift of William Swift," the first one reads, "Tisbury Town and Proprietors' Records, June 20th 1669 to May 16th 1864, compiled by Wm. Swift and others, Feb 1903 – 841 pp." The entries stretch down the page and onto the next: a child's rocking chair, a poke bonnet, an ivory swift, an album of old photographs. They run on for a hundred pages, and are continued in another book, and then another still, stretching forward for a hundred years to 2023. The form of the accession records changes over time—handwritten, pen-and-ink notations in ledgers give way to typed index cards in steel file drawers and then to electronic entries in a database viewed as pixels on an LCD screen—but their purpose is always the same: to document the pieces of the past preserved, by their donors, from the ravages of "time and chance" and entrusted to the Museum to convey into the future.

The history of the Museum as an institution—of its expanding capabilities, changing priorities, and rising ambitions—is written in the pages of its accession ledgers. It is written in the photographs, notes, and salvaged labels that document nine decades' worth of exhibitions, and in fliers (and occasional texts or recordings) that capture the substance of hundreds of programs and events. It is written in the pages of nearly 250 issues of the *Intelligencer* and *Quarterly*, and in dozens of other publications. It is a deep history, a rich history, and—above all else—a *living* history.

"Disneyland," Walt Disney declared soon after his signature theme park opened in 1955, "will never be completed. It will continue to grow as long as there is imagination left in the world." Something similar could be said of the Martha's Vineyard Museum. Barring catastrophe, the ledger of accessions will never be closed. There will never be a last object whose addition completes the collection, a last document or photograph that fills the one remaining hole in an archival jigsaw puzzle, or a last exhibition that says all that remains to be said about the history and culture of Martha's Vineyard. There will always be more untold stories, waiting to be shared, and there will always be new discoveries, encouraging us to look at familiar stories through new eyes. "We shall not cease from exploration," T. S. Eliot wrote, "and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started, and know the place for the first time."



West Tisbury, Mass.
June 19. 1923.

Dear Mr Shepard.

I entirely approve of your letter and your proposition and while it may not yield very much it may call more attention and incite more interest than we think. Mr Foster has made a beautiful seal for us; in my judgment it is far ahead of any of the town seals. It shows the earmarks of an artist.

Sincerely yours
Wm J. Rotch.

"I entirely approve of your letter and your proposition," Vice-President William J. Rotch of the Dukes County Historical Society wrote to President Marshall Shepard about Shepard's latest effort to publicize the Society in the weeks leading up to its incorporation on July 12, 1923. The Society was still brand-new then, its future still uncertain, but Rotch was hopeful. It "may not yield very much," he admitted (referring implicitly to the Society itself), but "it may call more attention and incite more interest than we may think." A century later, the Society that Rotch and Shepard helped to found has grown into a Museum that does both.

Martha's Vineyard Museum
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