An 1849 Description of Dukes County

The following text is scanned from pp. 140-141 of
A Gazeteer of Massachusetts by John Haywood.
(Boston, John P. Jewett & Co., 1849)

EDGARTOWN is the county town. This county is formed of the islands of Martha's Vineyard, Chappequiddick, Elizabeth Islands, and Noman's Land - the latter of which is the southern extremity of' Massachusetts. These islands lie off, and south of Barnstable county, and Buzzard's bay, and contain about one hundred and twenty square miles. They constitute three townships.
The principal island, Martha's Vineyard, the Indian Nope or Capewock, was first settled by the whites, at Edgartown, in 1641, and is twenty-one miles in length and six in breadth. Although a large portion of this county is woodland, and many of the people engaged in the fisheries and coastal trade, yet considerable wool and woollen cloth are annually sent from the island.
There are on these islands about eleven thousand sheep.

This county suffered much during the revolutionary war. In 1778, the people were compelled to surrender their fire-arms, and two thousand three hundred head of cattle to the British.

"These islands were discovered by Bartholomew Gosnold, in 1602. He landed at Noman's Land, which he called Martha's Vineyard, passed round Gay Head, which he named Dover Cliff, anchored in Vineyard Sound, and landed on Cattahunk, which he named Elizabeth Island, in honor of Queen Elizabeth.
Here he concluded to begin a plantation, and accordingly chose a site at the west end of the island. Here, on the north side, is a small pond of fresh water, two miles in circumference; in the middle of its breadth, near the

west end, is a small rocky islet. This they fortified, and upon it erected a storehouse. While the men were occupied in this work, Gosnold crossed the bay in his vessel, went on shore, trafficked amicably with the natives, and having discovered the mouths of two rivers, returned to the island. One of these rivers was that on the banks of which New Bedford is now built. This storehouse was the first house built by the English on the New England shores. When Gosnold was preparing to leave, discontent arose among those who were to have remained, so that the design of a settlement was relinquished, and the whole company returned to England. The next year in June, Martin Pring entered the harbor of Edgartown, which he called Whitson's Bay, and anchored under the shelter of Chappequiddick neck, to which he gave the name of Mount Aldworth. Here he remained till the beginning of August, when he sailed for England. In 1619, Captain Thomas Dermer landed at Martha's Vineyard, and was attacked by the natives. He and his companions gallantly defended themselves with their swords, and escaped. Several Indians were killed in the fray.

"Martha's Vineyard, Nantucket, and the Elizabeth Islands were not included in any of the New England governments. William, Earl of Sterling, in consequence of a grant from the crown of England, laid claim to all the islands between Cape Cod and Hudson's river. James Forcett, agent for the earl, in October, 1641, granted to Thomas Mayhew, of Watertown, and Thomas Mayhew his son, Nantucket, Martha's Vineyard, and the Elizabeth Islands, with the same powers of government which the people of Massachusetts possessed by charter. The elder Thomas Mayhew had been a merchant at Southampton, in England, and when he first came to America he followed the same employment. The next year after he obtained a grant of Martha's Vineyard, he sent his son and several other persons to begin a plantation, who established themselves at Edgartown. The father himself soon followed, and became the governor of the colony. In 1644, by an act of the commissioners of the United Colonies of New England, probably at the

request
of the inhabitants, Martha's Vineyard was annexed to the jurisdiction of
Massachusetts. In 1664, the Duke of York received from his brother, Charles
II, a grant of New York, including Long Island, Martha's Vineyard,
Nantucket, and the islands adjacent, which had been previously purchased of
Henry grandson and heir of William, Earl of Sterling, who previously
resigned and assigned them to the duke. In consequence, these islands became
a part of New York, but were left mostly to manage their own affairs. It was
while Martha's Vineyard and Elizabeth Islands were connected with New York
that, with Nantucket, they were made a county by the name of Dukes county.
By the charter of William and Mary, which arrived in 1692, these islands
were taken from New York and annexed to Massachusetts. In 1695, Martha's
Vineyard, the Elizabeth Islands, and Noman's Land, were separated by the
legislature from Nantucket, ant made a distinct county."

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