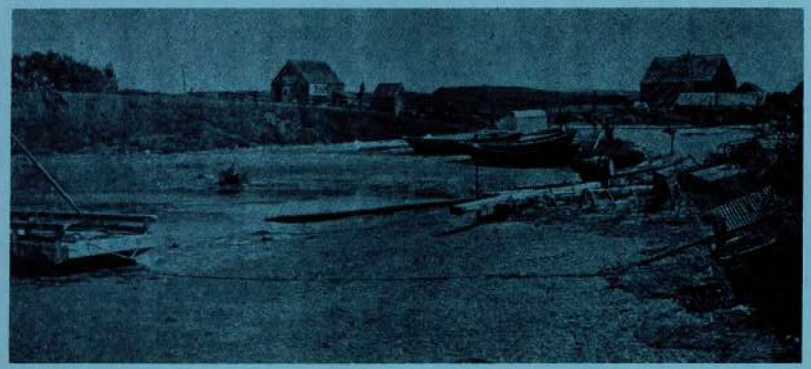
25th Year

THE DUKES COUNTY INTELLIGENCER

VOL. 25, NO. 2 NOVEMBER 1983



The Creekville Postoffice, center, and Icehouse, right, 1910.

When Menemsha Was Creekville

by JOHN LEAVENS

Cape Poge Light: Remote and Lonely

by ARTHUR R. RAILTON

Documents: *Jeremiah Pease Diary*

Plus:

Director's Report, Letters, Bits & Pieces

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(Continued)

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Our thanks to these and the others who have helped in the continuing work of preserving our buildings and historical materials.

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Editor: Arthur R. Railton

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The Dukes County Historical Society was founded in 1922 to preserve the history of Dukes County for the public benefit. It is a nonprofit institution supported entirely by membership dues, contributions and bequests, which are tax deductible. Its annual meeting is held in August of each year in Edgartown.

The Society maintains the Thomas Cooke House, the Francis Foster Museum and the Gale Huntington Library of History, all located on its grounds at the corner of School and Cooke Streets in Edgartown.

Acquired by the Society in 1935, the Thomas Cooke House was built in about 1765. It has been established as a museum and its twelve rooms are devoted to historical displays that reflect past eras of Vineyard Life. It is open to the public during the summer with a nominal fee being charged to non-members.

The Francis Foster Museum and the Huntington Library are in an adjacent building and are open to the public all year around. In the Museum is an exhibition of the Vineyard's maritime heritage with displays of fishing, coastal trade, whaling, navigation, plus a wide variety of scrimshaw. The Library contains collections of ship's logs, journals, genealogies and other Island documents, plus thousands of volumes of historical works.

The public is invited.

When Menemsha Was Creekville

by JOHN LEAVENS

BEFORE 1900, Menemsha Creek flowed in and out of Vineyard Sound along a narrow, tortuous channel that ran northeast past Creek Hill, then abruptly swung west, only to hook unexpectedly to the northeast again as it entered the Sound. There were no jetties and the opening changed with each major storm.

To the west of the Creek channel as it meandered were broad tidal flats, rich in shellfish. Hydrographic charts of the period show that the tidal water flowing in and out of Menemsha, Quitsa and Stonewall Ponds did indeed follow the winding course of a creek. It is no wonder then that when the settlement that developed there got its first postoffice on July 28, 1910, its cancellation stamp read "Creekville, Mass."

Then, as now, it was a fishing village, although few families lived near the Creek. The fishermen had shacks there, but their homes were elsewhere. Most of the fishing was done with traps strung along the shoreline from Gay Head eastward, many being set just offshore in Menemsha Bight. They were tended by trap scows and a miscellany of trap boats, many of them moored in the Creek.

There was also a thriving lobster fishery, much of it based at Lobsterville, just west of the Creek. Fishermen

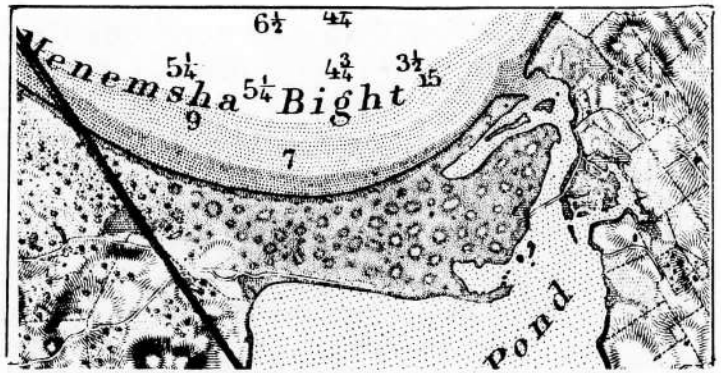
JOHN LEAVENS is an expert on catboats and related matters, including the fishermen who sailed them and the harbors where they were moored. With his wife, Marian, he lives in Chilmark, overlooking the Creek, for six months each year. Founding editor of the Catboat Association *Bulletin* and its working editor for nearly 20 years, he is the author of a book-length manuscript on Menemsha and its catboats, which the Society hopes to publish in the coming year. This article is drawn from his research on that manuscript.



Map of Menemsha drawn for the General Court when it designated the "District of Gay Head" in 1866. Tidal flats are dotted.

from Chilmark and Gay Head maintained fish shacks along the beach, moving into them each summer. It was easier to get in and out from there because there was no current problem and no narrow opening. Lobsterville even had its own store, owned by E. Elliot Mayhew (who also owned the store in Chilmark) and clerked by Miss Helen Mayhew. There was even, according to David Vanderhoop, a baseball field there for the fishermen.

The Noman's Land boat was the preferred type at Lobsterville because it could be easily hauled ashore, but there were catboats as well, moored behind Dogfish Bar, protected from the rough Sound waters. They were, also according to David Vanderhoop, secured on two anchors

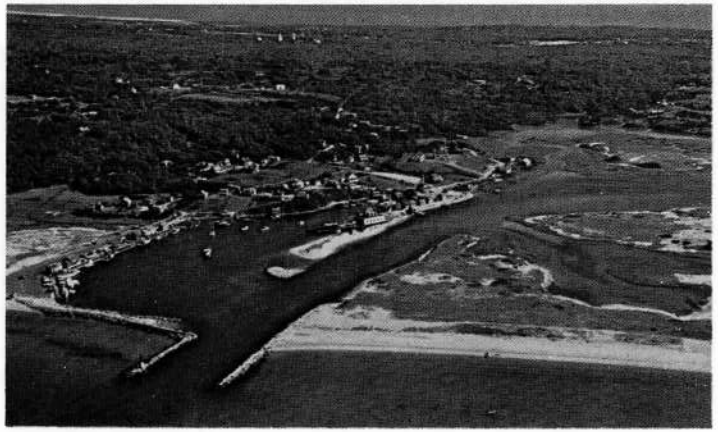


Coast and Geodetic Survey of 1887 shows how Creek meandered.

and a bridle. Capt. Everett A. Poole's catboat *Goldenrod*, among others, rode out the destructive Portland Gale of November 1898 moored "behind the bar."

There were, of course, fishermen who kept their boats in Menemsha Creek all year round. The swift flow of the current scoured the east bank of the Creek as it curved past what is today the Bulkhead and Dutcher Dock, providing deep water, although space for mooring was limited by the narrow channel.

Before the advent of power, a skipper had to take



Aerial photo of Creek and Basin before the boat slips were added.

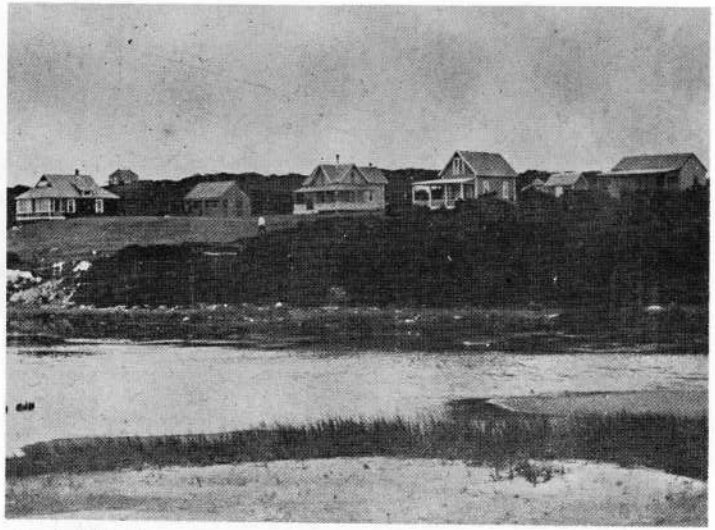
advantage of slack or flooding water to enter the Creek and slack or ebbing water to leave. When a boat missed the favorable current, men would go to her aid, getting a couple of lines on her and hauling her through the opening. The heavier and more awkward trap scows could be moved only at slack water with the aid of sweeps.

About 1906 (perhaps a little earlier), the channel was widened and moved westward, closing off its flow along the foot of Creek Hill. It was straightened out, flowing directly into the Sound. Part of the tidal flat was dredged to form the Basin, the spoil being piled in banks on both sides of the new channel. On the spit formed by the spoil between the new channel and the Basin, fish shacks and piers were soon built. The first and largest pier was built by the town at the foot of the road running down to the Creek, about where the road now turns down to the Coast Guard boathouse.

It was just about this time that inboard power first came into general use for small boats. Joseph Chase Allen stated that when he went to work for Everett Poole aboard the *Goldenrod* in 1906, some catboat fishermen had already begun to shorten their long overhanging booms and install power.



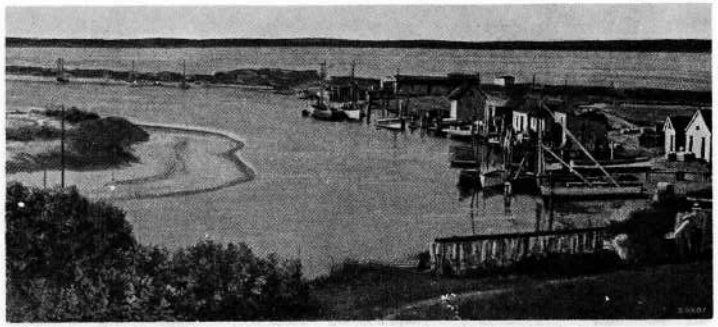
Summer "homes" of fishermen lined Lobsterville beach in 1900.



Creek Hill, about 1920, with Look, Poole, Flanders, Hancock houses.

One could say that the catboat era at Menemsha and its prosperity as a fishing village began at the same time as the straight-through cut was made and the jetty built. That first jetty was plank and only on the west side of the opening, running north and south. The catboat, which was common at Menemsha, had few equals as a fishing boat in the age of sail, particularly in the waters of Vineyard and Nantucket Sounds. Whether used for packeting (hauling fish to market at New Bedford), lobstering, scalloping, swordfishing or trolling, it was the perfect boat. "Slick boats" was how Capt. Ernest Mayhew used to describe them. His catboat, *Reporter*, was a familiar sight at Menemsha for years.

The introduction of power came about 1902 or 1903 with one-cylinder, two-cycle, make-and-break engines, universally known as "one lungers." At first, they put out 2 to 4 horsepower. With such a tiny power output, the engines did little more than supplement sail power, but



Old postcard shows how Creek curved around tidal flat in 1900.

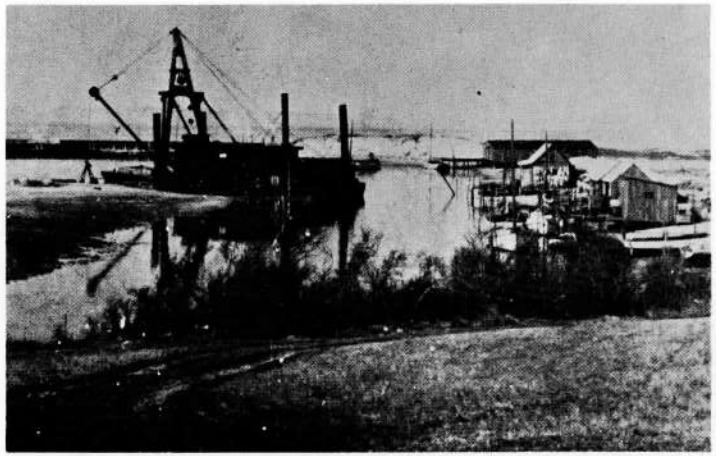
soon the engines were raised to 7 horsepower and things were different. As Onslow Robinson said: "My, they were powerful!"

Economics as well as convenience dictated the shift from sail to power and by 1906 the rush was on to install engines. It wasn't very long before most sail rigs were removed and the catboat had become a power boat.

With power, fishermen could go in and out of the Creek no matter how the tide was running. The fish shacks at Lobsterville were no longer necessary and shacks were built along the Creek and in the Basin. A miniature building boom began. Jim Look, a West Tisbury trap fisherman and boat builder, erected a shack on the northern slope of Creek Hill overlooking the Basin. Others soon followed and the picturesque fishing village we know today began to take shape.

By 1910, the settlement was so well established that the Creekville postoffice, mentioned earlier, was opened on the site of the present Home Port Restaurant. That name, however, didn't last very long. D. Herbert Flanders started a campaign to have it changed to Menemsha and on May 15, 1913, the change was made.

Dan Look bought Jim Look's fish shack, moved it up the hill and remodeled it into the dominant house in the area.



Donald LeMar Poole Collection

Dredge removing tidal flat in 1906, creating what became the Basin.

It became known, because of its size, as the Look Inn, or the Green House, because of its color. Capt. Everett A. Poole and family lived next to Look in a house that came from South Road, opposite the Lucy Vincent house. Once moved to the hill, it was enlarged considerably. Others who built and lived on the hill were Allan Flanders and Russell Hancock and their families.

The scene these houses looked down on was different from the one we know today. Along the shore of the narrow gut at the south end of the Basin there were no shacks and only a few short piers. Where the bulkhead and fish markets are today was a sandy shore with a long, narrow boardwalk (at one time) leading to the gas dock (at the beginning there was no pump, the gasoline was poured from cans) which was about where it is today. To get to the beach you walked through the gas dock building. There were three or four fish shacks and short piers about where Poole's Fish Market is today.

Everything changed in 1938 when the devastating September hurricane swept away most of the low-lying

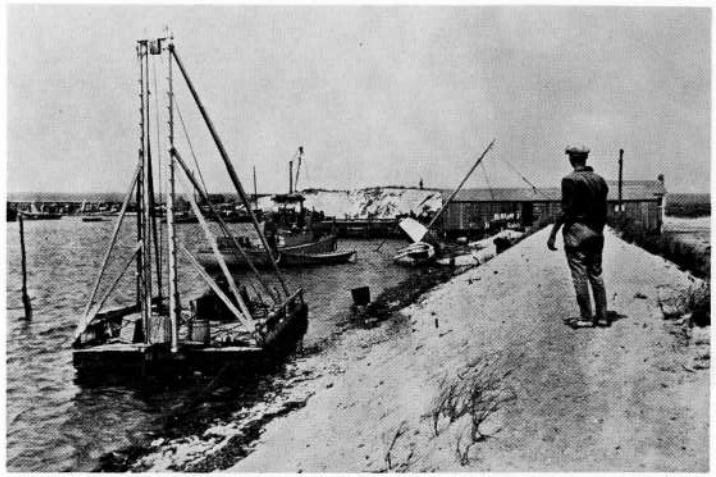


Creekville Postoffice, 1908; it was on the site of today's Homeport.

buildings. The devastation was so complete that after pressure from local residents, aided by the small, but politically powerful summer colony, the Federal and State governments aided in the rebuilding. The result was the construction of the bulkhead that is familiar to all today. The section where the commercial boats tie up is generally



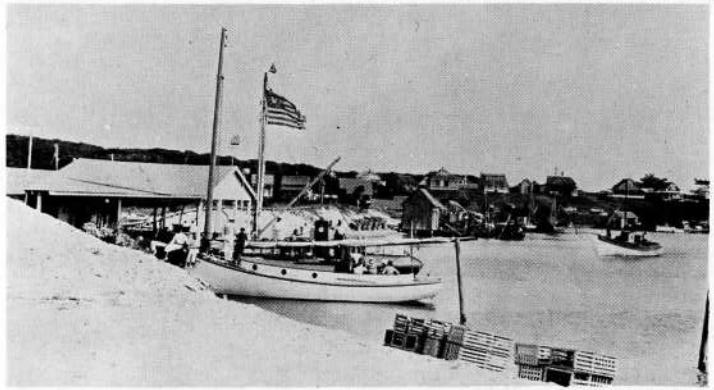
Sign on shack at left says "Gasoline," but there's no pump in sight.



Gas dock in distance, about 1910. Pile driver is tied up in foreground.

called "The Bulkhead," and the section to the north where pleasure boats tie up in summer is known as Dutcher Dock, in memory of a newspaperman.

He was Rodney Dutcher, a well-known Washington correspondent, who was born on the Vineyard and died at an early age at the height of his career. Dr. Edward Greenbaum, a Menemsha summer resident, led the drive to get Federal aid. Through his efforts, and those of others,



Courtesy The Wooden Tent

By 1920, gas dock has a roof, pump and a boardwalk along the sand dune.

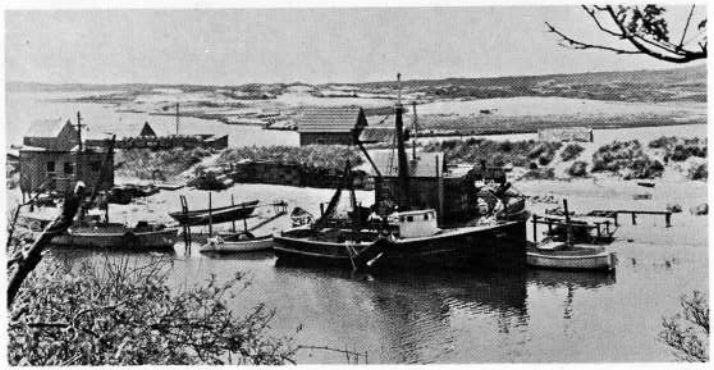


After straight-through cut was made in 1906, shacks sprang up along the spit formed by the dredging spoil. At left, the Town Dock.

the new wharf was named Dutcher Dock as a memorial to the Vineyard native.

More recently, slips have been added along the narrow spit separating the Creek from the Basin and along the north shore of the Basin. Stone jetties protect both sides of the narrow opening. The Coast Guard now maintains a station there, having moved over from Cuttyhunk, bringing their building with them on a scow.

But it is the fish shacks and piers with their working fishing boats, stacks of lobster pots and other gear that



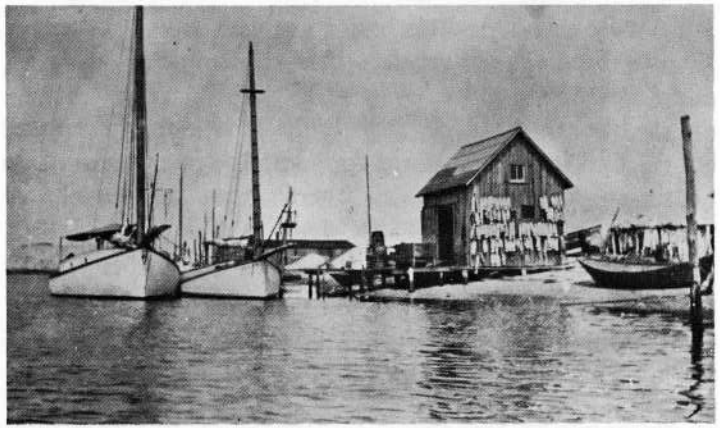
This 1930 photo of the spit shows area now occupied by the Coast Guard.



In early 1930's, the gut was crowded with working boats and gear.

delight the artists and tourists, causing more activity at the Creek in summer than the fishermen, whose daily work makes it the Vineyard's only true fishing village.

As for the catboats that once lined the Creek banks, they, like the trap scows, the Noman's Land boats and the fish shacks at Lobsterville, are gone. An occasional fiberglass pleasure "cat" comes into the Basin, but the working catboat is virtually extinct, a victim of progress.



Two working catboats, rigged for swordfishing, tied up at Poole's dock.

Cape Poge Light: Remote and Lonely

by ARTHUR R. RAILTON

STANDING on the extreme northeastern tip of Chappaquiddick island, Cape Poge Lighthouse, even today, is remote and isolated. In 1801, when the first keeper, Matthew Mayhew, and his family moved into the tiny dwelling provided by a parsimonious Department of the Treasury, it must have seemed as isolated as a frontier outpost. Their enemy was not the "Savage," but the savage sea.

Keeper Mayhew felt so insecure that even a quarter of a century later, in 1825, he wrote to Henry Dearborn, Superintendent of Light Houses for Massachusetts:

> ". . . it is my opinion that it would be expedient for the dwelling house to be moved the present Summer. If we are not in danger of falling immediately down the clift, it is very unpleasant, particular to females,[1] to be thus situated in storms when the Sea is beating with such violence as for the spray to fly against and over the House and no other dwelling house within 5 miles for a refuge. . . ."

The history of Cape Poge Light is a story of human courage, independence and dedication. It is the story of a penny-pinching government agency that seemed almost heartless in its attitude, an agency that showed little understanding of the problems faced by keepers, as at Cape Poge, who lived in remote stations, miles from their

[1]Keeper Mayhew knew well how storms affected "females," as living with him, besides his wife, were five daughters.

ARTHUR R. RAILTON is Editor of this journal and he thanks William Sherman of the National Archives, Washington, D.C., for his help with the research on this history. Unless otherwise stated, the quotations cited are from the National Archives.

closest neighbors.

Even a century later, in 1921, the isolation at Cape Poge continued to bother keepers. By that time it had been made a two-man station, but in an economy move the government was planning to cut it back to a single keeper. Henry L. Thomas, head keeper then, was concerned about losing his assistant and sought the assurance of the government that he would be able to get help in an emergency. Frank J. Morse of the Light House Service wrote to Thomas, making it sound very simple:

> "Relative to sickness: I do not think you need fear any trouble on that score, for a flag set union down should bring you help within the hours of daylight."[2]

That primitive call for help, a flag hoisted upside down, was still, even as late as 1921, the most expeditious means the keeper had of summoning aid in an emergency.

Cape Poge Light became the Island's second lighthouse after Congress, on January 30, 1801, appropriated $2000 for the construction of a lighthouse and dwelling on the tip of Chappaquiddick. That was about two years after Gay Head Light had begun operation. The measure was backed by commercial interests in Edgartown, anxious to attract some of the coastal shipping that was filling Holmes Hole harbor. A letter in the Boston newspaper, *New England Palladium*, indicates that. The unnamed letter writer, an Edgartown "Customer," quoted Capt. James Brackett, Jr., about the Cape Poge lighthouse proposal:

> "I had the honour [the Captain wrote] of being consulted by the Hon. B. Lincoln, Esq., respecting the building of a Light House on Cape Poge. From the wrong representation of Old Town Harbour that had been made to me, I was inclined to object against building the Light. I was never inclined to go into the harbour till a few days past. I was piloted by Mr. Fisher; and I must confess, I was very agreeably disappointed, finding it a harbour secure against all winds, and particularly useful for vessels bound

[2]A letter in the Keeper's Journal for 1921, D.C.H.S. Archives.

> to the eastward. I am certain it will meet the approbation of masters, as well as merchants, and owners of vessels, as it will save great expense of cables, anchors, etc., which necessarily attends them in Holmes Hole."[3]

On March 6, 1801, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts ceded to the United States four acres on Cape Poge's tip that it had bought from John Worth, Marshall Jenkins, Martin Pease and Joseph Huxford for $36 for the "purpose of erecting a Light House on the same." The Rev. Joseph Thaxter, "Parson" Thaxter in history, was the Commonwealth's agent in the transaction.[4]

The Federal agency that accepted the land and was responsible for the fledgling lighthouse establishment was the Treasury Department, which, being responsible for the collection of customs duties, was familiar with coastal shipping. The Commissioner of Revenue in the Treasury Department, William Miller, ordered Benjamin Lincoln, Collector of Customs in Boston, on March 21, 1801, to proceed with the project, explaining:

> ". . . because the [total] Expenditure for completing the Establishment cannot exceed 2000 dollars, it will, I presume, be impracticable to obtain any other than a substantial frame Pyramid with appendages which are necessary for preserving the oil and accommodating the keeper."

Lincoln, a retired Revolutionary War General, agreed that the project had to be kept inexpensive:

> "Limited as you are by the sum of $2000, the works must be so reduced as not to exceed in expense that sum . . . a good framed octagonal Pyramid, 35 feet high, 19 feet base, 7 feet at top . . . well covered with boards and shingles and a dwelling house 15 feet wide and 32 feet long with a cellar 10 by 13 feet, will be sufficient. . ."

[3]D.C.H.S. Archives. A typewritten copy of the letter.

[4]Before entering the clergy, Thaxter had been active in politics in his home town of Hingham, Mass., (also Lincoln's home town) and they probably were friends. They both served in Washington's Army. It is likely that Lincoln, being told to build a lighthouse on Martha's Vineyard, would have asked his old friend for help.

Commissioner Miller, in July, approved the proposal for the Treasury Department and ordered General Lincoln to

> ". . . give your friend[5] at Martha's Vineyard instructions to have the preparatory arrangements which were submitted in my former letter immediately attended to . . . the season having advanced very far."

The "preparatory arrangements" included the publication of advertisements calling for bids to construct the lighthouse and keeper's dwelling. The *Columbian Centinel*, a Boston newspaper (and other papers, no doubt) on August 15, 1801, published the complete specifications, with construction to be completed by November 15, 1801.

Apparently there already was a light of sorts on Cape Poge, although we know of no other reference to it except in these specifications. In the description of the keeper's dwelling, a one-story frame building, the specifications as published stated that it was to be

> ". . . placed within about 60 or 70 feet of the Light-house (which is to be erected where the beacon now stands.)"

We have found no record of who had built the "beacon" or who tended it, but obviously one was there, thus Cape Poge may have had the Island's first "lighthouse," predating Gay Head. Perhaps, as at Tarpaulin Cove on Naushon island, the Nantucket shipping interests had erected and provided oil for the beacon to guide their vessels through the shoals. A light at Cape Poge would be as useful to vessels heading to and from Nantucket, especially to those coming up from the south, as to those entering Edgartown, indicating that political pressure on Congress may have come from Nantucket as well as from Edgartown.

The lowest bidder for the project was a Hingham contractor, Duncan McBean Thaxter,[6] who was awarded the contract for $1950. The contract apparently contained

[5]Probably "Parson" Thaxter.

[6]Could this Hingham Thaxter have been a relative of the "Parson's"?

an error in one specification, as Lincoln informed Miller that

> ". . . the lantern is [not] to be six feet diameter, it should have been 4½ feet . . ."

With the contractor's bid of $1950, plus the land cost of $36, the total came to $1986, leaving not enough to pay the commission that General Lincoln had coming to him. He must have complained to Miller about it because in December he was authorized to take his commission from another account.[7]

On November 23, 1801, Commissioner Miller notified the Secretary of the Treasury that the Cape Poge Light was completed and a keeper must be appointed. General Lincoln had proposed Cornelius Huxford and Miller so informed the Secretary. He was a brother of Joseph Huxford,[8] one of the sellers of the land. It is not known what happened, but on December 7, Miller informed General Lincoln that President Jefferson had turned down his recommendation and had appointed Matthew Mayhew keeper at a salary of $200 a year. Lincoln was told to send oil to Edgartown so that the light "may be lighted immediately."

We don't know on precisely which night Cape Poge Light was first lighted, but it was sometime late in December 1801. Just as at Gay Head, confusion soon arose over the chain of command. Keeper Mayhew wrote to Collector Edward Pope in New Bedford requesting certain supplies for the lighthouse, that city being the place from which Vineyarders usually got their supplies. Pope, anxious to enlarge his domain (and thus his commissions), sent Mayhew's request along to Miller in Washington, but the Commissioner quickly straightened him out:

> "Benjamin Lincoln is over Cape Poge, not you, and the letter from Edward (*sic*) Mayhew asking you for supplies is wrong. It should go to B. Lincoln."

[7]Collectors got a percentage of monies spent, amounting to about 2 percent.

[8]Joseph and another brother, Samuel, were Revolutionary War soldiers, a fact that perhaps influenced General Lincoln's choice.

General Benjamin Lincoln, an old army buddy of George Washington, had considerable political clout. When he retired from the army, he had been appointed Collector of Customs in Boston by his friend, George. Being at a major port, the Boston Customs Collector was among the highest paid Federal employees. Even after Jefferson became president, Lincoln managed to stay on, despite his strong opposition to Jefferson's party.[9]

It could very well have been politics that gave the keeper's post to Matthew Mayhew rather than to Cornelius Huxford, General Lincoln's choice. Jefferson was very unpopular along the sea coast and especially in Massachusetts; he may have been trying to build his standing with the influential Mayhews.

Whatever the reason, Mayhew got the job on the isolated, windswept spot. It was a long way to town by land so within a year he asked that the government provide him with a boat so he could sail to Edgartown for mail and supplies rather than make the long walk along the beach. His request was approved on November 3, 1802, provided the boat cost no more than $70.

Jefferson's Secretary of Treasury, Albert Gallatin, began in 1804 to take increased interest in the lighthouse establishment, being run by his Commissioner of Revenue, William Miller. Keepers were complaining about the low wages and the Secretary seemed to suspect that the system was not fair:

> "The size of the Light House [Gallatin wrote to General Lincoln] has generally been considered the principal

[9]Political loyalty was important in Federal employment, even then. Jefferson received a letter from the Governor of Delaware asking for help for a "Rev. Mr. Hargus, Keeper of the Light House. He undergoes great persecution on account of his political sentiments, as most of the Society of Methodists in this state, particularly in this county, are high-toned federalists and every engine they can contrive to set to work to oppose and injure him. If anything can with propriety be done in my opinion he is well deserving of it."

> criterion, but . . . . the degree of comfort, convenience, and sometimes incidental profit arising from the situation; or the reverse of all those [should be considered]."

Keeper Mayhew, at inconvenient, remote, uncomfortable Cape Poge, was surely entitled to a raise, if such criteria were used. He did have, to use Gallatin's words, a small source of "incidental profit arising from the situation." But it was causing a problem for him as he wrote to the Secretary:

> "I presume it is supposed that the Keeper of the Light House should reap some profit from the land belonging to the public. In its present situation, I derive little profit from it. It would yield some profit if it was fenced. The place where it stands is sandy. The sheep and cattle that come round it for shade keep the sand loose and the high winds which are frequent and continually blowing away the sand [so] that in a short time it will endanger the foundations of the house. Believing it to be for the public interest as well as some profit to me, I wish if it should be judged best, that the land may be fenced. This is the only thing that will keep the sheep and cattle from undermining the foundation of the house . . ."

Keeper Mayhew estimated the cost of the fence to be $50 and he had the letter countersigned by a prestigious group: Jeremiah Pease, Collector of Customs; Thomas Cooke, Justice of the Peace; Beriah Norton, J.P.; William Mayhew, J.P.; and Joseph Thaxter, the "Parson."

He got his fence, but it took more than three years, not being approved until 1808.

Whether it was Gallatin's interest in wages that prompted it we don't know, but Keeper Mayhew did get a raise in January 1807:

> ". . . You are hereby authorized [Gallatin wrote to Lincoln] to allow an addition of $15 to the salaries of each of the keepers of Portland, Cape Cod and Cape Poge Light Houses. . ."

That act of governmental generosity brought Keeper Mayhew's annual salary up to $225 or $4.33 a week, housing provided. For that he worked a 24 hour day, seven days a week, with no vacations.

By 1809, General Lincoln had resigned and Henry Dearborn was Collector of Customs in Boston. Dearborn took a very active interest in the lighthouses under his supervision and soon became a major influence on the government's actions. Early in his term he wrote to the various keepers, asking for specifications of their beacons, data apparently not available in his files. Keeper Mayhew's response from Cape Poge on May 14, 1809, gives us the first information about the kind of lamp in the tower:[10]

> ". . . The haith of the Lantern is 5 feet 7 inches, wedth of Lantern is 4 feet 6 inches, as to the lamps, I use but one which is 12 inches broad and 6½ inches deep with eight nosses. . .
>
> ". . . I take the liberty of mentioning that I stand in grate need of a half bolt of Duck for a sail as I have about five miles to go to get my necessary supplies."

The lamp that he described was obviously the primitive spider lamp without chimneys. The "nosses" must have been his term for wicks (probably "noses").

In June of that year, again responding to a Dearborn request, Mayhew wrote that his "annual consumption of oil averages at about 543 gallons, some years more, some years less."

Dearborn's data collection may have been prompted by Secretary Gallatin, who at the time was negotiating with Winslow Lewis, a former sea captain, who had patented a lamp for lighthouses and was eager to sell to the government. His lamp, a rather crude copy of the Argand lamp widely used in Europe, consisted of a silvered reflector inside which a wick lamp with chimney was mounted. It gave, Lewis claimed, more light than the spider lamp, such as was in use at Poge and elsewhere, and

[10]Keeper Mayhew is a poor speller. Some of his letters obviously were written by someone else because the spelling is excellent. This one is obviously his.

burned only half as much oil. That was not so miraculous as it might seem because the spider lamps had eight wicks burning with no chimneys or reflectors. They were smokey and wasteful. A chimney would direct an air flow over the wick, increasing its efficiency, and a reflector would bounce the light rays toward the horizon. Lewis also added a crude lens to the front of the lamp to increase, he said, its intensity. The lens, however, did nothing but make "A bad lamp worse," it was discovered later. At the time of the negotiations, however, the assembly seemed most scientific.[11]

Captain Lewis offered to sell his patent to the government and to supervise the installing of his lamps in all the nation's lighthouses for $24,000. To test the design, Gallatin had Lewis put his lamps in the Boston Harbor lighthouse, a fixed beacon, and in Cape Cod lighthouse, an eclipsing light. The lamps did, the test showed, reduce consumption by 50 percent and mariners reported they were brighter.

So good were the results that in July 1811 Gallatin wrote to Dearborn to tell him "I feel disposed to extend [the system] as fast as the appropriations will permit to all our light houses." But later that year Gallatin changed his mind, writing to Dearborn that he could not authorize extending it because of its cost. Apparently the bill that Lewis presented for refitting Boston Light, $887.50, was much higher than Gallatin had expected. Also Gallatin, in the Jefferson style, may have felt that lighthouses were primarily a service to the shipping interests who therefore should bear part of the costs. Although he was satisfied it was an improvement, he wrote to Dearborn, he would not "direct its being extended to any other Light Houses."

Unaware of these high-level decisions, Keeper Mayhew

[11]For more details about the Lewis system, see *Intelligencers* Feb. and May 1982, covering the history of Gay Head Light.

on remote Cape Poge was having his own problems. He wrote to Dearborn on December 17, 1811, that he needed a new boat and, he said, a bigger one than the first, "a boat sufficient for my use would cost $120," nearly double the cost of the other.

Thomas Cooke[12] of Edgartown, a Customs officer, went to Boston a few months later and confirmed Mayhew's need for a new boat, so on May 30, 1812, Dearborn forwarded the request to Washington:

> "Matthew Mayew (sic), Keeper of Cape Poge Light House has petitioned for a new boat as the one he had hitherto had is worn out. Mr. Cook (sic), the Collector of Customs of Edgartown, was in the office this day, who had been requested by the Keeper to state the condition and the necessity of a new Boat. He says she is not worth repairing and that it is absolutely necessary that Mayew should be furnished with one as his local situation is such that he cannot do without a new Boat -- shall he be furnished?"

On the bottom of the letter there is the notation:

> "Authorize, limiting the price. A.G."

Gallatin's clerk passed along the Secretary's approval to Dearborn in this manner:

> "... you are hereby authorized to furnish the Keeper of Cape Poge Light House with a new boat, provided the expense does not exceed $70."

So much for Mayhew's request for a larger boat!

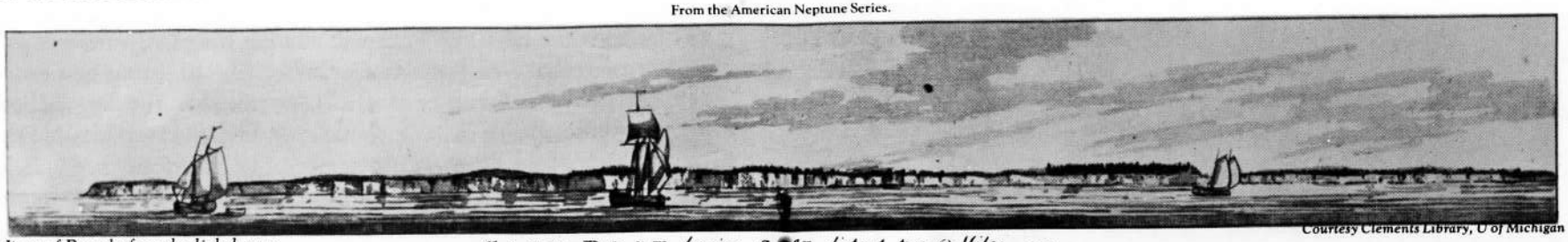
When President Madison took over from the stingy Jefferson, there was less pressure to hold down expenses. In June 1812 a contract was signed with Capt. Winslow Lewis authorizing him to refit the nation's lighthouses with his lamps. He was to be reimbursed for his patent by being given the oil he said his lamps would save: one half of the previous year's consumption, a substantial payment which amounted to about 24,000 gallons of sperm oil a year.[13]

By the fall of 1812, he was moving down the east coast

[12]Cooke was Mayhew's brother-in-law, having married his sister, Elizabeth.

[13]Sperm oil was worth more than $1 a gallon.

From the American Neptune Series.



Courtesy Clements Library, U of Michigan

View of Poge before the lighthouse . CAPE POGE *bearing S. E., distant two Miles.*

installing his lamps and apparently had made the change at Cape Poge[14] by October 24, when Keeper Mayhew wrote to Dearborn complaining about his house. In the letter he mentioned Captain Lewis ("Luis"):

> "The dwelling house is small and ilconvenient, their is but tow small rooms without any place to put our iron ware, we are obliged to put it up garet or down sellar and but one way outdoors except we pass out of the window which is offen the case. In storme weather the house is so small that it is not in my power to acomedat peopel that comes hear by distress of weather ... Allow me a small addition to the house. The Expense would be about 130 dollars. Capt. Luis is abel to Inform you wether my Request is just or not as he has ben hear."

This was the same complaint that had been made by Keeper Skiffe about his Gay Head dwelling house. He, too, had "no place to put iron ware."

Mayhew requested in the same letter, almost as an afterthought, that he be sent 30 squares of 6 by 8 inch glass and a diamond to cut it. "The glass I have won't fit the sashes of the Lantern." What the wind blowing through broken windows in the lantern did to the new Lewis lamps and reflectors must be left to our imagination.

But new window glass wouldn't solve the major problem that Mayhew faced in the lantern, the many-paned glass enclosure that protects the lamp from the weather. The keeper asked Dearborn in February 1813 for "sum more tube glasses . . . it is not in my power to prevent the tubes from brakeing."

The problem, he explained, is the smallness of the lantern. It was, as we have read, only 4½ feet in diameter. Apparently most lighthouses of that size had larger lanterns and Commissioner Miller had seemed to think that Poge would have one also. General Lincoln, in holding down the cost, corrected that false impression in his earlier letter to Miller. Had the extra width been retained, it would have eliminated Mayhew's problem:

> "The Lantern is so small that i am obliged to stand in the gangway that leads into the lantern to trim my lamps with the scuttel open which causses so much wind to com into the Lantern that makes the blaze of the lamps to flair which strikes against the tubes and causes them to brake. Was the Lantern so large to admit of the lamps being trimmd with the scuttel shut i think the tubes wold not be so liabel to be broke."

Mayhew's problem was set aside as much larger concerns were occupying the minds of Gallatin and the Administration. The country was at war with England, hostilities having been declared a few months before, in June 1812, after months of conflict over shipping embargoes, impressment of sailors and "freedom of the seas." Although we were at war, the lighthouse establishment seemed little affected until nearly a year later. On April 20, 1813, Dearborn wrote to Secretary Gallatin:

"The last of March I gave directions to the Collector of

[14] Lewis may not have installed his new lamps at Poge until 1816 (an 1820 report gives that date), but Keeper Mayhew was breaking chimneys in 1813 and the older lamps didn't use chimneys.

> Nantucket[15] to distribute the oil in his possession to the several Light Houses, but as our coast is infested with enemy cruisers, I this day directed him not to send this oil away until further orders. There being now about three years stocks of oil on hand at the several Light Houses, presume you will not be dissatisfied with this measure."

The war stopped Lewis from refitting the nation's lighthouses, but it did not keep him from criticizing the way keepers were wasting the oil, thus making it appear that his lamps were not, as he had promised, using only half as much as the old style. He told his friend Dearborn in June 1813 that he planned to asked the Secretary to give him custody of 23,000 gallons of oil, enough for a year's supply, and he would dole it out to the keepers, thus being able to control the wastage with, Lewis wrote, "much less trouble to the Treasury Department."

Dearborn agreed that keepers were wasteful and wrote to the Secretary that the Lewis plan should be adopted because

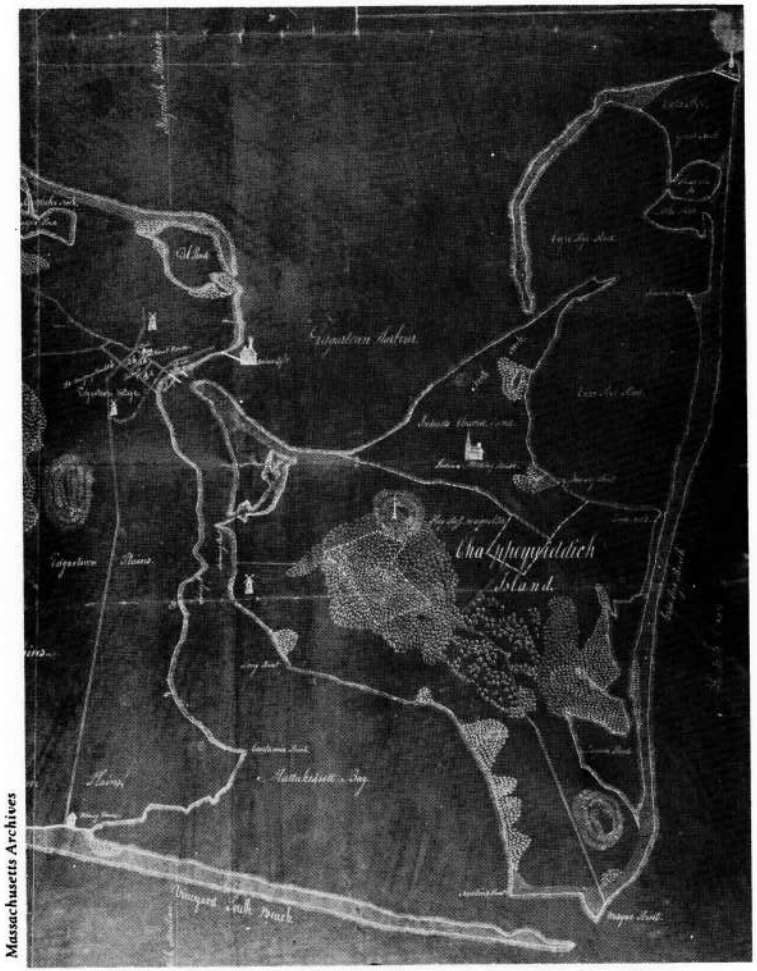
> "Most gross abuses have been practiced in the articles of oil. It is not as good or as well secured in sufficient casks as the contractors for its supply engage, and the keepers have it in their power to waste, sell, or otherwise dispose of a large quantity of oil annually and without its being possible to prevent it..."

Dearborn was suggesting that those keepers whose lights had been refitted with the Lewis lamps had an excess of oil on hand and thus were tempted to sell it or use it for personal comfort, such as for lamps in the house. The Lewis proposal, it seems, was not accepted, perhaps because the war was building up and the administration had bigger problems than a few barrels of oil. Lighthouses were even being sacked, Lewis notified the Treasury:

> "The keeper at Gull Rock Light House[16] informs me

[15]Oil for the lighthouses in the district was stored on Nantucket. It was purchased from a variety of sources,

[16]Perhaps this was Little Gull Island, Long Island Sound.



Massachusetts Archives

This 1830 map shows the total isolation of the lighthouse, upper right.

> that 28 July [1813] a boat from a British man o' war took all lamps and reflectors, 'by the order of Sir Thomas Hardy.' Should I replace them?"

A few weeks later, Dearborn reported that he would no longer ship oil from the Boston depot to the Islands, but would send it to Barnstable and ship it across from there. He did not want to "risk capture by the enemy around

Cape Cod."

British raids on New England were becoming more frequent and Dearborn wanted the lights turned off.[17] In July 1814, he proposed to the Treasury that the beacons on Cape Cod (and other places) be extinguished "as they are of great advantage to the enemies' ships on this coast and serve to direct their barques into the ports and bays on their nocturnal predatory expeditions."

The war was very unpopular, especially in New England, where the commercial interests opposed it. The lighthouse establishment did not seem in any hurry to extinguish the beacons. Then a month later, the British marched into Washington, D.C., chasing President Madison out of town and setting fire to the Capitol, the White House and several other buildings. Shortly afterwards, the British fleet raided the port of Baltimore and on the night of September 13, 1814, the "Star Spangled Banner" was written as the rockets red glared. That day, Samuel H. Smith, Commissioner of the Revenue, writing from fire-blackened Washington, informed Dearborn:

> "You will be pleased to cause the lights in the Light House establishment under your superintendence to be forthwith extinguished."

The order came down to Cape Poge and Keeper Mayhew complied, reporting back on October 4, 1814,

> "I have caused the light under my care to be Extinguist. The apparatus and other publick property I have removed about four miles . . . to the dwelling house of Mr. Samuel Huxford where they are deposited in his cellar."

Thus, in a tiny cellar on Chappaquiddick, the Government's property was secured from the enemy. Two and a half months later, the war officially was over, with the signing of the Treaty of Ghent on December 24, 1814.

[17] In July 1813, Hannah Smith, whose Diurnal Journal is in the Society Archives, described a naval battle between two "stupendious barques" which she watched off South Beach.

The fighting continued, however, because the word of the signing did not get back to Washington until February 14, 1815. Presumably some weeks later the word filtered down to Cape Poge and Keeper Mayhew hauled his "apparatus" back four miles over the beach, installed it in the tower and relighted his lamps.

When Captain Lewis visited Cape Poge Light the following September on his annual visit, he took up the three-year-old request of Keeper Mayhew for an addition to his house. On September 30, 1815, Lewis reported to Dearborn:

> "I have lately visited Cape Poge. . . The dwelling house . . . has only 2 rooms, 15 by 12 feet, no chamber, kitchen, bed-room or closet in it. An addition of 15 feet to this small house would make it tenantable for the Keeper's family. The Light House is wood and wants painting, it having never been done but once, which was when it was built."

Keeper Mayhew, now 50 years old, and his wife, Magdalen, had raised a family of eight children in a two-room dwelling on the windswept point of Cape Poge. For 14 years, they had enjoyed the enviable life of a lighthouse keeper!

It took about a year, but on August 3, 1816, Commissioner Smith in Washington informed Dearborn that he was

> ". . . authorized to enlarge the dwelling house of the Keeper of Cape Poge Light House, 14 by 14 feet, provided the expense shall not exceed $250 and to paint the Light House and dwelling house provided the expense shall not exceed $120."

Keeper Mayhew, learning of the new addition, decided to request something more. He enlisted, once again, the help of Thomas Cooke, who wrote to Nathaniel Tracy, Deputy Collector in Boston and probably the official with whom Collector Cooke regularly dealt on Customs business, explaining that Mayhew would like it if, in the

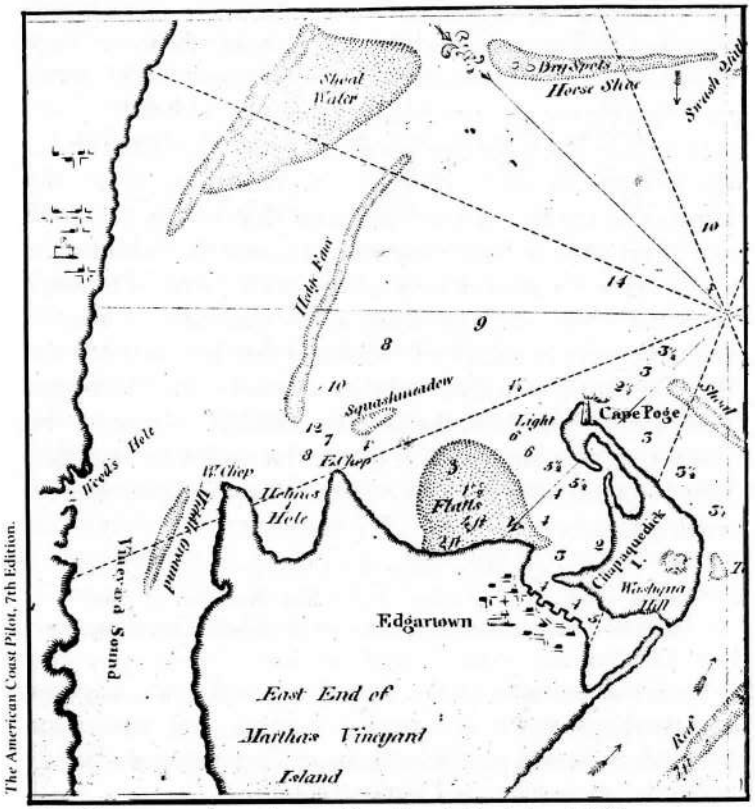
". . . contemplated addition to the dwelling house that there may be an outside door put to the end that is to be added . . . the house has just one outside door . . . [and that] faces to the eastward. That in the prevalent gales of wind from that quarter his family frequently are obliged to have the wood and water, etc., past in at one of the lee windows on account of the difficulty attending the opening of the door in strong gales. Mr. Coffin, the contractor, is willing to complete the door without additional expense to the government in case it would be approved of by Mr. Dearborn."

Keeper Mayhew's belief that he had to call on his distinguished brother-in-law for help in having a door installed at no cost to the government is evidence that red tape was as strong then as today. A remote lighthouse keeper, left to his own resources by the establishment in so many of his responsibilities, did not feel he could make such a simple decision himself or even request such a decision himself.

We don't know if he got the door, but in any case the addition, with or without the door, was completed October 11, 1816, and contractor Coffin so informed Dearborn.

It was in that year, 1816, that the residents of Holmes Hole, by far the busiest harbor on the Island, decided it was time to demand a lighthouse on West Chop. It was bad enough that Edgartown had a lighthouse, but Congress had just appropriated money for a lighthouse at Tarpaulin Cove. A double insult! After all, Holmes Hole was the major harbor in the area. A group of citizens headed by Thomas Dunham petitioned Congressman John Reed in February, asking him to have Congress approve a lighthouse for them. Holmes Hole, they wrote, was "the right place" for it:

"When a Light House was erected at Cape Poge, many people were surprised that it was not erected on the West



The oldest map we have showing Cape Poge Light is dated 1809.

Chop. Seeing two Light Houses erected or to be erected, one ten miles to the eastward of the right place and one twelve miles to the westward of the only place where a Light House can be brought to any certain point to clear the Shoals, they could not refrain from stating to Congress their reasons and petitioning for an alteration."

The lighthouse at Tarpaulin Cove, they argued, would be a "misapplication of the public's money as they feel confident that the public will be better served by having the light on the West Chop of H. Hole."

The petition paid off and in its next session Congress

authorized a lighthouse at West Chop. A contract was awarded to the same man who had built the Cape Poge Light, this time, however, the amount was $4850, more than double the amount paid at Chappaquiddick.[18]

On Cape Poge, Keeper Mayhew, now luxuriating in his three-room house, reported to Dearborn that the lighthouse tower needed repair and that locally he could not "find anyone that is capable of doing the business, as our mechanics are not acquainted with such." The deck atop the tower and the many-windowed lantern around the lamp were in such bad condition that Mayhew felt the work required a skilled lighthouse workman. He hoped that, at the same time, the lantern could be enlarged so he could trim the lamps while inside the enclosure, echoing his complaint of four years earlier. Winslow Lewis agreed, writing Dearborn June 27, 1817, that the

> ". . . deck is somewhat decayed -- a new lantern is what is most wanted. [It is] now only 4 feet diameter. A new lantern 6 feet diameter and a new deck will cost about $700."

With the memory of the recent war still fresh, another and perhaps more powerful argument was made for increasing the size of the lantern, as Commissioner Smith in Washington wrote to Dearborn:

> "Mr. Lewis make the following representations: 'Cape Poge lantern is one of the smallest in the United States, being only 4 feet in diameter. The deck of the lantern is now decayed and must be new. I should recommend that when the new deck is laid, a new lantern of 6 feet diameter be put on. As it is now ascertained that Ships of War can pass through the Vineyard Sound with more safety than to go outside the Shoals, this light will become of more importance."

The defense of our seacoast had become important as the nation settled back behind its shores in a growing

[18]Holmes Hole won the battle, in a way. The West Chop Light began operation Oct. 3, 1817, one day before Tarpaulin Light.

mood of isolationism. The defense argument helped and the new deck and enlarged lantern were authorized, not, however, to exceed $700. The keeper could now trim the wicks in calm air.

There were 55 lighthouses on the coast in 1817, all under the supervision of Winslow Lewis, who was increasingly being criticized by politicians and ship owners. The lights, they said, were not up to the standards of those in Europe. Lewis had lived up to his promise to reduce oil consumption, but the brightness was inadequate. The nation burned 24, 731 gallons of oil in 1817, compared to an estimated 52,000 gallons that would have been consumed with the old lamps. As the number of lighthouses increased, Lewis was getting so much more income under the 50 percent arrangement that Congress cut him back to one-third.

In May 1819, perhaps to dull the growing criticism, Commissioner Smith sent out the first detailed instructions the keepers had ever received. Included was the requirement that a daily journal be kept at each station and that each quarter year a summary report be sent in of the important occurrences. The keepers, did not quickly fall into line, forcing Dearborn to issue a follow-up directive:

> "It is expected that you will in future strictly comply with the instructions . . . for failure to do so will subject you to the penalty mentioned in the [earlier] letter."

Salaries of keepers had been increased sharply (Mayhew was now making $350 a year, nearly double his starting pay of $200) and the establishment apparently decided it could expect more from them.

In almost every session, Congress appropriated funds for another lighthouse or two. There were, by 1820, 70 lighthouses in operation. The nation was increasingly dependent upon its coastal shipping. In 1815, more than

140 cotton mills were operating within 30 miles of Providence, R.I., with coastal schooners being the major means of supply. Every port city was demanding its own lighthouse, often as much for civic pride as navigational necessity. Congress obliged in many cases, especially where the political pressure was great. The lighthouse establishment was growing like Topsy and President Madison decided something had to be done.

He turned the responsibility for lighthouses over to the Fifth Auditor of the Treasury Department, Stephen Pleasonton. It was the first time a separate department had been given the exclusive responsibility. At the local level, however, there was no change as Customs Collectors were still in charge.

Pleasonton was deluged with the complaints of ship owners and masters,many about Winslow Lewis and his lamps. He still had loyal supporters, one being Dearborn, who wrote to Pleasonton on November 22, 1822:

> "In justice to Capt. Lewis, I must observe that I have found him attentive and ever ready to rectify any imperfections in the lamps and zealous to keep the establishment in fine order and when any injury accrues or defect in the light arrives, it is generally from the want of intelligence or attention in the keepers."

Dearborn wasn't the only one who supported Lewis and, despite the growing criticism, the Captain stayed on as the government's expert on lighthouse construction, lamps, oil and other details. He, because of his experience, became the principal advisor to the Fifth Auditor, helping make decisions that, no doubt, did Winslow Lewis no harm.

He survived some gross indiscretions, like the one involving a lighthouse he had built in Florida, where there were serious financial irregularities. Lewis claimed he was not personally aware of the fraud and that he greatly regretted it. He expressed his regret to his friend Dearborn, who wrote to Pleasonton that Lewis showed "deep

mortification and indignation at the fraud which it has been found was practised by his associates in the contract for building the Light House at St. Marks."

It was not fraud or indiscretions that worried Keeper Mayhew on Cape Poge, it was the encroaching ocean. The winter of 1824-5 was particularly stormy and in the spring Keeper Mayhew, still a very poor speller, graphically described the conditions in his quarterly report:

> "I hear with trance mit to your office a copey of my daily Journal with my quaterly account --
>
> "Takeing into view the situation of the United State property at Cape Poge, I think it my indispensible duty to acquaint you theirwith, in the year 1800 there was of the Land 4 acres and now their is about 2 acres, the land whashes away very fast. The distance from the dwelling house to the edge of the bank is 40 feet. I have known 14 feet of the bank to wash away in one tide. Consequently, it is my opinion that it would be expediant for the dwelling House to be moved the present Summer. If we are not in danger of falling immediately down the clift, it is very unpleasent, particular to females to be thus situated in storms when the Sea is beating with such violance as for the spray to fly against and over the House and no other dwelling House within 5 miles for a refuge. Should it meet your approbation and will have it accomplished, it would be very gratifying to your,
>
> Obedient Servant,
> Matthew Mayhew"

Dearborn got an estimate of the cost and sent the letter along to Pleasonton:

> "He [Mayhew] states it will cost about two hundred and twenty dollars [to move the house]. More land will be required & as it can be procured, as he alleges, for fifteen dollars per acre, I recommend that four additional acres be purchased."

On April 29, 1825, the Fifth Auditor authorized the move and the purchase of four acres of land "provided it can be got at a rate not exceeding $15 per acre."

Land was cheap in those days, but not so cheap as

Keeper Mayhew thought. Moving the house, which he had said would cost $250, was accomplished by Thomas Mayhew (the keeper's brother) for $220, a saving of $30, but part of that saving was absorbed in the higher land cost, as Dearborn explained to Pleasonton:

> "I directed the Keeper of Cape Poge Light House to purchase four acres of land at fifteen dollars per acre, but I received the enclosed letter this morning from which you will perceive that the owners asked twenty dollars and, as the sum was so small, I have authorized the Keeper to take it at that price, trusting that it will meet with your approbation."

It did meet with the Fifth Auditor's approbation. The whole project was completed with an alacrity that was unusual. Whether it was Mayhew's vivid description of the family "falling immediately down the clift" or the growing criticism of the lighthouse establishment that did it, we don't know, but something shook up the Fifth Auditor. The project took less than two months to complete.

Not only were the Mayhews in danger of falling down the cliff, so too, many Vineyarders thought, was the nation. The Federalists, the dominant Vineyard party, had already fallen, making the election of 1824 a one-party contest among candidates of the Republican Party (the present Democratic party). Five Republicans ran for president and none received a majority of the Electoral College. General Andrew Jackson, the military hero, received the most, with 99, second was the New England favorite, John Quincy Adams, with 84. The other three candidates received a total of 78 votes. Henry Clay, the Kentucky statesman, one of the other three, announced his support of Adams over Jackson. The election was thrown into the House of Representatives where Clay's support was decisive and Adams was elected. It turned out to be an unsatisfactory solution. The country was not behind its new leader and, because he was not a

"politician" willing to compromise, little was accomplished during his term. Thus the stage was set for an overwhelming victory in 1828 by General Jackson. The nation, which, until now, had been controlled by the established folk, was turned over to the "common man."

On Cape Poge, the political "revolution" went unnoticed. To Keeper Mayhew it meant only that Winslow Lewis no longer came around once a year, bringing new lamp parts and adjusting his "apparatus." Lewis was bitter about his removal. It was, he felt, totally political (and it was, Jackson having discovered the "spoils system"). Lewis wrote to his buddy, Pleasonton, on June 16, 1830, stating that the government still owed him money for the "bad oil" that he had replaced with "good oil" at his own expense:

> ". . . having closed my connection with the Light House establishment after 16 years of hard service, rather poorer in my pecuniary affairs than when I commenced, and having rather too far advanced in years to commence new pursuits . . . [I request that I be given the oil I replaced]."

Pleasonton must have agreed because we learn from our Edgartown diarist, Jeremiah Pease, that on November 20, 1830, he (Pease) "went to Capoge[19] to get 2 bbls. of oil for Winslow Lewis. Got the oil and put it on board sloop *Toleration*, Capt. Wheeler." (A most appropriate name for the vessel involved in such a mission!)

Lewis had not been responsible for the "bad" oil that had been bought under competitive bidding by the government. He had merely delivered it. But he was responsible for the "bad" lamps that he had sold the government. These lamps were increasingly being attacked by mariners who had seen the brilliance of European lighthouses. In Edgartown, mariners were critical of the Cape Poge lighthouse, stating that its reflectors were too

[19]There are many ways to spell Cape Poge. For an interesting explanation see Banks, *History of Martha's Vineyard*, v. 1, pp. 34-5.

small. It was not that the Lewis reflectors were too small, they were improperly shaped. Instead of being optically parabolic to redirect the lamp's rays, they were bowl-shaped, or, as one critic years later described them to Congress, "about as parabolic as a barber's washbasin."

Pleasonton, anxious to defuse the mounting criticism of the Lewis lamps which were in virtually every one of his lighthouses, approved the Edgartown request on July 2, 1832:

> "I have received your letter of the 27th ult., enclosing the recommendations of sundry persons at Edgartown that large reflectors should be substituted in the Cape Poge Light House for those now in use there. As you inform me that the old reflectors are nearly worn out and it will consequently be necessary ere long to provide others of some kind, I perceive no objection to the accommodation of the people of Edgartown with reflectors of the largest size. You are authorized accordingly to procure and have them fixed. If the contractor could be prevailed upon to receive the old reflectors at a moderate price in part payment, it would be very agreeable, but this is not to be made a condition."

Pleasonton, an auditor, always kept his eye on the expense side of the ledger!

With the increasing prosperity of the whaling industry, the Edgartown Customs Office was growing rapidly and early in 1834 it had become large enough to be given responsibility for the area's lighthouses, including those on Nantucket island and the south shore of Cape Cod. John P. Norton, the Collector of Customs, was given the additional duties of Superintendent of Light Houses. This doubtless made Keeper Mayhew's life much simpler, but sadly, he wasn't able to enjoy it for long.

On December 20, 1834, Jeremiah Pease wrote in his diary:

> "Matthew Mayhew dies at about 6 o'clock this morning, aged about 69. His corps is brought up from Cape Poge this afternoon."

We don't know if the death was sudden. We don't know if he had tended his lamps that night or not. We do know that at just about the hour he would have climbed the five flights of stairs to the lantern on that cold December morning to extinguish the light, his own life was extinguished.

Neither of his two sons sought to take over, the usual practice at the time. But the position was not so lonely that it was not eagerly sought. Capt. Lott Norton, an Edgartown mariner in his 60's, quickly drew up a petition asking for the job and had it signed by ten distinguished Vineyarders, one Nantucket man, plus the three Edgartown selectmen. It was presented to Collector Norton at the Customs Office, who forwarded it to Washington. Among the signers were such well-known men as Leavitt Thaxter, Dr. Daniel Fisher, Chase Pease, Frederick Baylies, Jr., William Jernegan, Isaiah D. Pease and Peter Pease.

Pleasonton acted quickly and on December 31, he wrote to Collector Norton that Lott Norton was the new keeper and that he should be informed "of the necessity of his residing and being himself steadily in the house provided for the Keeper."

News of his appointment reached Lott on January 9, 1835, but Jeremiah Pease tells us that the new keeper couldn't get out to the station until January 12th "because of the ice."

It is not known who operated the light from December 20, the day Keeper Mayhew died, until January 12, the day the new keeper arrived. Perhaps the widow; perhaps no one.[20]

The question takes on tragic importance when we read Jeremiah Pease's diary for January 6, 1835, six days before

[20]Banks states that Benjamin C. Smith of Chappaquiddick held an interim appointment as keeper after Mayhew's death, but we have found no records of it in the Archives.

Lott's arrival:

> "Wind NE. Gale. Some snow. 20 vessels arrive here. The Schooner *Hudson*, Capt. Shearwood, cast away on Cape Poge this morning. Part of the crew got on shore much beat out. Some badly frozen, one of which dies after reaching the Light House. The Capt. and 2 passengers remain on board all night. The vessel being full of water, the gale continuing and very cold, the passengers froze to death at night."

In his diary the following day, Jeremiah notes that the Captain was rescued. "The schooner was from New York bound for Boston, she had been part way over the shoals and was returning when cast away."

Had the light been operating? We don't know. We do know that the dependable, experienced Keeper Mayhew was not there that night. He died three weeks before.

For 34 years, one half his life, he had lived and worked on that lonely, isolated tip of land with his wife, raising eight children. No keeper after him would hold the post as long. The fact that only days after death took him away from his station, three strangers lost their lives in the icy waters adds a tragic epilogue to his life story.

End of Part One

Make It a Historical Christmas

A most satisfying Christmas gift is a membership in the Historical Society. Just send $15 along with the recipient's name and address and we'll do the rest.

Remember also that as a member you receive a discount on any of our books and other publications. They, too, make excellent gifts. Stop in our Library and do your Christmas shopping.

Documents

The most unusual occurence in Jeremiah's diary in this issue is the spread of what seems to be an epidemic of a serious intestinal disorder, causing many deaths among adults and children.

The diary of Jeremiah Pease, 1792-1857, records the routine existence of an Island community. The period of religious fervor has passed and the Methodists have become the major denomination. There is evidence of dissatisfaction with the public schools, as the Dukes County Education Society is formed.

It is a Presidential election year and General Zachary Taylor, old Rough and Ready, hero of the Mexican War, becomes the last Whig to be President. The Whigs, the dominant party on the Island, are in a decline, winning only because the issue of slavery has divided the Democrats. Former President Martin Van Buren, Democrat, is nominated by the anti-slavery Free Soilers. Lewis Cass is the Democratic nominee.

Gold is discovered in California, but news of it doesn't appear in Jeremiah's journal. However, that fact will become important to Jeremiah soon, when two of his sons join a shipload of Islanders heading for California to make their fortunes -- few, if any, did.

Jeremiah continues as keeper of Edgartown Light, bone setter for the Island, shoemaker, Deputy Collector of Customs and Methodist layman. He still has political influence, being named to a new position by the Governor.

September 1848

3rd. NNE, pleasant. Attended meeting at the Camp Ground, E. Chop. Br. J. I. I. Adams, son of Revd. John Adams preached.[1] Br. Geo. Weeks was there and took a part in the services. It was an interesting time. Quite a number attended. Funeral of Capt. Burdick. Service by Revd. Upham.

5th. NEly, light. Carried Br. J.I.I. Adams to H. Hole.

7th. NEly to S. The corpse of Capt. Burdick is taken up from the Grave and carried to Stonington by his son and brother.

8th. NEly to SW. Joseph & Eliza are sick, but rather better today.[2]

10th. SW. Attended meetings at E'Ville, went to Pogonset to Saml.

[1]John Isaac, the first child of Reformation John Adams, was born in Edgartown in 1826, making him 22 years old at this time. Here's what his father had written in his journal the day his son was born: "This day, which is the 22nd of July, I shall have reason to remember hereafter, I hope, with joy; for my dear consort. after sorrow and anguish through the day, at evening was safely delivered of a man child. To heighten the distress, a young lad was brought into the house in a gore of blood, occasioned by a tailor's throwing his shears at him. My feelings were much hurt. O God, pity the wretch!

"Here I think my consort can realize the truth of the scripture St. John 16:21; for, having been married more than six years, the Lord has seen fit to give us a little Isaac; and it is my desire that we may be willing to sacrifice him to God, as he is only a lent favor. We hope to be thankful for a good physician and kind friends in such a time of mingled joy and affliction."

[2]Joseph is Jeremiah's oldest child; Eliza is Jeremiah's wife, rarely mentioned in his diary.

Smith's, he having broke his shoulder blade. Set it and returned this evening.

15th. NEly. Attended Meeting for the promotion of Education, held at the Methodist Meeting House at Holmes Hole. A Dukes County Education Society was formed, Hon. Leavit Thaxter was chosen President, Wm. Daggett of H. Hole, Jon. Allen of Chilmark and W. W. Hall of Edgartown were chosen Vice Presidents, Hebron Vincent, Secretary, Nathan Mayhew, Treasurer.[3]

16th. NEly. Attended Education Meeting at Holmes Hole.

17th. ENE to W, rains a gentle shower this Night. It will require much rain to wet the grassland, which is drier than I ever saw it before.

22nd. NE to NNW, rains a good shower. More rain has fallen within a few days than since the 30th of June. Mrs. Margaret Mayhew, Widow of Mr. Matthew Mayhew, dies. A child of Br. E.M. Baylis is brot from Centerville where it died a few days ago and buried here. Funeral service to Revd. F. Upham.

25th. S, cloudy. Br. Saml. Smith of Norridgewalk, Maine, dies of dysentery. His death was peaceful. He died in the Lord, as we trust.

27th. NE, cloudy, cool. Commenced gitting in my Corn.

30th. SSE, cloudy, squally. Little rain. From the 30th of June until the 22nd of this month, it has been a great Drought and remarkably warm and very sickly.

October 1848

1st. Ely, light and calm, very warm. Attended meetings and Sabbath School at M.D. School House. Several children have died in this Town lately of Dysentery and Meezles. Two buried today, one child of Mr. Briggs, one of Capt. Ewd. Mayhew, one of Mr. Ewd. Worth and one of Mrs. Pollard, have died within a few days.

2nd. NE gale with rain. There are now more than 100 persons (young and old) now unwell with Diarea and Dysentery in the Village.

6th. Wly. Miss Marchant, daughter of John Marchant, died of Dysentery.

10th. SSW, fresh breeze. Engaged weighing Whale Bone from Ship *Splendid*.[4]

11th. NW, gale. Went to Hyannis to see about locating a contemplated Light House.[5]

[3]Leavitt Thaxter, son of "Parson" Thaxter, was a school teacher, as was Nathan Mayhew, for whom today's Seminars are named. This was a period, 1848, in which Horace Mann, the great educator, was under violent attack by the education establishment for his efforts to reform the public school system, which was in serious decline. Also, the Orthodox Congregationalists were continually attacking Mann for his Unitarianism. It is unfortunate that Jeremiah doesn't tell us what issue was discussed at these meetings.

[4]The *Splendid*, according to Starbuck, did not return to Edgartown until April 1, 1849. This bone must have been shipped back aboard another vessel, a common procedure.

[5]Jeremiah must have been sent there by his son Joseph, Superintendent of Light Houses for the district. Jeremiah was merely keeper of the Edgartown harbor light.

12th. Went to Barnstable and Boston.

14th. Returned home.

16th. SW. On the 11th, Oliver D. Luce died at E'Ville of Dysentery, aged about 17 years. He was buried on the 13th. Funeral service by Revd. Walker.

20th. SW to WSW, fresh breeze, clear. Brother Joseph Linton dies about 5 o'clock P.M. of Dysentery and Diorea, aged 85, he was for many years a very pious man hand (*sic*) contributed largely to the support of the cause of our Blessed Saviour. His house was a home for the Ministers of Christ, he was an excellent member of the M.E.P. Church, his Exhortations and prayers will be long remembered. For several years, I, with other Brethren, attended meetings in his house. He took great pains, and delight in endeavouring to accommodate all who attended there, and a number of Souls were awakened and born of the Spirit of God (as I trust) in his dwelling. He was a firm and tried Friend of mine, whose loss I sencibly feel, and will be felt by all the neighbourhood in which he resided.[6]

22nd. NNE. Attended the Funeral of Br. Linton at E'Ville, service by Br. Upham, preacher in charge of this place. Many of the Brethren and Friends of this Village and other parts attended. It was a solemn scene to me and others. More than 14 years, we have been intimately acquainted and the principal part of the Sabbaths I have spent in the place.[7]

26th. NE, cloudy. Went to Chilmark to see two Ladies who had been thrown out of a Waggon. They were both considerably injured. One had her arm broken and shoulder socket much shattered, the other, her shoulder out. I endeavoured to put them right. I think I did. This morning about 5 A.M., Sister Parnel Mayhew, the Wid. of Deacon Wm. Mayhew deceased, died of Dysentery, measles & rash. She was a pious worthy member of the M.E. Church for many years and died rejoicing in the God of her Salvation. At about 4 P.M., Mr. Edmund Stewart died of Dysentery, he was a respectable citizen.

28th. SSW. Funeral of Mr. Edmd. Stewart. Service by Revd. F. Upham and Revd. Goodenow at 2 o'clock P.M. At 4 P.M., Funeral of Sister Parnel Mayhew, service by the same. Mrs. Lydia Pease, Wife of Mr. Chas. Pease, died of Dysentery.

November 1848

3rd. WNW, light. Funeral of a Child of Mr. Edgar Marchant's. A number of children have died within a few months past, whose deaths I have not mentioned in this Journal.

4th. SE, rains at night. Mr. Saml. Daggett dies of Dropsy, aged about 78.

[6]When the Methodists were first starting on the Island, they had no meetinghouse and early meetings, which were almost secret because of the opposition of the establishment, were held in the home of Joseph Linton. The itinerant preachers lived there also.

[7]It's clear that Linton's death affected Jeremiah deeply; both were devoted to Methodism.

7th. W, clear. Town Meeting for the choice of Electors of President.[8]
10th. NW, cool. Went to Chilmark to see Mrs. Howland and Mrs. Skiff. The oil burned very badly last night in the Lt. House. Cutter *Jackson* arrives.
11th. NW to NE, light. Oil burns badly last night.
15th. N to SW, pleasant. Funeral of a child of Br. Henry Colt, service by Revd. Upham & Revd. Mr. Goodenow.
16th. SW, pleasant. Funeral of Mrs. Roanna Mayhew, who died at the residence of Hon. Leavitt Thaxter yesterday morning. She was esteemed a very pious woman, came here from Williamsburg, Mass., to visit her children and connections.
20th. ENE, heavy Gale with rain. P.M., N to NNW, Gale. Mrs. Haskins dies (at the residence of Mr. Henry Pease) of consumption.
21st. W to WSW. Schooner *Page*, Capt. Alfred Fisher, sails for Pacific Ocean on a merchant voyage. Funeral of Mrs. Haskins, service by Revd. Mr. Goodenow.
24th. SE, light. Bark *Alfred Tyler*, Capt. George Luce sails for the Pacific Ocean.[9]
28th. Wly, light, pleasant. Bought cow of Wm. Jernegan.

[8]Zachary Taylor, Whig candidate, was elected President and probably Edgartown voted for him. He died in 1850 and his vice-president, Millard Fillmore, took over.

[9]The *Alfred Tyler* returned May 7, 1853, after a successful voyage: 367 barrels sperm, 1286 barrels whale, 1800 pounds bone.

30th. SW, fresh. Thanksgiving day, so called.

December 1848

2nd. SE, gale. Br. William King dies of Dysentery. He was esteemed an honest man and died a believer on our Blessed Saviour.
4th. S to SW, pleasant. Went to Holmes hole with William.[10]
17th. WSW. Attended meetings at E'Ville. Returned with ⌗.[11]
22nd. NE, snowstorm, Gale.
23rd. N, clear. Ground all covered with snow.
24th. E to S, foggy, snow thaws fast. Did not attend meetings at M.D. on Acc't of snow and wet. Attended meeting at the M. Meetinghouse. Br. Upham preached. Br. William A. Wardwell of Providence, R.I., married this evening in the Meetinghouse by Br. Upham to Sister Lydia B. Norton of this Town.
25th. S, light, very foggy, little rain. Widow Lois Pease dies at about 2 o'clock A.M., aged 90 years & 6 months, esteemed a pious woman.

January 1849

3rd. WNW, Gale, very cold. Ship cut away her masts back of Cape Poge. Light vessel parted her chain and arrived here.[12]

[10]William, Jeremiah's son, was an officer in the U.S. Revenue Service.

[11]Jeremiah uses a mark somewhat resembling a very large asterisk when he wants a detail to be secret. We don't know if he kept a separate journal cross-referenced with such intimacies.

[12]The lightships, relatively new at this time, often parted their chains during storms, forcing them to leave their station when they were most needed. The frequency with which this occurred at Sow and Pigs Reef, off Cuttyhunk, became a minor scandal in the Service.

10th. NW, cold. Makes Ice very fast in the harbour.
13th. SW. Ice goes out of the harbour. Received a Commission from the Governor to Qualify civil officers.
23rd. WNW. Went to N. Bedford in Packet *Passport*.
24th. Went to Providence and Bristol, R. Island.
25th. SSE, light. Returned from Bristol via Providence & N.B., in Steamer *Telegraph* of Nantucket.
26th. SW, cloudy, little rain. Capt. Holmes W. Smith dies on Tuesday the 23rd instant, having been sick several months of Dissentery (sic) and other complaints. He lived with me several years in early life, and learned a shoemaker's trade. He was a fine young man. He went to sea in the Ship *Apollo* and was always a very respectable man and died as we trust a firm believer in Our Blessed Saviour, he was a member of the Congregational Society. He has left a large family and his loss will be very sencibly felt in this community -- But "blessed are the dead that die in the Lord."[13]

[13]Jeremiah, among his many occupations, was a shoemaker and usually had an apprentice living with him. His father had been a shoemaker. How Jeremiah performed all his duties and devoted so much time to his religion remains a mystery.

Letters

Editor:

Your article on "Islanders and the Revolution" (August 1983) was very interesting. What does that do to the popular legend that the original Samuel Look was a patriotic American during the Revolution and was awarded a Captaincy for his meritorious actions against the English?

SUSAN BUTLER

Tashmoo Farm
Vineyard Haven

There are many legends about the patriotic actions of Vineyarders in the Revolution. The article referred to does nothing to damage or question them.

The article was intended to show, using the evidence of documents written at the time by participants that the Islanders were not, as indeed most of the colonists were not, ardent revolutionists. They were annoyed by the actions of the British (taxes, etc.,) but hardly enough to pick up a musket and charge into battle. See Bits & Pieces, *in this issue for more on the subject.*

CORRECTION

We have been informed that Daniel Vincent's house on Basin Road, shown in the photograph on page 23 of the August issue, was incorrectly identified as Capt. Steve Gardner's. We regret the error.

Director's Report

AS WE begin to close the Thomas Cooke House and to make other preparations for winter, we are enjoying our memories of a very pleasant summer that brought visitors to the Society from the far corners of the world, including Australia, Austria, Bermuda, Canada, England, France, Germany, Haiti, Ireland, Israel, Jamaica, Japan, the Netherlands, Sweden and Switzerland.

Our annual meeting in August was a particularly enjoyable experience with a large turnout of approximately 100 members and guests. They came to hear our speaker, Dr. James B. Richardson, III, make archaeology exciting with his presentation, "Early Man on Martha's Vineyard." At the business part of the meeting, Lorna Livingston was elected as our new Vice-President, and Lane Lovell, Dorothy Cottle Poole, and Doris C. Stoddard were re-elected to the Council. S. Bailey Norton will fill the position on the Council vacated by Mrs. Livingston.

After the meeting we walked to the Society grounds for refreshments and to watch the operation of the Gay Head Light. For the third year in a row we have been able to operate the light every Sunday night in July and August thanks to the efforts of Tony Bettencourt. Several other people this summer also volunteered their services and made important contributions to the Society. Dorothea Looney transcribed and edited a collection of correspondence to and from Richard E. Norton during his years as a whaleman. Chuck McQullen also did work in our archives. In the Thomas Cooke House, Judy Bruguiere did a wonderful job of polishing our many brass objects, and Snowden Taylor made his annual visit to check over the clocks at the Society. Margaret Eppley came by on

busy, rainy days to help out as a guide in the house. Throughout the summer, Shirley Erickson performed a number of unsung tasks including the preparation of refreshments for the annual meeting.

Unfortunately, we must sadly report the death of Dorothy Cottle Poole, who had been a member of the Council for fourteen years and was also the Society's official historian for nearly as long. She will be missed by everyone connected with this organization, but her many publications will be a reminder of her accomplishments as a Vineyard historian.

In the library this winter we will be without the services of Rosalie Powell, who has departed for California. We will miss her good humor and her extensive knowledge of Vineyard history. Apparently California holds a special attraction for former librarians at the Society, because Muriel Crossman is also living there. Mrs. Crossman recently donated two large filing cabinets to us for our photographic prints in memory of our late vice-president, Dan Sullivan, who had reorganized our photographic files.

As a replacement for Mrs. Powell, we are fortunate to be able to welcome aboard Shirley Erickson, who also has deep Island roots and brings to us a familiarity with our history.

Again this winter, the Gale Huntington Library of History and the Francis Foster Museum will be open from 1 to 4 on Thursday and Friday afternoons and from 10 to 4 on Saturdays. We are always pleased to have visitors.

THOMAS E. NORTON

25th Year
For the *Intelligencer*

Bits & Pieces

THE letter from Susan Butler (see page 85) brings up a difficult question: How to be sure which local legends are accurate? Most were handed down by word of mouth and are rarely documented.

That doesn't mean they are not true. Lack of documentation, by itself, does not mean that the event did not occur.

Take the story (as told by Ms. Butler) of Capt. Samuel Look, who repulsed a force of Englishmen attempting to land at Herring Creek by giving one of his workmen a fife, another a drum, and marching in front of them waving his sword, scaring the British into flight. The sword is the only evidence, having been preserved by the family.

Then there's the well-known tale of the Liberty Pole girls, who blew up (or down) the great flag pole to keep the British from using it to repair a vessel of war, the ship *Unicorn*.

Dr. Charles E. Banks, the Island's greatest historian, looked into the tale and discovered that it first appeared in a book, *Romance of the Revolution*, by Bunce, printed in 1853. The girls' names were not spelled exactly right, but the place is Holme's Hole and the year, 1776. From the log of the *Unicorn* (kept in London), Banks learned that the vessel was not in Holme's Hole in 1776, but two years later,on April 19, 1778, she did come into the port and while there had some work done on her spars. The log states the crew :

"Struck & unrigged the Foretopmast to fit new Crosstrees (that was sprung) rigged it again and swayed it up and set up the lower foretopmast Rigging fore and aft."

Does that confirm the story of the three girls? Fitting a new Crosstrees is not replacing a mast, but it comes close. Is that proof?

There are Revolutionary War tales we can document, but they are less well known, and less heroic. One involves the capture by Edgartown men of a vessel carrying supplies to the British in Boston in March 1776.

We have the petition of two of the Edgartown men who complained about the proposed distribution of the spoils. We also have a letter written by the "enemy" captain, who was wounded in the struggle. He wrote to Gen. George Washington, then in Cambridge trying to put together an army, telling his side of the story.

Another document in our Archives depicts Islanders as less than eager to serve in the local militia. Not a man, the Captain wrote, was willing to re-enlist.

The Islanders felt remote and neglected. When they asked for troops to defend the Island they got nothing but a cannon or two shipped over from Truro (they had to pay the freight!), plus advice that they ship surplus livestock and goods off-Island so the place would be less inviting to enemy raiders.

Vineyarders were not fired-up revolutionists eager to overthrow the King. Their interest was defense, not offense.

A.R.R.

In Memoriam

Dorothy Cottle Poole, a dedicated Council member and Historian of the Society for many years, died September 24th after suffering a severe stroke.

Mrs. Poole personified the goals of this Society, being an unselfish historian, always willing to help others in their research. She spent hundreds of hours in our Library, reading logs, journals and other documents as she researched her many articles and books. At the time of her untimely death, she was completing a major work on the history of Chilmark's whaling masters, a work that we hope will be published.

For many years the teacher and principal of the Chilmark School, she left her imprint on the character of hundreds of young people, imbuing them with her dedication to truth. She was, it has been said, the consummate country school teacher and she will be long remembered as such by her fortunate pupils.

She will be remembered, too, by her writings, upon which future researchers will continue to draw as they study Island history.

We, her colleagues on the Council, will miss her gentleness, her compassion, her wise judgment and her devotion to the Vineyard and its history.

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From the Martha's Vineyard Directory, 1907