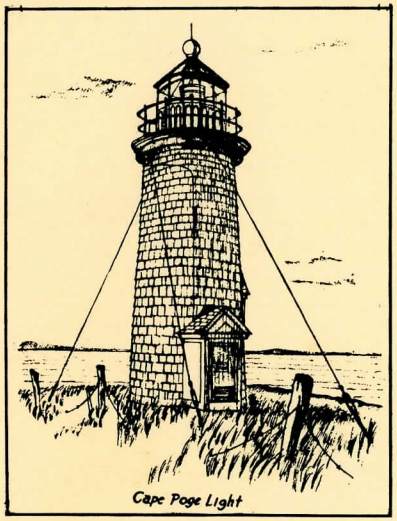
25th Year

# THE DUKES COUNTY INTELLIGENCER

VOL. 25, NO. 3 FEBRUARY 1984




Drawing by Thomas Hale, 1966

## Cape Poge Light: Remote and Lonely

Part Two

by ARTHUR R. RAILTON

Plus: *Director's Report,*

*Books, Bits & Pieces*

## Navy Combat Pilots Train At the Island Air Base

by HENRY E. SCOTT, Jr.

## Documents: *Jeremiah Pease Diary*

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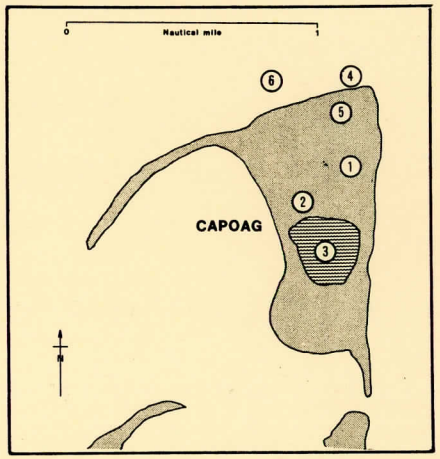
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**Cape Poge in 1602, according to Prof. Quinn's analysis of the Archer and Brereton accounts of Gosnold's voyage (see p. 130).**




From *The English New England Voyages*

(1) 'we saw a disinhabited island...we bore with it, named it Marthaes Vineyard...the Iland is fiue miles, and hath 41. degrees and one quarter of latitude' (Archer). 'foure English miles in compasse' (Brereton). (2) 'Beeches and Cedars' (Brereton). 'we went ashore, and found it full of wood...' (Archer). (3) 'a greate standing lake of fresh water, neere the sea side, and English mile in compasse' (Brereton). (4) 'on the north side of this Island we found many huge bones and ribbes of whales' (Brereton). (5) 'Heere we had...Birds which there at that time vpon the Cliffes being sandy with some Rockie stones, did breed...' (Archer). (6) 'heere we rode in eight fathome neere the shoare...' (Archer).


# THE DUKES COUNTY INTELLIGENCER

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Editor Emeritus: Gale Huntington
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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.

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The public is invited.

# Cape Poge Light: Remote and Lonely

## Part Two

by ARTHUR R. RAILTON

ON the 12th of January 1835, the wind fell off after weeks of frigid northerlies. It became, according to Jeremiah Pease's diary, "very light and calm, thaws all day." Edgartown harbor, which was "filled up with ice a half mile below the [Harbor] Light House," began to open up. By the next morning, the wind had swung to the southwest, "the ice. . . goes out at noon or most of it."

That was what Lott Norton of Edgartown had been waiting for. He was the new Keeper of Cape Poge Light, replacing the late Matthew Mayhew. His appointment had arrived on the 9th, but the solid ice cover had kept him from getting to the station "conveniently." Jeremiah explained it in his diary, January 13, 1835:

> Br. Lott Norton and part of his family sail at 10 o'clock for Cape Poge, having received the appointment of light Keeper on the 9th, but could not get there conveniently on the account of the ice until today. He commences this afternoon.[1]

Who made up the "part of his family" that went along, we don't know. Lott was 63 years old, with five unmarried children.[2] Most of the grown children must have stayed in Edgartown as there were only three rooms, with two

[1] D.C.H.S. Archives.

[2] Within three years, four had married, one of them, Sophronia, to Jeremiah Pease's son, Joseph, who was to become Superintendent of Light Houses in 1845.

ARTHUR R. RAILTON is Editor of this journal. Much research for this article was done at the National Archives, Washington, D.C., where the author received substantial help from William Sherman. Credit is also due to Thomas Hale of Vineyard Haven whose sketch of the Cape Poge Light House is on the cover.

fireplaces, on the first floor of the Keeper's dwelling, plus "a chamber" (unheated) upstairs -- hardly luxurious accommodations. The Keeper slept in a front room on the first floor, the house being so placed on the site that "the lantern may be seen from the front windows."[3] Keepers at one-man stations like Poge did not watch the light all night; they trimmed the wicks at about 11 p.m., made sure there was enough oil, and went to bed, awakening occasionally to look out the window and check the light.

Keeper Norton, no doubt, considered his new post a comfortable place in which to spend his last years. Young men were rarely appointed as Keepers. The position was considered "an easy berth for the needy, or for those who are incompetent to perform more laborious service."[4]

What he didn't know was that a rebellion was building up against the lighthouse establishment and that the next 20 years were to be the most tumultuous in the history of the service. Even Cape Poge, remote and isolated though it was, would feel the waves.

Since 1833, Edmund and George W. Blunt, publishers of *Blunt's Coastal Pilot*, had been trying to convince the government to do something about its primitive lighthouses. They bombarded Congress with complaints and in 1837 the lawmakers placed a moratorium on new lighthouse construction until a study of the existing beacons could be made.

On Cape Poge, Keeper Norton was not aware of this, but he was very aware of the encroaching ocean. Like his predecessor, Keeper Mayhew, he watched apprehensively as the waves ravaged the cliff below the lighthouse. In the spring, his first at the station, he asked John P. Norton of Edgartown, the Superintendent of Light Houses for the area, to request that a stone wall be built to slow down the erosion. Norton sent the request to Washington and on

[3]Lighthouse specifications, *Columbian Centinel*, Aug. 15, 1801.

[4]*Report of the Light House Board*, 1852, p. 65.



October 12, 1836, Fifth Auditor Stephen Pleasonton, the Treasury Department official responsible for lighthouses, wrote Edgartown that he agreed with

> the necessity of building a stone wall under the cliff at Cape Poge Light House . . . provided the expense is not to exceed $120, as estimated.

The stone wall was built, but it turned out to be no match for the waves and, in 1838, Superintendent Norton reported that the lighthouse

> must be moved about 12 rods nearer the dwelling house between now and the 30th of September, otherwise it will be under the Clift. It now stands about 30 feet from the Clift on loose soil.

When Lt. Edward W. Carpender of the U. S. Navy, taking part in the Congressional ordered survey, visited Poge in the fall of 1838, he reported that they were "moving the tower." His report gives a detailed description of Cape Poge Light:

> This light is on the eastern entrance to Edgartown harbour, 55 feet above the level of the sea. They were in the act of moving the tower (which is of wood) a few yards back, the sea threatening to undermine it. This is an exceedingly useful light, not only as a guide to Edgartown harbour, which is the resort of an immense number of vessels, but to the trade entering the "shoals" from the southward, and to vessels crossing them in all directions. It, however, is of no more importance than Monomoy Light and, being twice the elevation of that light, requires less a greater number of lamps . . . accordingly, I recommend the suppression of the upper series, consisting of 5, and the more compact arrangement of the lower, consisting of 6 lamps. The reflectors are 13-inch. The dwelling here, as well as tower, is of wood. The tower is 40 feet high, and, not having been built sufficiently strong, has suffered from the action of the wind. It will, however, last for many years, though, when the time comes for rebuilding it, advantage ought to be taken of the present site for the use of more durable materials. . .

The survey, important though it was, didn't appease the Blunts. They demanded a comparison test between the Winslow Lewis reflector lamps, then in use here, and the Fresnel lens from France. Congress appropriated funds, but not enough. Pleasonton informed the Blunts that he had only $1000 and that the Fresnel unit would cost $2026, so he couldn't proceed. Blunt wrote that he would pay the difference. "I regret not being informed earlier," he added.

Congress continued to stall, asking for more data, ordering the Treasury to hire an outside engineer to examine 70 lighthouses in Maine, New Hampshire and Massachusetts. Treasury Secretary Walter Forward hired Isaiah William Penn Lewis, nephew of Winslow Lewis and a civil engineer. His report was devastating. He tore apart the establishment, stating that "the present Lighthouse system is founded in error." He quoted various Keepers, all in criticism.

Leavitt Thaxter, son of "Parson" Thaxter, had been made Superintendent of Light Houses in Edgartown when the Whigs took over the White House in 1841, replacing John P. Norton. After reading the Lewis report, "being somewhat alarmed," Thaxter visited the lighthouses and talked to the Keepers who had been quoted. He reported to Pleasonton in Washington:

> The Report of Mr. Lewis respecting the lights under my superintendance is incorrect and exaggerated in most instances; and the statements signed by the Keepers were drawn up by him and urged upon them contrary to their convictions of the truth.

Pleasonton was pleased by Thaxter's initiative and the defense of his establishment:

> [Your] report is full and satisfactory and I am very glad to perceive that it puts an extinguisher upon the many false statements made by I. W. P. Lewis concerning these lights.



Thaxter's support of Pleasonton seemed to bear fruit. He had requested $190 for a new boat for Keeper Norton because

> the Boat belonging to the Cape Poge Light House is very old and unsafe, being "nail sick," rotten in many places, and not worth repairing.

Pleasonton, despite his reputation for stinginess, approved the new boat immediately, a rare event. He also quickly approved Keeper Norton's request early in 1843 for an additional room on the dwelling, telling Thaxter:

> At Cape Poge you will cause a room to be added to the dwelling of 10 or 11 feet square in consequence of the dwelling house being small. In cases where painting and whitewashing are required, it would be proper to furnish the Keepers with paints, oil, etc., and let them do the work themselves. For whitewashing which requires considerable labour they ought to be allowed from 15 to 20 dollars . . . painting and other small repairs they ought to do without compensation.

But he still was the Fifth Auditor: the day after writing the above, he again wrote to Thaxter:

> Inform me what disposition the Keeper of Cape Poge Light House has made of his old boat.

As Congressional pressure increased, Pleasonton asked Thaxter (and the other Light Superintendents, no doubt) to report on the opinions of Congressmen in the area concerning lighthouses. Thaxter replied in June 1843:

> Mr. Burnell, who is the only member of Congress within 60 or 70 miles, lives in Nantucket and, as I learn, is quite unwell. I am assured that the pilots and masters of vessels in this region will speak well of the Light Houses in these waters.

The Lewis report had listed Cape Poge light as one of those "found in a state of partial or complete ruin." Pleasonton seemed eager to blunt the criticism and in June 1844 he ordered Thaxter to

> send me a plan and estimate of a [new] frame tower at Cape Poge. If the expense is inconsiderable, I will cause a new

one to be built, otherwise the repairs must be made which you indicate to be necessary.

Leavitt Thaxter wasted no time. He went to Boston to talk to Capt. Winslow Lewis, now 73 years old and still building lighthouses on a contractual basis. The old man drew up a set of specifications, including a new lantern and lamp, items that Pleasonton had not mentioned as being in need of replacement. Thaxter explained when he sent in the specifications:

> The lantern in the Tower, in former years, was greatly neglected, consequently its strength and stability are much impaired by corrosion and it is advisable to build the whole new.

The estimated cost, according to Lewis, was $550 for the new tower and $1150 for the new lantern and lamps. No fool, Lewis added that if both jobs were done by the same contractor (namely, Lewis), the cost would be $1600, instead of $1700. On July 10, 1844, Winslow Lewis signed a contract to complete the work by September 1, for $1600. The specifications called for a wooden octagonal tower, 30 feet high (5 feet lower than the old one), shingled with pine shakes and resting on a rubble-stone foundation two feet deep. Atop it, a new lantern was to contain 11 lamps equipped with 14-inch reflectors and mounted on an iron chandelier in two rows. So much for Lt. Carpender's survey trip with his recommendations that the new tower be built of "more durable materials" and that only 6 lamps be used in the lantern. Pleasonton and Lewis were still in charge.

Lewis and his workmen moved fast and Thaxter informed Pleasonton on July 27, 1844, that the job would be completed ahead of schedule:[5]

> The Cape Poge Light House will be completed in all next week. The most judicious location of the tower brings it

[5]Jeremiah Pease in his diary (D.C.H.S. Archives) wrote on July 24, 1844, "Winslow Lewis arrives to build a new light house at Poge." The job was completed, apparently, in less than two weeks.



> within 18 feet of the Dwelling House and I have agreed to pay Mr. Lewis $45 for building a covered way [to it]. I have also authorized him to furnish the Burners with his Patent caps at an expense of $19.50, both of which I trust will meet with your approval.

Thaxter clearly enjoyed a happy relationship with Pleasonton, being able to make such decisions involving additional expense without objection from Washington.

Keeper Norton, 72 years old, was not in good health and lived only a few months after the tower, with its covered walkway to the house, was completed. He moved into Edgartown during his final illness and on November 20, 1844, Jeremiah Pease wrote in his diary:

> In the evening returned and visited Br. Lott Norton. Had a very interesting conversation with him relating to his situation and Eternity. Found his faith strong in the blessed Redeemer. He died about12 o'clock this night. His death was peaceful.[6]

Leavitt Thaxter officially notified Pleasonton three days later:

> I have to state that Capt. Lott Norton, the faithful and efficient Keeper of Cape Poge Light House, died last Thursday night. His son, John R. Norton, has the charge of keeping the light at present.

Within a few days, Pleasonton had named a replacement: another Norton, although not one closely related to Lott. He was Capt. Aaron Norton, 59 years old, who was married to Lucy Fisher.

There were changes in Washington, as well. In 1844, the Whig candidate for President was narrowly defeated by a Democrat, a "dark horse," James K. Polk (the Whig slogan was "Who is James Polk?"). Joseph T. Pease , son of Jeremiah and a staunch Democrat, saw his chance and began lining up support for taking over the post held by Whig Leavitt Thaxter. His friends on the Democratic Town Committee wrote to former Massachusetts

[6]D.C.H.S. Archives.

Governor Marcus Norton (soon to be Collector of Customs at Boston), on January 10, 1845:

> Joseph T. Pease, Esq., of this place, who intends making application for the Office of United States Collector of this Port, *at the proper time*, is a young man of the strictest integrity and of the highest responsibility; that he is Chairman of our County Committee and has been from his Youth, a constant and efficient supporter of Democratic principles, men and measures. We hope he may receive your favorable notice.

Democrat James K. Polk was inaugurated in March and Joseph was right there to watch. He must have met the right people in Washington because by summer it was openly discussed in town that young Pease would be named Collector. Leavitt Thaxter, no innocent about politics, recognized his fate. In a letter to Pleasonton, he described his soon-to-be successor as a"very worthy and capable young man." On August 5, 1845, the newspapers confirmed the appointment and Joseph Thaxter Pease took over the office in September.[7]

In one of his first letters to Washington, Pease urged Pleasonton to approve some major expenditures at Cape Poge:

> It is seven years since the outside of the house was painted and an addition lately put thereto was never painted. Also, the boat is hauled up on the beach (on account of the ice) from December until March and is more injured by storms and frost than from use; I recommend a boat house for her protection.

Pleasonton was not pleased by the pressure from the new man in Edgartown and wrote back that he should

> defer repairs until the next year unless it be to stop the windows at Cape Poge from leaking which I suppose can be done by the Keeper himself.

The next month, a November storm brought disaster to the Keeper's boat. Pease wrote Pleasonton:

[7]This, of course, made Joseph his father's boss, Jeremiah being the Keeper of the Edgartown Harbor Light. If it had happened a year earlier, while Lott Norton was alive, he would also have been his father-in-law's boss!



> The Keeper of Cape Poge Light . . . informed me that . . . his boat had foundered at her Moorings and was almost entirely worthless . . . one side of her, together with the Keel, and nearly all the inside ceiling[8] are gone; one or or more holes have been made therein by coming in contact with the rocks . . . unfit to repair. As this Keeper has to transport his supplies, including his wood, from this place to Cape Poge in his boat, I do not see how a boat smaller than the one he has heretofore used can be made to answer his purpose.

Pease estimated that a new one built in Edgartown by Mr. Morse would cost between $180 and $200. Pleasonton, in character, said that was too much for a 17-foot boat. A boat like that, he wrote, should cost only $6 a foot, making it $102 plus $18 for sails. Total cost: $120. Pease should try a New Bedford builder and if he wouldn't meet that price, to have it built in New York.

The boat was to have a 17-foot keel, a centerboard, two oars, a sprit mainsail of light cotton duck. James Beetle in New Bedford offered to build it for $150. Pleasonton relented a bit and wrote that the offer "appears reasonable . . . not exceeding $150." That was December 31, 1846. In March 1847, Pease informed Pleasonton that Beetle had backed out of the deal. He had thought it was to be 17 feet over-all, not 17 feet at the keel, and he "couldn't build one like that for $200, nor would he." Pleasonton, weary of the whole business, pencilled on Pease's letter: "have boat built at Edgartown--$200."

The Keeper of Cutter Hunk Light had also been authorized a new boat and it, too, was to be built in Edgartown. Pease felt it wise to explain something about the speed with which things get done on the Vineyard and wrote Pleasonton:

> As none of our boat builders shops have more than two men in them, I presume you will not think seven weeks an unreasonable time to require in which to complete them.

[8]For those who are not knowledgeable in marine nomenclature: the ceiling of a boat is the "planking that lines the inside and bottom of the vessel."

Penny-pincher that he was, Pleasonton was always trying to cut oil consumption. He wouldn't agree with the complaints about poor oil. It was not the oil, but the Keepers, that were at fault: "They keep the flame too high," he claimed. "It should be no more than 1¼ inches high." Pease took the Keepers' side in the argument:

> I believe all the Keepers who have exceeded the average quantity have been appointed within four years; being anxious to maintain good lights, perhaps to excel, I think they have kept the wicks screwed up to the highest point possible, thinking by that means to show a greater degree of light.

Unlike Thaxter, Pease did not hit it off well with Pleasonton, who seemed to have little patience with the young man. Pease, in turn, had been involved with lighthouses for years, his father being a Keeper, and he objected to Pleasonton's attitude that he knew nothing about them. Their exchanges were never cordial. Collector Pease did, in fact, seem often to be in opposition to Pleasonton. His brother, William Cooke Pease, was a well-thought-of young officer in the Revenue Service who visited many lighthouses and met many Collectors. He regularly wrote Joseph about what he learned so the Edgartown Collector was well informed on the politics of the establishment. Pleasonton, no doubt, was aware of that fact.

And Pleasonton had reason to be wary, being continuously criticized in Congress and the press. In many ways, he was a tragic figure. He had brought order to the nation's lighthouse establishment which had a confused and disorganized beginning. He was not an engineer, he was an auditor; and yet he was being criticized on technical matters. Furthermore, it was his life's work that was being challenged.

He didn't have to put up with Collector Pease for long. In November 1848, the Whigs returned to the White



House when Gen. Zachary Taylor became President. Pease, a Democrat, was removed and Leavitt Thaxter, Pleasonton's Whig friend, was once again in the Customs office on the second floor at the corner of Main and Water Street (above today's drug store). There was also a change at Cape Poge: Keeper Aaron Norton was replaced by Edward Worth, a Whig.

Congress, still controlled by Democrats, created a Light House Board in March 1851, charging it with the responsibility of investigating, once and for all, the continuing criticism of the Pleasonton establishment. A year later, it presented Congress with a massive document supporting the charges against Pleasonton who wrote to Leavitt Thaxter, asking for help:

> The Light House Board created by Congress have, I understand, made a report very unfavorable to the Light House establishment. I wish you, therefore, to obtain the opinions of as many pilots, captains of vessels and steamers as you can as to the quality of our Lights and send them to me as soon as you can. I have reason to believe that our Lights are perfectly satisfactory to all navigating people and, if so, their opinions will have more weight than those of persons having no interest in them other than a desire to obtain control of the funds appropriated for Light House purposes.

A few weeks later, Pleasonton wrote directly to the President, enclosing statements from mariners who praised his work:

> The great object [of this attack] was to introduce the French lenses into our Light Houses, which do not suit this country and for that reason I opposed and still oppose the employment of them.

His campaign failed. In that month, September 1852, Congress created a Board to supervise the nation's lighthouses. Its members were: two Naval officers; two Engineer Corps officers; two civilians "of high scientific attainments"; and two junior officers of the Navy and Engineers to act as secretaries. Fifth Auditor Stephen

Pleasonton, after nearly 30 years of work, was relieved of his post. The *Vineyard Gazette* shed no tears:

> We are very glad to learn that Mr. Pleasonton has lost his office. It is astonishing that our Government has kept a regular antediluvian old Granny like Pleasonton in office for almost half a century.[9]

It was a Presidential election year and, after only one term, the Whigs were soundly defeated by little-known Franklin Pierce of New Hampshire, Democrat. Keeper Edward Worth of Cape Poge Light, a Whig, was a man of good humor. He sent a Thanksgiving turkey to his friend, Democrat Edmund Luce of Edgartown, along with the following rhyme:

> The heavens have been made to ring
> With the names of Pierce and King;
> Cape Poge has shook from shore to shore
> With the mighty cannon's roar;
> And the victory you have won,
> And heav'n on earth with you's begun!
> Edmund, give thanks, and cook this fowl,
> It is superior to Loon or Owl.
> Give thanks, Edmund, pray and sing
> That you have elected Pierce and King.[10]

Keeper Worth had a sense of humor, but it was not enough to overcome the handicap of being a Whig. He lost his job in May 1853. Daniel Smith was named the new Keeper of Cape Poge Light. Mr. Smith, it would seem, was a Democrat. Former Collector Joseph Thaxter Pease, a Democrat, was returned to office, "under peculiar circumstances," his father wrote. Joseph, not one to waste a political opportunity, packed up and went to Washington, probably to make friends among the members of the new Light House Board. When he returned to Edgartown, he tried to replace his father as Deputy Collector of Customs with another Democrat,

[9] *Vineyard Gazette*, Sept. 10, 1852.

[10] *Vineyard Gazette*, Nov. 26, 1852. Editor Marchant described it as a "very clever little poetical composition."



Constant Norton. Jeremiah, his father, called on higher authority and won out, keeping the post.[11]

Whatever was behind his attempt to replace his father, Joseph Pease didn't stay on as Collector very long. About a year later, a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity came his way when Dr. Daniel Fisher, the wealthy oil and candle entrepreneur in Edgartown, along with several other businessmen, announced plans for a County bank. In August 1855, the Board of Directors selected as the bank's first cashier, Joseph T. Pease, Esq., "a perfect gentleman . . . [with an] untarnished reputation, until recently Collector of this port."[12] Constant Norton, whom Pease had tried to have appointed in his father's place as Deputy Collector, was named Collector of Customs and Superintendent of Light Houses for the district.

Congress, in reorganizing the lighthouse establishment, ordered the Light House Board to install those "French lenses" that Fifth Auditor Pleasonton disliked so much. In 1856, Fresnel lenses for Cape Poge, West Chop and Tarpaulin Cove were ordered from Sautter & Company of Paris, at a cost of 2604.15 francs each. All were 4th Order lenses, the size standardized for harbors and bays. The new and sparkling Fresnel (a fixed lens, not a revolver as at Gay Head) was installed at Cape Poge in 1857, probably in the summer or fall.

In August of the previous summer, a tragedy had been averted at Poge when a young girl drifted out to sea in a small boat while her mother was visiting the Keeper's wife.

[11] D.C.H.S. Archives. We don't know what was behind Joseph's actions (as we shall see, Constant Norton got Joseph's job two years later). The episode disturbed Jeremiah very much. Here is his diary entry on July 25, 1853: "The nomination of Constant Norton for the office which I now hold is rejected. The Lord reigns, let the earth rejoice. I have great reason for gratitude to my Heavenly Father for his many mercies, and especially at this time for the good feelings manifested by almost all the citizens of this, and the other Towns, towards me in relation to my removal from office."

[12] *Vineyard Gazette*, Aug. 3, 1855. The new bank, the Island's first, was the Martha's Vineyard National Bank, which later moved from Edgartown to Vineyard Haven.

The *Gazette* of August 15, 1856, told the story:

> FORTUNATE RESCUE:--On Wednesday last, while Caroline Coleman, a girl of 13 years of age, was playing in a small boat about 6 feet long, on Cape Poge beach, she was taken from the shore by the tide and carried three or four miles out to sea. The son of the light keeper, after running three miles, procured assistance, and Elijah P. Smith and others, took a boat and rescued her. When she was found the boat was half full of water and in a little while would probably have sunk. The little girl told her deliverers she never expected to see any one again.

The boy who ran to Wasque to call her rescuers was 11-year-old Joshua Smith. The girl's father published a thank-you in the *Gazette*:

> A CARD
>
> The undersigned would take this method to tender his sincere thanks to the gentlemen who rescued his daughter from the perilous situation to which she was exposed by drifting off to sea from Cape Poge, alone in a small boat, on the 13th of August, instant.
>
> CHAS. H. COLEMAN 2d.

Mr. Coleman forgot to thank Joshua, son of Keeper Smith; or perhaps he blamed him.

Late in October, 1859, there was another change in keepers at Cape Poge when Capt. George R. Marchant of Edgartown, a 58-year-old mariner, took over from Keeper Smith. We don't know the reason, except that the Smiths moved to Fairhaven (perhaps to a lighthouse there). Captain Marchant was the brother of Edgar Marchant, owner and editor of the *Vineyard Gazette*, providing the newspaper with an insider's view of the lighthouse service for the first time.

When the Fresnel lens was installed in 1857, it came with a new lamp. Instead of the 11 individual lamps, used in the Lewis system, there was only one lamp with one circular wick. It apparently didn't work right and was replaced in 1859 with another lamp which, according to the *Gazette*, was even worse:

> A new lamp placed in the lantern of the light house proved to be a very poor one and it has required the utmost attention on the part of the keepers[13] ever since to keep it in burning trim. Of late, the light has been constantly watched during the entire night, with as much care as a nurse would bestow upon a sick child, and it has been found necessary to trim, or alter it, in some particular every half hour. On Tuesday last, a new lamp (said to be the latest improvement) was put in the lantern, but it went out three times before midnight and seems to be no better than the other.



Difficulties with the lamp continued and on December 23, 1859, the *Gazette* reported that the manufacturer had come to examine it:

> Mr. Funke, the original maker of the Franklin Lamp now in use at Cape Poge, arrived at the Cape on Wednesday for the purpose of adjusting the difficulty . . . Mr. Funke found that it had not been properly set in the lens, and after adjusting it, it was found to work well during the whole night.

Despite the presence of the *Gazette* editor's brother at Poge, there was little printed about the light during the next few years. There was little published anywhere about lighthouses. The nation was torn apart in the war between the states, the Civil War. At least 20 lighthouses were damaged or destroyed in the conflict. More than 150 lighthouses were darkened by the government when it was thought the beacons might help the Confederacy. By 1866, most of the lights were back in service and things were normal again.

There was nothing normal about what happened off Cape Poge on January 7, 1866, and on the four days that followed. On Sunday, the 7th, the schooner *Christiana* went aground on Hawes Shoal in what the *Gazette* described as "the most terrific storm" in many years. The temperature dropped below zero with gale force winds. Five men and one boy were forced into the schooner's

[13] *Vineyard Gazette*, Dec. 9, 1859. We don't know what was meant by "keepers." There was only one Keeper at this time, the Editor's brother.

rigging when the vessel sank in the raging sea. Edgartown harbor was icebound and the waves were such that no small boat could be launched from Cape Poge. It was not until Thursday, January 11, that a boat made it to the wreck, finding one man clinging to the mast, incredibly, still alive. He was the first mate, Charles F. Tallman from Osterville. He lost most of each foot and part of each hand due to exposure. After his recovery, he became a well-known figure in Cottage City, operating a small newsstand near where the Flying Horses are today. The long delay before his rescue caused some harsh criticism at the time (see page 136 for details).

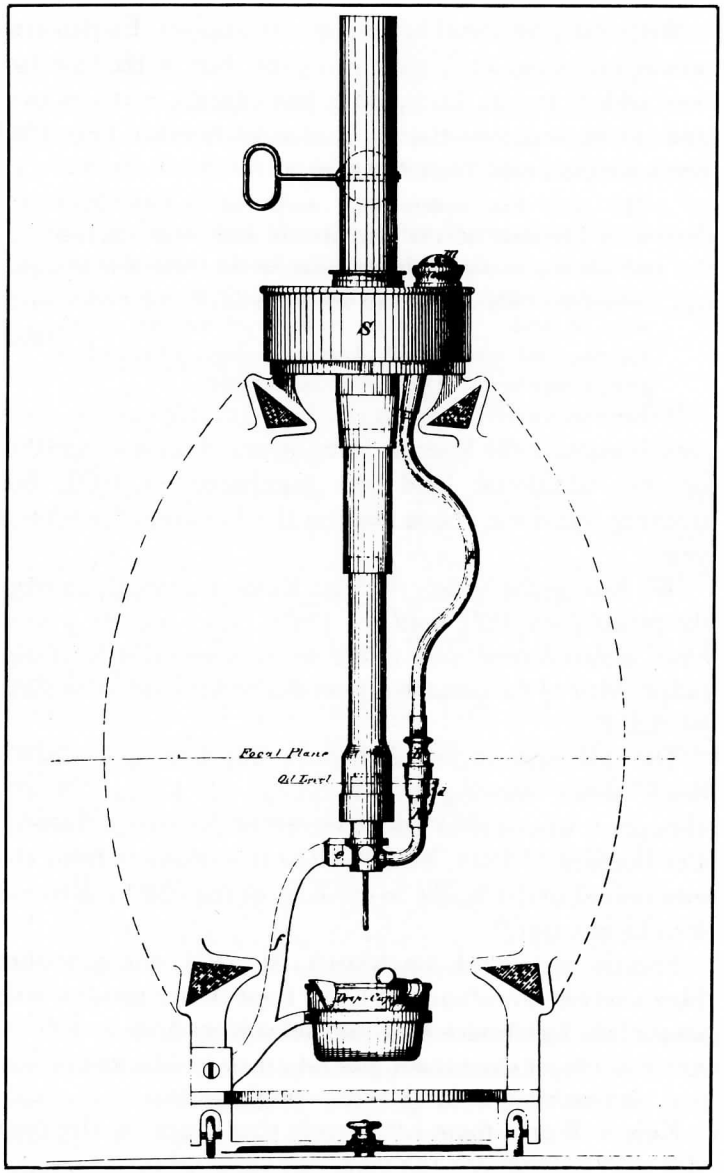
Some time after the *Christiana* tragedy, Keeper Marchant was removed and former Keeper Edward Worth returned. Worth, you will recall, was the poetic Whig with a sense of humor who lost his post when the Democrat Pierce became President. We don't know if the Marchant removal was political or not.

In 1867, a boat house was built on Cape Poge Pond, more than 20 years after it was first proposed by Collector Pease. Located on the protected pond beach, it meant a long walk over loose sand for the Keeper. One plan shows it as 3000 feet away.

But that long walk must have seemed less of a burden after the Light House Board later that year authorized an assistant keeper for the station and appointed Keeper Worth's son, Jethro, to the position. Thirty years old, he had recently married after returning from serving in the Navy during the Civil War. There was more good news: Keeper Worth's wages were increased from $350 to $565 a year and the new assistant was raised to $400 a year. The increases were not so large as they might seem: the war had brought a sharp inflation.[14]

[14]Congress made sure the wages wouldn't keep going up. It passed a law limiting the average pay of all lighthouse Keepers to $600 a year -- a maximum that remained in effect for 50 years.






From *Management of Lens Apparatus & Lamps*, Light House Board, undated.

*Franklin lamp as used at Cape Poge with 1857 Fresnel lens. Reservoir for oil, S, atop lens was wrapped around chimney for warmth.*

With the additional keeper at the station, the dwelling was again too small. It took two years, but in 1869 a room was added. It was 12 by 13½ feet, hardly more than a gesture at accommodating a second family. The 1869 annual report told a familiar story:

> The site has suffered to such an extent from encroachments of the sea that it had been deemed advisable to make timely provision for the removal of the buildings inland, by the purchase of a little more than four acres of land . . . Immediate necessity of removal is not apprehended, and the light-keeper has been instructed to give prompt notice of further encroachment.

If there was anything that the Board didn't have to do, it was to instruct the Keepers to be aware of the encroaching ocean! Additional land was purchased in 1870, but nothing was done about moving the buildings for several years.

(*We have in the Society Archives Keepers' Journals covering the period from 1872 until the 1940s. They provide a first-hand, although terse, view of life on the reservation, as it was called. Most of the quotations from this point on are from those journals.*)

The cliff continued to wash away, but nothing was being done about moving the buildings so Keeper Worth thought it was time to keep a record of the encroachment. On January 1, 1874, he measured the distance from the east corner of the house to the edge of the cliff "and found it to be fifty feet."

Shortly after dark on March 10, 1874, the schooner *Hardscrabble* ran ashore on Cape Poge Beach about a mile west of the lighthouse. The journal reports that:

> Cape Poge Light was seen plainly by those on board about an hour before going ashore and also at that time.

Keeper Worth must have made that entry on the next day after talking with the crew who came ashore:

> Above Schr. was first seen from this station at about 5:30 a.m. At about 9 a.m., Revenue Cutter *Hamilton* tried to haul her off but failed having got the hawser foul of her Screw, disabling her. U.S.S. *Verbena* . . . towed her [the *Hamilton*] into Edgartown. At about 8 p.m., the wind blew a gale . . . and the Schnr. took fire, being lime laden. The crew and wreckers were obliged to leave the vessel and come to this station for shelter, the weather being extreme cold.



On the third day, the schooner burned to the water's edge as the crew watched from the lighthouse. It was not until two days later that the crew was able to leave Cape Poge:

> Vessel's crew left this station for Edgartown. The cargo. . . consisted of about 1200 brls. of lime and 200 brls. of potatoes, all of which are a total loss.[15]

Keeper Worth, on New Year's Day 1877, dutifully did his measuring, recording the "distance from the east corner of the house to the cliff -- 39½ feet." One year later, January 1, 1878, he did it again: "Measured distance from house to edge of bank and found it to be 36 feet."

In four years, the ocean had moved 14 feet closer, yet nothing was being done.

Since 1867, the lighthouse had been burning lard oil, sperm oil having become too expensive. In 1878, an even cheaper oil was squirting out of the ground in Pennsylvania, bringing another change:

> July 2, 1878 -- S.V. Poor (lampist) . . . dismounted the lens and fitted it to be used in connection with a "Kerosene" oil lamp. Rec'd. 3 lamps, 48½ gallons of Kerosene Oil, five yards wicking, 12 chimneys, one measure and funnel. Commenced burning Kerosene on the evening of this day.

The new lamp burned well, "no trouble," the Keeper wrote. On the next night, it again burned well "with the exception of a chimney warping over and causing it to smoke." Kerosene had taken over.

[15]Events like this raise the question of payment for food to shipwrecked sailors. Did the Keeper have to feed them from his own salary? We have seen nothing to indicate that he was ever reimbursed. Sometimes, the crew would stay, as this time, several days.

The ocean was taking over Cape Poge and in its 1879 annual report, the Light House Board stated about Poge:

> The sea has washed away the whole of purchase of 4 acres of Aug. 20, 1801 . . . and nearly all of purchase of 4 acres of June 6, 1825.

The Board asked for funds to rebuild the Poge establishment and Congress appropriated $5000 to replace the original 1801 dwelling, which had been added to three times, with a double set of quarters. Mr. Seely of the Light House Service arrived on August 13, 1879, "to make arrangements . . . for landing material to build a new house at this station." The new dwelling was finished on December 9, but it was not until April 15, 1880, that the two Keepers and their families moved in. The old house and barn were then torn down by the keepers who, the Board said, could "have the wood for fuel, etc."

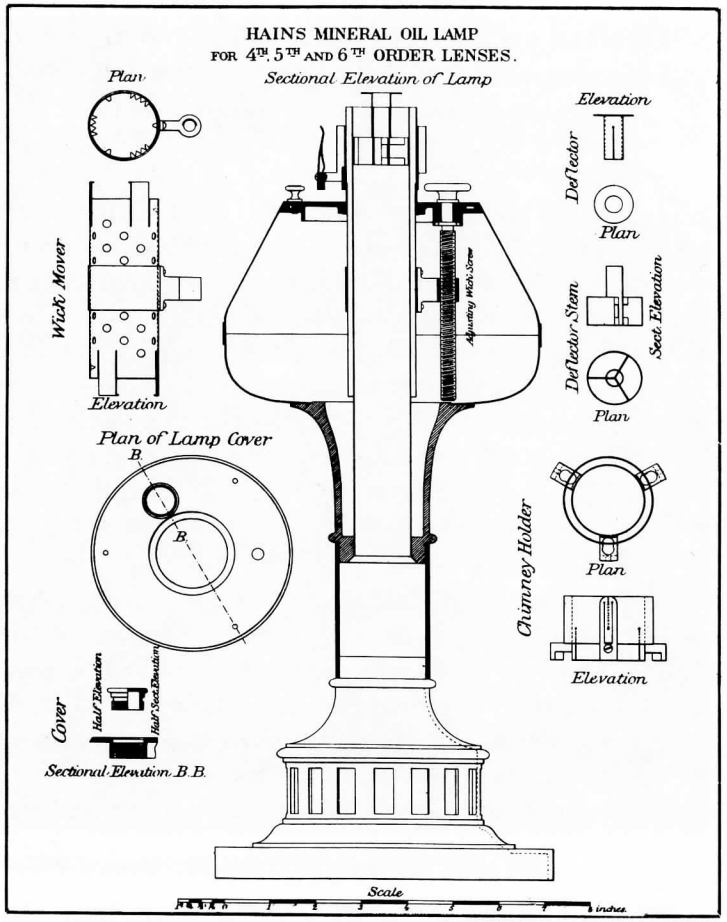
On February 23, 1881, the supply vessel *U.S.S. Verbena* dropped off "one Library (No. 14) for the use of this station." The establishment, after years of indifference, had started in 1876 to distribute small boxes of books, 40 or 50 books per box, to those lightships and lighthouses it determined to be "inaccessible off-shore stations." Now, five years later, even such "accessible" stations as Cape Poge were receiving books. It would be interesting to know what the titles were, but that's a research project of its own.

One title we know Keeper Worth received that year was a book of *Laws and Regulations Relating to the Light House Establishment, 1880.* This may have been the first comprehensive book that Keepers ever received on the subject.

Another vessel went aground that fall on September 18, 1881:

> At 8:30 p.m., Schr. *Carrie W.* of Eastport, Maine . . . ran ashore half mile to the westward of this station. Light *seen*





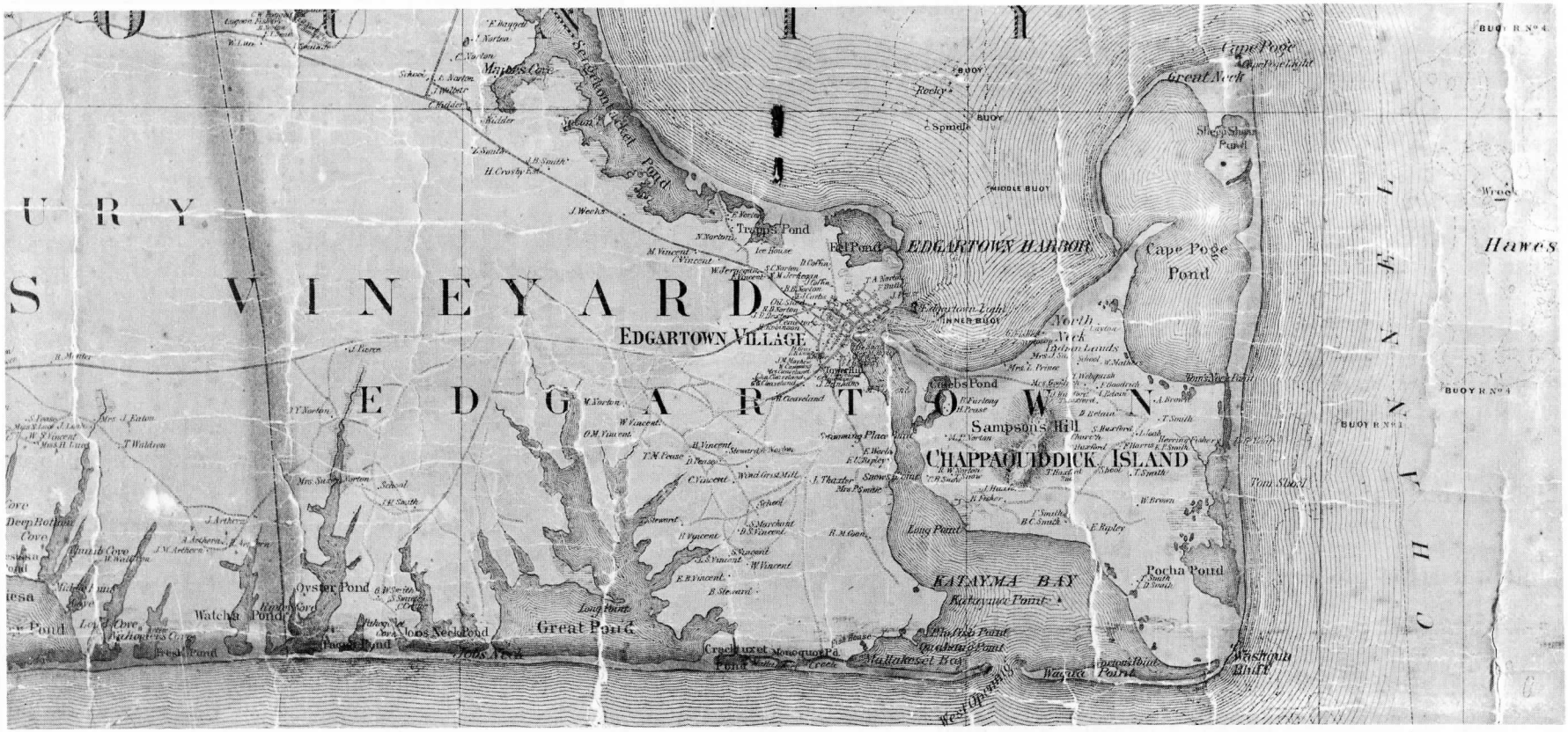

From *Instructions for Light-Keepers*, 1881, Light House Board.

*Mineral oil (kerosene) made lamps simpler. No longer was it necessary to heat the fuel, as required with sperm and lard oils.*

> and *known.*[16] Reason of disaster: miscalculation of distance, the weather being thick and stormy at the time. The above schr. cargo consisted of "Down East fruit" -- herrings and sardines.

The captain and crew came ashore the next day,

[16]Whenever there was a disaster, Keepers made sure to record that it wasn't their fault: the light was burning, etc. Keeper Worth's humor shows up here, describing the cargo of fish as "Down East fruit."




Map by Henry F. Walling, 1858

*East end of Vineyard in 1858, showing remoteness of Cape Poge (upper right). An earlier wreck than the* Christiana *is indicated on Hawes Shoal (right).*

spending the night at the station. Two days later, the schooner was floated off the beach by wreckers for $500.

Increasingly solicitous of its Keepers, the Light House Service, on November 5, 1881, delivered to the station "one Cook Stove and furnishings complete." There were, of course, two families at Poge, but only one stove was sent. Keeper Worth should have suspected something. The next year, on August 22, 1882, that something occurred. Father and son made this joint entry in the journal:

> The office of "Assistant Keeper" at this station is abolished by the Hon. Secretary of Treasury and the late Assistant promoted to "Acting Keeper." Mr. Edward Worth, late Keeper of this station, retires (after a continuous Service of over sixteen years) at the age of *Seventy years and three months.*
>
> I, Jethro Worth, who this day take charge of this station as "Acting Keeper," have served continuously from July 1, 1867, to August 22, 1882, as "Assistant Keeper," being a period of over *fifteen years.*

On September 6, 1882, the separation occurred:

> Edward Worth (late Keeper) moved his furniture and family this day.

Another era had ended at Cape Poge. The 70-year-old

Keeper, the humorous poet and Whig who had sent a turkey to his Democratic friend on Thanksgiving 1852, packed up his belongings and left his station in the care of the "Acting Keeper," his son, Jethro. On December 2, Jethro proudly wrote:

> Having passed a successful examination, received my full appointment as Keeper of this light station. Jethro Worth.

Keeper Jethro Worth was 45 years old. He and his wife, Lizzie, had a son, Edward, then 10 years old. They didn't stay on Poge for long; a much less lonely station became available the next year and they took it:

> October 11, 1883 -- Turned over all public property to Mr. Geo. H. Fisher, late ass't. keeper of Cross Rip Light Ship.
>
> I shall proceed to Edgartown and take charge of the Harbour Light. Jethro Worth.

Directly under that entry:

> I, George H. Fisher, take charge of this station as acting keeper. Jethro Worth (late keeper) moved his furniture and Family this day.

The change must have been welcomed by both families. Cape Poge, remote though it was, must have seemed like heaven to Fisher, fresh from service aboard the Cross Rip Light Vessel; and to the Jethro Worth family, the lighthouse on Edgartown harbor, a pleasant stroll from town, must have provided a whole new way of living. On January 24, 1884, Acting Keeper Fisher received his "full appointment as Keeper of this Light Station," having passed the required examination.

The Light House Board steadily improved the Keepers' lot. On March 12, 1884, Keeper Fisher "received one Medicine Chest from the Inspector." Then, on June 23, he received a "uniform suit, likewise a working suit." The Board explained the move in its annual report for 1885:

> The Board has at last succeeded in clothing all the male light-keepers . . . in a neat, appropriate, and economical uniform . . . It . . . will aid in maintaining [the Service's] discipline, increase its efficiency, raise its tone, and add to its *esprit de corps*.



It didn't help the female Keepers, of course. At tourist spots like Gay Head or Nobska Point, the uniform was worn with considerable pride, but at remote Cape Poge, where most visitors dragged themselves ashore from a wreck, it served more as free clothing, a welcome addition to the Keeper's meager salary.

Another perquisite was on the way and, after four years at Poge, on August 31, 1887, Keeper Fisher

> left this station on leave of absence for one week.

This is the first mention of time off in the journals. Perhaps it was the first time that Keepers, who worked seven days a week all year round, were given a vacation. He probably went to Nantucket where his mother, in failing health, was living. One year later, September 11, 1888, he again left on leave, indicating that the annual vacation had become routine:

> Leave of absence for one week, leaving station in charge of my son, H. B. Fisher.

If these leaves were indeed official vacations, it is strange that the Service didn't feel obligated to provide a substitute keeper.

Keeper Fisher kept a good journal. Its entries were clear and terse, with only an infrequent personal reference. In the back of the book, he listed "Dates of Official Visits to this Station." The routine seemed to be that there were from four to six visits annually, including one official inspection (later, inspections became more frequent). The other visits were by supply vessels, mechanics and occasionally an engineer. In most years, there was only one visit during the winter, usually in December, with none from then until March. It was a lonely spot during the long, stormy winter months.

For what seems to be the first time, in 1892, the station was provided with "four charts showing position of Cape

Poge Light and its vicinity." Along with the charts came instructions on how to measure for uniforms -- apparently, the new uniforms weren't fitting too well. Some things, however, never changed:

> March 4, 1892 -- The small house that stood to the East of the Light House went down the bank in the gale of last night. The bank has washed away during this late gale from 3 to 5 feet in different places around the government land.

Keeper Fisher, despite his terseness, occasionally used rather poetic imagery in describing the weather. Such phrases probably were idiomatic at the time: "a smothering snowstorm," "light, baffling airs," "squally with tempest." The gale that sent the small house down the bank was accompanied by "a smothering snowstorm."

On July 13, 1892, Keeper Fisher received a telegram[17] from Nantucket with word that his mother was "sinking rapidly." He left the station at 5 p.m., for Nantucket, returning on the 17th. Again on the 29th, a telegram arrived: his mother was dead. He "left the station at 2:30 p.m. for Nantucket leaving Wife and Son in charge." He returned on August 2nd.

By 1893, the ocean, as it always does, had won out and a new tower was authorized. The construction was a major operation that summer, but in its annual report for the year, the Light House Board made it sound rather simple:

> A new temporary light tower, made necessary by the washing away of the bank, was built 40 feet distant from the old one. The old tower, which was very much out of repair, was taken down and the light was removed to the new tower.

In his journal, Keeper Fisher describes what happened in detail, but he never suggests that it was a "new temporary light tower." This 1893 structure is the one that still stands

[17]This raises the question of the delivery of telegrams. How did the Keeper know to go into town to pick it up? We know telegrams were not delivered to Poge -- one official telegram was in Edgartown for a week before being picked up by the Keeper.



today on Cape Poge. Could it be that when it was built it was thought of as only temporary by the Light House Board?

There is something equally confusing in Keeper Fisher's activities at the time. During the month that the workmen were there building the new tower, he was hard at work on the old one:

> Keeper whitewashing [old] tower outside. Workmen on new tower.
> Keeper painting window frames and sashes in old tower.
> Keeper painting old tower stairs.

The new tower, temporary or otherwise, was erected 40 feet from the old one. The old lantern (the glass-enclosed room inside which the lamp and lens are mounted) was to be used on the new tower. The transfer had to be accomplished during daylight of one day so the light could operate without interruption. Keeper Fisher explains how it was done:

> June 23, 1893 -- Workmen putting up staging from one Tower to the other. At 10 a.m., Mr. Johnson (Lampist) arrived here. Commenced cutting away the boarding in Lantern to loosen bolts that hold the old Lantern down.
> June 24 -- The Tower Lantern moved from old tower to new. Put in place at 3:30 p.m. and lighted at Sunset for the first time on new Tower. Mr. Johnson moved Lantern. Set one new pane of Glass, repaired a broken hinge to Lantern door.

That lantern, a heavy 10-sided "greenhouse" with a cast-iron roof and ventilator ball, containing a heavy glass Fresnel lens, was inched across the staging from the old tower to the new one, a distance of 40 feet. All this taking place 35 feet above ground, using nothing but man power. And Lampist Johnson and crew accomplished it, breaking one pane of glass and one hinge in the process! A good day's work!

One week later, the workmen "pulled the old tower down," the tower that the Keeper had freshly

whitewashed and containing freshly painted stairs and window sashes. Could the old stairs and windows have been used in the new tower? If so, that would make them even older than the 1893 structure -- an important historical point. It does seem unlikely, however; but why did Keeper Fisher paint them?

Three years later, with the new tower safely back 40 feet, Keeper Fisher wrote on December 17, 1896:

> Two stones of the foundation of the old Light House has gone down bank.

The following day's entry:

> Two more stones of the old foundation have gone down bank.

There was something symbolic about the old foundation going down the bank in 1896. That same year, the spoils system, the foundation stone of the lighthouse service for nearly a century, was also washed away when President Cleveland placed the establishment under Federal Civil Service.

Many vessels ran aground off Cape Poge because of a confusion between the fixed white light at Poge and the fixed white light on the Cross Rip Light Vessel. In 1898, the Board decided to end the confusion by giving Cape Poge Light a flashing characteristic, one red flash and two whites. Keeper Fisher described the changeover:

> June 9, 1898 -- Two workmen (machinists) arrived here at 9 a.m. with a new lens and fixings for putting in a Flash-light at this station. They are now at work in the Light House.
>
> June 11 -- This Light changed from a fixed White to a Flashing red and white and Lighted for the first time at sunset.

The "new lens and fixings" were made by Chance Brothers of England. The base was a 19½-inch drum that rotated every 30 seconds atop a raceways containing 29 bearings (19 thrust and 10 radial). A weight at the end of a steel cable powered the clockwork that rotated the lens.



The Keeper wound up the weight inside a 35-foot dropbox, giving a running time per winding of between 5 and 6 hours. There were six panels of prisms and lenses, two having red shields in front of them. The lens rotated, sending out a 0.7-second white flash, then a 4.3-second eclipse, followed by a 0.7-second red, etc. We don't know if a new lamp came with the Chance lens. Probably, the Kerosene lamp that had been installed in July 1878 was retained.

The flashing characteristic added another chore to the Keeper's life: at least every five hours he had to crank up the weight. That meant he had to get out of bed every night; on long, winter nights, perhaps twice. Clearly, not a pleasant chore, especially in a howling winter gale. Normally, a rotating light station was manned by two Keepers because of this extra work. Cape Poge was not.

Keeper Fisher didn't like it and thought the clockwork should run longer. On June 27, 1898, the District sent a man over to work on it:

> Mr. Sommes (Machinist) has been making repairs about the running gear in Tower so as clock would run longer time.

When he left the next day, Mr. Sommes had "made clock in Tower to run Seven hours."[18] But even that must not have satisfied Keeper Fisher. On August 23, after 15 years on Cape Poge, he sent in his resignation:

> Rec'd from Inspector office a letter stating my resignation was excepted (*sic*) from Sept. 1st, 1898. My Successor, Mr. Dolby from West Chop Station, will probably relieve me by that date.

The Lighthouse Service didn't believe in much overlap and on August 30th, Keeper Fisher "transferred all gov't. property . . . to Mr. Geo. E. Dolby, late ass't. keeper at West Chop Station." The next day, Keeper Dolby made his first entry:

[18] It is not clear how he could have done that. What determines the length of time per winding is the height of the tower.

> Having all Government property turned over to me this day by the late Keeper Geo. H. Fisher, I now take Charge of this Station.

Two months later, the U.S.S. *Myrtle* anchored offshore and landed lumber and brick, along with four "labaras" (laborers). The four men worked from November 3 until January 26, a poor time of year on Cape Poge for outdoor work, on a major renovation of the station. The annual report described it this way:

> A set of quarters in the dwelling was rearranged, much better adapting it to being kept warm, and a well was driven in the cellar. The yards were filled and graded, concrete walk laid, plumbing put in order, and 96 feet of drains laid. The boathouse was rebuilt and enlarged. An oil house was built. Various repairs were made.

The new boat house hadn't been planned. It became necessary, as we learn in the journal, when a storm destroyed the old one while the workmen were there:

> November 27 -- Bank washing badly. Fences blown down. Boat House blown down and carried away. Lost one pare of Oars, two double blocks and fall which belonged with blocks used for hauling up boat . . . steps moved from Tower. Tower rocked very badly. A three-masted schurner is ashore betwene Cape Poge and Edgartown. Very heavy sea on the East side of Cape Poge.[19]

The renovation of the dwelling was completed in January and presumably the Dolby family, about whom we know little, spent a warmer and more pleasant winter. That summer, tragedy struck the home and on July 21, the journal entry reads:

> Keeper's little boy Arthur died at 1:30 a.m. of Hart trouble, another boy sick.

The following spring, a most welcome announcement came from the Light House Board:

> Received Letter from Inspectors office stating that a Assistant will be appointed at this station and what is needed.

[19]Like most Keepers, Dolby was a poor speller.



When the Steamer *Azalea* anchored off the point on May 11, 1900, bringing the new assistant, the Dolby family must have watched with great interest. He was Alfred A. Howard and along with him came a new stove, a lamp and 1½ tons of coal. There is no mention of other household furnishings or family. It is not until January 22, 1901, that we learn he is married:

> Mr. Howard, Assistant Keeper, went from the Station at 9 a.m. for Taunton with his wife for the Hospital, she being Sick for some time. Mrs. Dolby went with them to Edgartown.

It is not obvious what the Keeper meant by his writing error (he crossed out the word, mild). Perhaps he thought she was not as sick as she claimed. While the Howards were away we learn that they have a child:

> Assistant child sick. Sent for Dr.

Two days later, Mr. Howard returned. We are not told when Mrs. Howard came back.

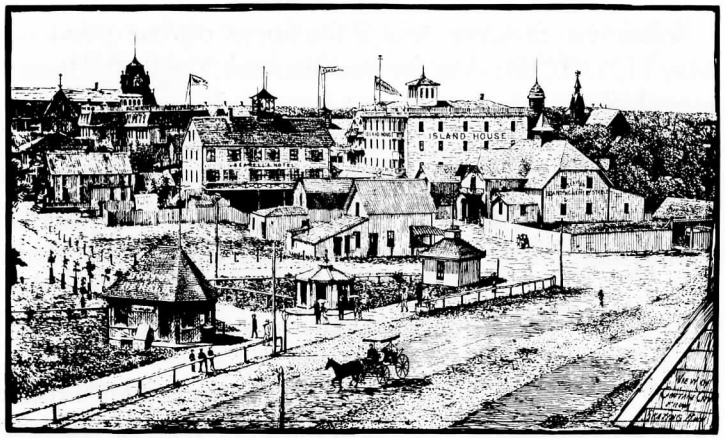
These were heady times to be an American. For the first time, the United States was a "world power." Our war vessels roamed the seas:

> July 8, 1901 -- Passed this station at 11 a.m. Battleships *Kearsarge, Massachusetts, Alabama* and a number of small steamers. Proceeded East.

The battlewagons sailed west the next day. Again on August 9 there was naval action as "Three Battleships painted white and one which looked like a Cruiser went West."

We had just defeated Spain in Cuba and had taken over Puerto Rico, Guam and the Phillipines. During the war, we had annexed the Hawaiian Islands. We had taken part, along with other nations, in quelling the Boxer Rebellion in China. It is no wonder that Keeper Dolby could recognize battleships by name.

Then in September 1901, President McKinley was assassinated and the flamboyant Teddy Roosevelt took over. There's not a mention in the journal of the




*Portfolio of Views of Cottage City, 1886.*

*Charles Tallman of shipwreck fame had a tiny stand (above the horse in sketch) near the site of today's Flying Horses in Oak Bluffs.*

McKinley assassination, no mention of the flag being at half-staff or of a period of mourning.[20]

Mrs. Dolby and her children had spent the winter in Edgartown, returning to Poge on June 6, 1902. The day after their return, there is a surprising entry in the journal:

> Keeper packing up things. Getting ready to move.

On June 25, 1902, the Steamer *Azalea* arrived "to take on board Keeper and Family and household effects and left, en route for Nantucket at 2 p.m. All well." One week later, the *Azalea* returned and "landed Keeper Wallace A. Eldredge, Family and Household Effects."

Dolby had been Keeper only four years, the shortest tour on Cape Poge since it started. There were other changes coming. On January 13, 1904, the Inspector, during a visit, asked Assistant Keeper Howard "if he would accept the Keepership of Great Point Light and he accepted." The Howard family left two days later and his replacement, a Mr. Westron, arrived on February 1. He

[20]It wasn't until 1894 that lighthouses were equipped with a flag and flag pole, at a cost "not to exceed $130 per station." The only mention in the Poge journals of a flag pole is on Feb. 20, 1904: "Keepers took flag pole down and painted it and equipped it for vane."



didn't stay long. On June 3, 1904, the journal recorded:

> Mr. Westron informs me that he has sent in his resignation.

There must have been unpleasantness between the two men because on June 14:

> Ass't Keeper Westron left this Station this a.m. for Boston without notifying me.

He didn't come back and three weeks later Mr. J. E. Barrus arrived to become the new Assistant Keeper. His family and household goods followed, arriving on July 12, 1904.

Mr. Barrus stayed at the station for the next 15 years, one of the longest tours in Cape Poge history. He was promoted to Keeper in 1908. His son and his wife both died on Cape Poge, as we will see in the third and final part of this history of Cape Poge Light.

**(End of Part Two)**



D.C.H.S. Archives.

*Tallman sold photos showing his loss of feet and fingers in the disaster.*

*World War II*
*On the Vineyard*

# Navy Combat Pilots Train At the Island Air Base

by HENRY E. SCOTT, Jr.

ON the Great Plain of the Vineyard, during World War II, pilots and crews of Navy fighters and bombers underwent the final phase of their training before being assigned to aircraft carriers in the war against Japan. The training covered navigation, target practice, night air combat, recognition and identification of ships and planes, and simulated night carrier landings and take-offs.

This relatively small base was one of several in New England. Manning the base were officers and enlisted men, some of whom later became permanent residents, others summer residents who later retired here. The station personnel lived both on base and off. Married officers rented houses in town; unmarried officers lived in the "B.O.Q." (Bachelor Officers Quarters). Enlisted men were quartered in two-storied wooden barracks.

The transient air crews, pilots and others, came for six weeks of intensive training and were then shipped out into combat, having had little time to fall in love with the Island.

At the Air Base, specially built for this training, there was an Administration Building (today's offices and

HENRY E. SCOTT, JR., a Lieutenant in the Naval Reserve in the fall of 1944, was transferred from Texas to the Auxiliary Air Facility on Martha's Vineyard, as part of the station complement. Once here, he and his wife, Peggy, knew what to do. They bought an historic farmhouse in Chilmark, which, since his retirement from university teaching, has become what the Navy might call a "permanent duty" base.





restaurant) with its control tower, a Mess Hall, a Medical Building, a Post Exchange, a Hangar, and a number of Quonset huts for classrooms, ammunition, the "brig," etc. The major buildings had steam heat, but the Quonset huts relied on small kerosene heaters, scarcely enough to handle the rough Island winter.

Station Officers (as distinct from the transient Flight Officers) took turns as O.D. (Officer of the Day) and S. P. (Shore Patrol Officer). Being O.D., despite its name, meant staying on the base all night, responsible for everything while the "Skipper" was not on base. The O.D. would try to sleep on a cot in his office, but the nerve-wracking "bounce" drill of the aircraft (dropping down on and quickly taking off again from a marked stretch of runway -- a simulated carrier deck) usually kept him from sleep. A visit to the control tower, where interesting and often exciting things were happening, usually replaced sleep. The scene from there -- totally dark except for colored runway lights, the reverberations of the planes landing and taking off, one right after another, the radio chatter: "Four chicks request permission to land"; "Take runway one eight zero"; "Over and out" -- was exciting.

O.D.s also made a tour of the base in a Jeep to check everything, including the guards who patrolled the fences with police dogs that growled and threatened at anyone's approach.

Besides the practice landings there was a lot of hazardous night flying on simulated combat missions. Sadly, some planes and crews were lost at sea due to navigational error, "vertigo" or engine troubles. Other tragedies resulted from failure to pull out of a dive in time, which happened at Noman's and off Gay Head, where a wrecked vessel was used as a target. One enlisted man on Noman's was awarded the Navy Cross for swimming out to rescue a downed pilot.

Shore Patrol duty meant putting on an SP armband and

patrolling nearby towns in a station wagon, especially Oak Bluffs where the men liked to "eat, drink and be merry."

The station personnel kept in communication with the parent base at Quonset, R.I., on a twin-engined R4D (same as the Army C-47). It made a daily "milk run" from Quonset to the Island, to Nantucket, Hyannis, and New Bedford. There was also a twin-engined flying boat, a Widgeon, available to the Skipper and officers who were often called to Quonset for briefings.

As there were not many officers at the base, each had multiple duties. I was Training Officer (Recognition, Navigation, Meteorology) and, in addition, for three months I was Boats Officer and Officer-in-Charge of Noman's Land, where we had a small detachment.

On that three-mile-long island, four miles south of Gay Head, some 36 enlisted men under an old-time Navy Chief were quartered to tend two targets -- Meat-Ball and Excelsior -- one at the east end of Noman's, the other at the west end. One target was for 5-inch rockets fired from planes; the other for 50-caliber machinegun strafing.

Many civilians thought there was indiscriminate bombing there, but that was not the case. It was carefully controlled. Of course, there was an occasional lapse, as when a flight from a mainland base, not properly briefed, was fooled by the name Noman's (thinking it was unoccupied) and "shot up" the place, much to the consternation of the men there. Fortunately, none was hurt. The rockets used in practice were not explosive and simply tore up the ground.

There has been a common notion that the island and its wildlife were ruined by the practice bombing, then and now, but that has not happened, as Gus Ben David of Felix Neck has also asserted.

On a hill on the island there was a radio shack, two huts (Master and Slave) for spotting and recording hits on the





Photo courtesy Marjorie Manter Rogers

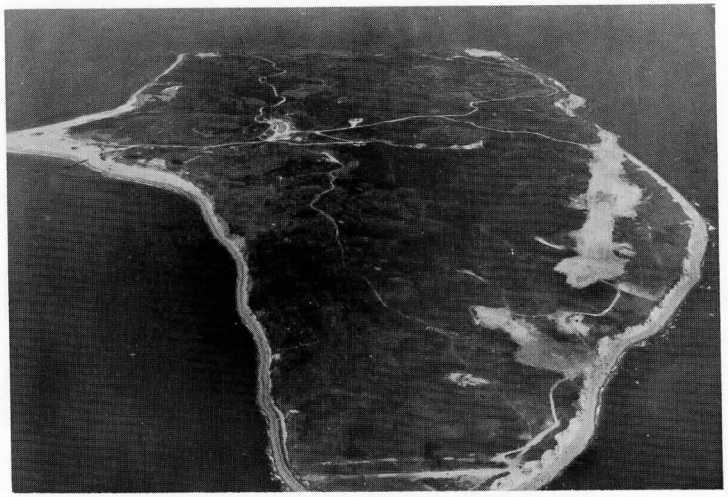
*Eleven Quonset huts provided barracks, offices and recreation for the detachment on Noman's. Harbor is visible in upper left.*

targets, plus several Quonset huts for housing, mess and recreation. Two other huts in a valley by a water reservoir housed two electric generators. On Noman's, there were no trees, but plenty of shrubbery, many blueberry bushes, with stone sheep shelters still standing.

We had two ways to get there with supplies and men. A 50-foot Navy launch was kept in Menemsha and a 45-foot crash boat was stationed in Vineyard Haven. The crash boat was the more exciting. It had twin Hall-Scott engines that burned high-octane gasoline. Its flat-stepped hull enabled it to plane even at speeds as low as 20 knots. In an emergency, it could rev up to 40 knots.

An emergency was what it was designed for: the rescue of pilots who came down in the water. At her cruising speed, the run from Vineyard Haven to the dock on the North side of Noman's took about 55 minutes.

Liberty for the men on Noman's followed a four-days-on and four-days-off schedule. The men, many from Texas and the Midwest, called Noman's "the end of the earth." There were times when the weather prevented their relief from arriving on schedule and that didn't enhance their



**Photographs courtesy Marjorie Manter Rogers**

*Noman's in 1945, looking east. Landing strip is at right, harbor at left. Target area is in foreground; another at opposite end.*

affection for the place.

I recall one emergency run we made in the crash boat to deliver some essential communications gear. When we got to Gay Head, we ran into the great southwest swells of the open sea in a strong blow. We'd ride to the top of a wave, then plunge into the trough, smashing water over the boat and into the cockpit. I suddenly realized that the helmsman was taking a short cut across Devil's Bridge, instead of our usual course out to the black can. What was shouted had better be left unquoted, but he quickly headed out of danger. As we entered the opening of Noman's tiny harbor, a great wave just lifted the boat, sweeping her neatly in alongside the dock. Pale and slightly green, we were greeted by the Chief and others who revived us with bowls of hot soup.

During this period the Navy worked closely with the Coast Guard. Our crash-boat crew shared quarters with their men in Vineyard Haven. Patrol and rescue operations were frequently coordinated.





*At the end of the war, the Navy held an Open House at the base to show the Islanders what had been going on there.*

In the summer of 1945, the Crane family, who owned Noman's before the Navy took it over, asked permission to visit the island. A son, Alexander Crane, had been a student of mine at Harvard, so the Skipper assigned me the rather pleasant duty of host. When Alexander and his sister, Priscilla, arrived, I took them to Noman's on a 63-foot Coast Guard patrol boat. They were disturbed by some things: roads that had been bulldozed through old stonewall sheep fences; a house that had burned to a ruin; but other things impressed them, such as the possibilities presented by the Quonset huts (if they should be left there -- they were not), the electric generators and the fine dock.

Despite an exceptionally severe winter in 1945, the last winter of the war, the Vineyard was warm and friendly with a pleasant mix of Navy personnel and year-round residents. In August 1946, after Japan surrendered, the Navy staged an Open House so the public could get a closer glimpse of what had been going on at the air base. Soon after, the base was emptied of personnel and equipment, but it took some time before it was turned over to the County of Dukes County, making possible its use as the Island's airport today.

# Books

## The English New England Voyages, 1602 - 1608

*Edited by David B. Quinn and Alison M. Quinn. Published by The Hukluyt Society, London. Illustr. 580 pp.*

FOR anyone curious about how the first English "developers" came to our Island, this well-documented book tells all. In it is every relevant document of the 1602 Gosnold voyage, plus documents of all subsequent voyages to other parts of New England until 1608.

Of specific interest to Vineyarders are Archer's account of the Gosnold voyage and the Brereton account, both, of course, being members of the same expedition.

But it is not only the original documents that make this work so valuable. It is the Quinn introduction to them with its precisely detailed analysis, almost on an hour by hour basis, along with the extensive annotations, that bring the Gosnold voyage to life.

Those familiar with the voyage already know of the exhaustive study of it by Warner F. Gookin, published by our Society in 1963. Gookin, a retired Vineyard resident, labored for years, piecing together the most thorough account of the Gosnold trip until the present Quinn work.

Reverend Gookin's analysis had Gosnold sailing to the south of Nantucket, entering Nantucket Sound by sailing north through Muskeget Channel between the two islands. The first landing on our Island was, Gookin believed, at East Chop, which Gosnold named Martha's Vineyard, in honor of his daughter.

Professor Quinn and his wife disagree. (Quinn knew Gookin and gave him, and later Barbour, important help in the preparation of the Gookin book.) The Quinns' research shows that Gosnold sailed directly into the Sound through the shoals south of Monomoy. They have him making his first landing on Cape Poge, which at that time was an island separate from Chappaquiddick. (See front and back covers for maps.)

What difference does it make, you ask. Well, the Quinn version makes Cape Poge the place where the first Englishmen set foot on Dukes County and thus makes Cape Poge the original Martha's Vineyard -- hardly an inconsequential matter. His arguments are persuasive.

There is far too much in this fascinating and exhaustive account to summarize here. It is enough to say that it is well worth careful reading and we urge members to come to the Gale Huntington Library and see for themselves.

The Quinn work gives full details of Gosnold's subsequential landing on Cuttyhunk and the building of the first English structure in New England on the tiny isle in that island's fresh-water pond.

A.R.R.



# Documents

*Gold Rush fever hits the Island in this installment of the Jeremiah Pease Diary, our most detailed record of life on the Vineyard from 1819 until his death in 1857.*

*Jeremiah loses his job as Keeper of Edgartown Harbor Light for political reasons. The Baptists are attracting many young persons away from the Methodists, just as the Methodists had cut into the Congregationalists years earlier.*

*We have been publishing excerpts from this diary since 1974.*

•••

### February 1849

*6th.* N. light, pleasant, Funeral of Mr. Martin Norton, aged about 84. Service by Rev. F. Upham. The Vestry of the new Methodist Meeting House[1] by the exertions of Br. Frederick Upham is finished today and dedicated by him, Br. Stewart and Br. Henry Baylies this evening. It was a pleasant and interesting meeting altho' considerable snow on the ground, yet the congregation was very large and attentive. May the Good Lord make it the Birthplace of many precious Souls.

*17th.* NNE, Gale, snowstorm. Harbour closed below the Lt. House with ice.

*24th.* N.E. moderate, thaws. The Harbour remains closed with ice and a great quantity in the Sound. Two lads, Blankeship & Mellin, came very near being drowned near the Light House. They were gunning in a small boat, which accidentily upset.

*26th.* E.N.E. Gale with rain. The Steam Boat *Telegraph* of Nantucket comes in through the ice.[2]

*27th.* N.E., thick foggy. Ice is broken up but closes the harbour.

*28th.* N.E., thick foggy. The harbour is clear for vessels to pass. This has been a cold month, considerable snow and ice. Mr. Bartlett Claghorn of E'Ville dies this month at the residence of his son at Holmes Hole and buried at E'Ville this month.

### March 1849

*8th.* N.N.W., fresh wind. William[3] arrives in Cutter *Jackson*, Capt. Waldron.

*11th.* N.W., fresh breeze. Attended Meetings at E'Ville. Considerable snow still in the roads. The weather having been severe I did not attend meeting at E'Ville or M.D., for four Sabbaths past.

### April 1849

*3rd.* W to SW. About 2 o'clock a.m., our Daughter Isabella Wimpenny had

[1]The present Old Whaling Church, Main St., Edgartown.

[2]The paddlewheeler *Telegraph* was famous for her ice-breaking work. See *The Island Steamers*, Morris and Morin, 1977.

[3]Jeremiah's second or third son (he and Cyrus were twins), William became famous as a Captain in the U.S. Revenue Service. See *Captain Pease, U.S. Coast Guard Pioneer*, Florence Kern, 1982.

a daughter born.[4]

*8th.* W.S.W. Attended meetings at E'Ville. Another Year of my short life has flown away.

*10th.* S.E. Commenced plowing. Brig *Vesta*, Capt. Osander Mayhew, sail for California.

*11th.* N.W., cold. Town Meeting. Sold the old Methodist Meeting House to the Town.[5]

*12th.* N.W., high wind. Fast day, so-called.

*14th.* N.W. Gale. Very cold, makes ice before sunset.

*15th.* N.W. Gale. Ice 1½ inches thick. Attended Meeting at E'Ville.

*18th.* E.S.E. Gale. Finished plowing for corn. Cold.

*23rd.* W. to N.N.E., rainy. Went to Holmes Hole to attend the discharging of Cargo from Brig *Blue Nose* (British). Salt. Returned at night.

*25th.* S.W. This day I am again removed from Keeper of Edgartown Light House under Gen. Taylor's Administration, notwithstanding his many pledges, declarations, etc., etc. Silvanus Crocker is again appointed in my stead.[6] Attended the discharging of said Brig at H. Hole.

*29th.* S. to N.N.W., light. Rains a little a.m., clears p.m. This evening a Meeting was attended in the Methodist Meeting House by request of the Capt. & Crew of the Ship *Walter Scott* of this place. Rev. Frederick Upham preached to them from Genesis, 28th Chapter, 20 & 21 Verses: "And Jacob vowed a vow, saying if God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my Father's house in peace, then shall the Lord be my God." The discourse was very appropriate and affecting. Rev. Mr. Goodenow of the Congregational Church was likewise requested to take a part in the services. He read a poem well suited to the occasion. The singing was excellent. It was a solemn and interesting season. The house was very full and all things conducted with propriety. My own feeling, (having two Sons who are about to embark in this expedition) I shall not pretend to describe.[7] Br. Jos. Huxford's Wife dies.

*30th.* E.S.E., fresh breeze, clear, cold. Ellis Lewis' Wife dies at night, May 1st.

### May 1849

*1st.* Ely. Surveyed land for Elisha Smith & Chas. Kidder.

*3rd.* Ely. Commenced planting corn.

*4th.* SEly to W.N.W., squally, little rain. Funeral of Mrs. Lewis, service by Rev. F. Upham and Rev. Mr. Goodenow attended, at the Baptist Meetinghouse.

[4]She was Mary Isabel, Jeremiah's 7th grandchild.

[5]Now the Edgartown Town Hall (and movie theater).

[6]Jeremiah was a Democrat; President Taylor was a Whig. This was the second time that the Spoils System had cost Jeremiah his post.

[7]It is 1849, the year of the California Gold Rush. Shiploads of Vineyarders sailed off to strike it rich (few, if any, did). Jeremiah's sons, Cyrus and John, were planning to leave on the next ship.



*6th.* E. to E. by S. Attended meetings at E'Ville. It was a blessed season. Six, I think, have professed Religion during the last week. The Brethren are engaged. 10 or 12 arose in the congregation for prayers. Br. Geo. Weeks was there. Many of the inhabitants of this place are now very deeply awakened. Some were blessed today.

*7th.* Ely, light. The Ship *Walter Scott* sails about 11 o'clock a.m. She was towed out by the Steamer *Massachusetts*. It was an affecting time when she departed for Calafornia (*sic*), having 50 or more on board, mostly from this Town. Having two Sons (Cyrus & John) about to leave us for such a Voyage, it would be impossible to describe my feelings. May the Good Lord guide and protect them all. Attended meeting in the Baptist Meetinghouse at E'Ville. A Baptist Preacher preached. Many appear to be very seriously awakened and a number have professed Religion. May the Lord carry on his work until all the Inhabitants shall be brought to the knowledge of the truth. Returned at ½ past 12 at night.

*12th.* N.E. to S.E., light. News of the death of my Friend Dutee (?) J. Pierce of New Port, R.I. Bark Ship *Sarah*, bought by John O. Morse and others at Warren, R.I., for the purpose of sending her to Calafornia, arrives.

*20th.* S.W., pleasant. Attended Meetings at E'Ville. It was a powerful time. Some were awakened. One young man who had been very trifling became affected. The Meetinghouse was crowded, extra seats were brought in. Mr. Geo. Weeks was there, Br. Seth Allen likewise. Four persons professed Religion this evening.

*23rd.* S.W., fresh breeze. News of the Death of Gen. Wm. J. Worth of the U.S. Army.[8] We were schoolboys together, his father and my Wife's Father were Brothers. Attended Meeting at Chapaquiddick (*sic*) with Br. Upham this evening. Br. Aron Norton's Wife died this morning. About 18 years ago, she rode to meeting with me over the Plain and embraced Religion the same evening. She died happy in the Lord.

*24th.* N.E., fresh breeze. Attended meeting at E'Ville. Jeremiah went with me. It was a very excellent meeting. Mrs. Mary Stewart professed Religion during the meeting, her mother and one of her sisters were awakened, her Father spoke, all the young Converts but one took an active part in the services. The older Brethren and Sisters were much engaged. It was interesting.

[8]General William Jenkins Worth, for whom Fort Worth, Texas, was named, was not born on the Vineyard, although his parents were. He was born in Hudson, N.Y., a few years after his parents moved there. His mother died shortly after his birth and his father returned to Edgartown where William went to school and was baptized. He joined the Army at 18, when his father died, rising through the ranks to Major General. He served heroically in the war against the Seminole Indians in Florida (1842) and in the Mexican War (1846). He died of cholera at San Antonio, Texas, where he was Commandant of the Department of Texas, and is buried under a 50-foot monument at Broadway and Fifth Avenue (Madison Square), New York City.

# Director's Report

WITH this issue of the *Intelligencer* we have the pleasure of welcoming more than one hundred new members to the Society as a result of a membership drive organized this fall by Council member Eleanor Olsen and Secretary Shirley Erickson. We now have well over a thousand members, making this Society one of the largest historical organizations in the state in number of members. Of the approximately 300 such organizations in Massachusetts, only about 18 have more members than the Dukes County Historical Society. We thank Mrs. Olsen and Mrs. Erickson, as well as the other members on the Council who assisted, for their outstanding work.

In addition to the work done by Mrs. Olsen and Mrs. Erickson, we are grateful for the accomplishments of the many volunteers who have served the Society in recent months. The members of the Society's Council all perform tasks beyond the call of duty, and while some of them have specific titles such as editor and genealogist, others go about their work with even less recognition. Other members of the Society also have been active in recent months. Joanne Clark and Kay Chamberlain have been typing catalog cards and Dorothea Looney is working on accessions. Until the weather turned too cold, Eleanor Olsen and Betty Hitesman were continuing their work of cleaning and refurbishing the carriage shed. The most visible volunteer project in recent months has been the construction of a brick walk from the front door of the Thomas Cooke House to the Library by Bill Schwabe's High School class. Following the plans suggested by Edith



Bliss, Mr. Schwabe and his students did a beautiful job on this walkway, and the Society is very grateful for their services.

Among our recent accessions, there are several items that may induce some of you to make a special trip to the Society. From Debbie Athearn of West Tisbury we received the log of the whaleship *Miles* on a voyage beginning in 1839, and Bill Hudgins gave us a most unusual photograph of some local duck hunters taken in 1898. In 1983, the Society received 173 accessions ranging in size from a leather post card to the papers of Grafton Norton.

During the last few months, the Society's archives have had the benefit of the scholarly work of Alvin Goldwyn and Connie Mermann, who have been cataloging some of our more significant manuscripts. Although Mrs. Mermann has left the Island for the rest of the winter, Dr. Goldwyn is continuing with this important task.

From the Historical Society, we extend our best wishes to you all for a pleasant and happy 1984 and our thanks for your support.

THOMAS E. NORTON

### Renewal Time

Many thanks to those of you who have already sent in your 1984 dues in response to our annual reminder letter. Especial thanks to those who have upgraded their membership categories and also, of course, added thanks for all contributions to our 1984 Preservation Fund.

We remind members who may have put the dues notice aside and, perhaps, by now have forgotten it that the Society and this journal depend upon you.

# Bits & Pieces

LIFE on our Island, one would think, would engender unity, bound together as we are by the sea. But it doesn't work that way. And, it seems, it never has.

Take the story of the *Christiana*, with the miraculous survival of her Mate (see page 105).

It was a stormy Sunday, January 7, 1866, when she ran aground and sank on Hawes Shoal, southeast of Cape Poge. Gale winds and an ice-bound harbor kept rescuers from reaching her until daylight, Thursday, the 11th, when an Edgartown crew plucked Charles F. Tallman of Osterville from the ice-covered rigging, to which he had clung for nearly five days. He was cared for in the Edgartown home of E.W. Jennings for two days, after which he was moved to his sister's house in Holmes Hole.

Bickering between the two towns began at once in the *Gazette:*

"[Mr. Tallman's] brother-in-law at Holmes Hole, Mr. Collier, came for him and had him removed to that place, but he seemed loth to leave, for, he said, 'he believed he had fallen among christians.' " (*Jan. 26, 1866*)

Mr. J.N. Collier, the Methodist minister at Holmes Hole, was not pleased. He wrote:

"The manner of your putting the matter seems to imply that the sufferer felt that he would fare better among strangers than with his own family . . . he certainly fell into no less a community than he left." (*Feb. 9*)

Collier's letter was critical of Edgartown for failing to rescue his brother-in-law quickly. That hit a raw nerve among Edgartown mariners; one of them, "W.E.," responded:

"I have had some experience of ice and wind, and ships, but most assuredly I would not place what little I have learned by experience in opposition to his profound ignorance . . . no doubt, he is a far better sailor in his study than I ever was at sea." (*Feb 16, 1866*)

Off-Islander Capt. M., wrote that he personally could not be found guilty "in the terrible crime . . . which he [Collier] would charge upon the people of Edgartown, as I am only a visitor to the island . . .

". . . the New Bedford *Standard* [printed] a communication, I am told, from a Holmes Hole correspondent, which so entirely, and without doubt purposely ignored all the efforts of the people of Edgartown . . . that it did not *even* mention the fact that Mr. Tallman, the only survivor, passed through this place en route for Holmes Hole, much less that he was rescued by some daring seamen of this place and received for 48 hours, all the attention which a sympathetic community could bestow. . . there has existed for some years a spirit of rivalry between the two places, and upon the part of some a feeling of jealously." (*Feb. 16*)

Even tragedy could not unite the two villages, sharing, though they do, our tiny Island.

A.R.R.



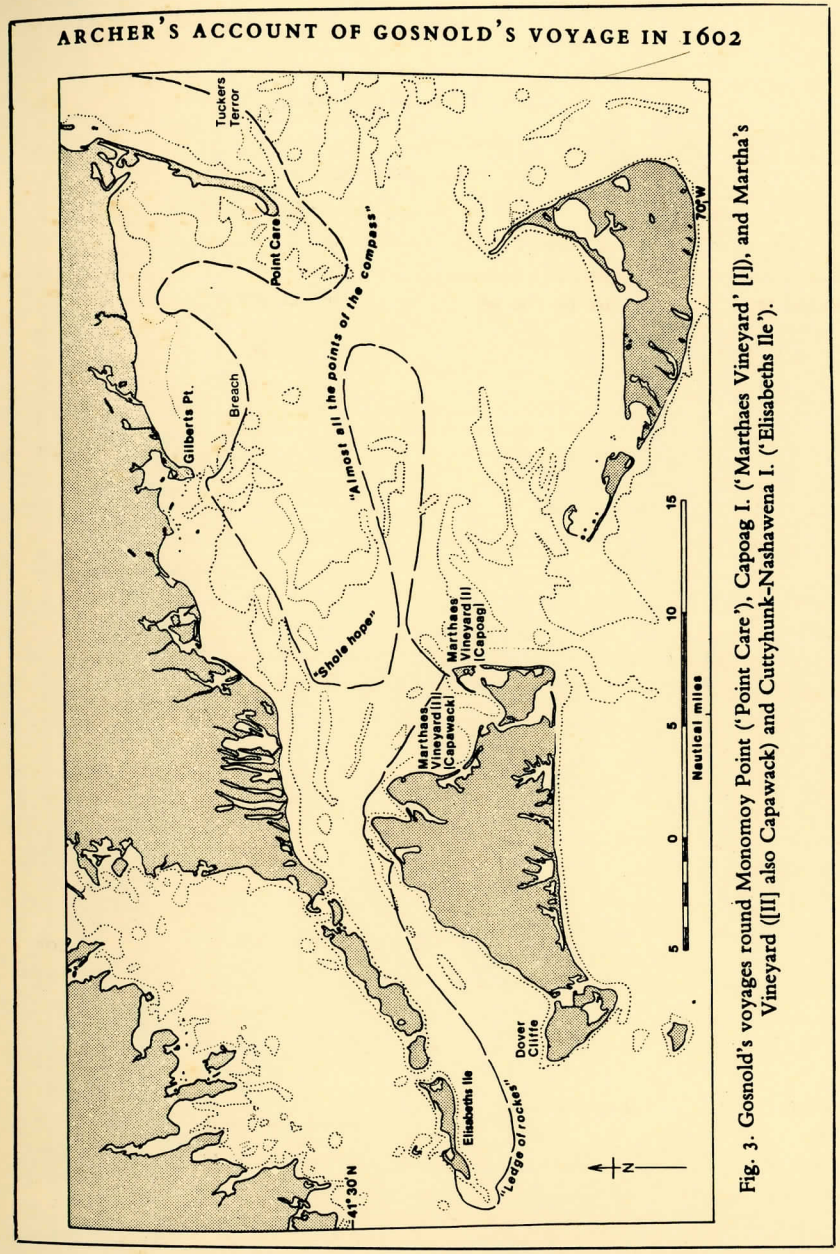
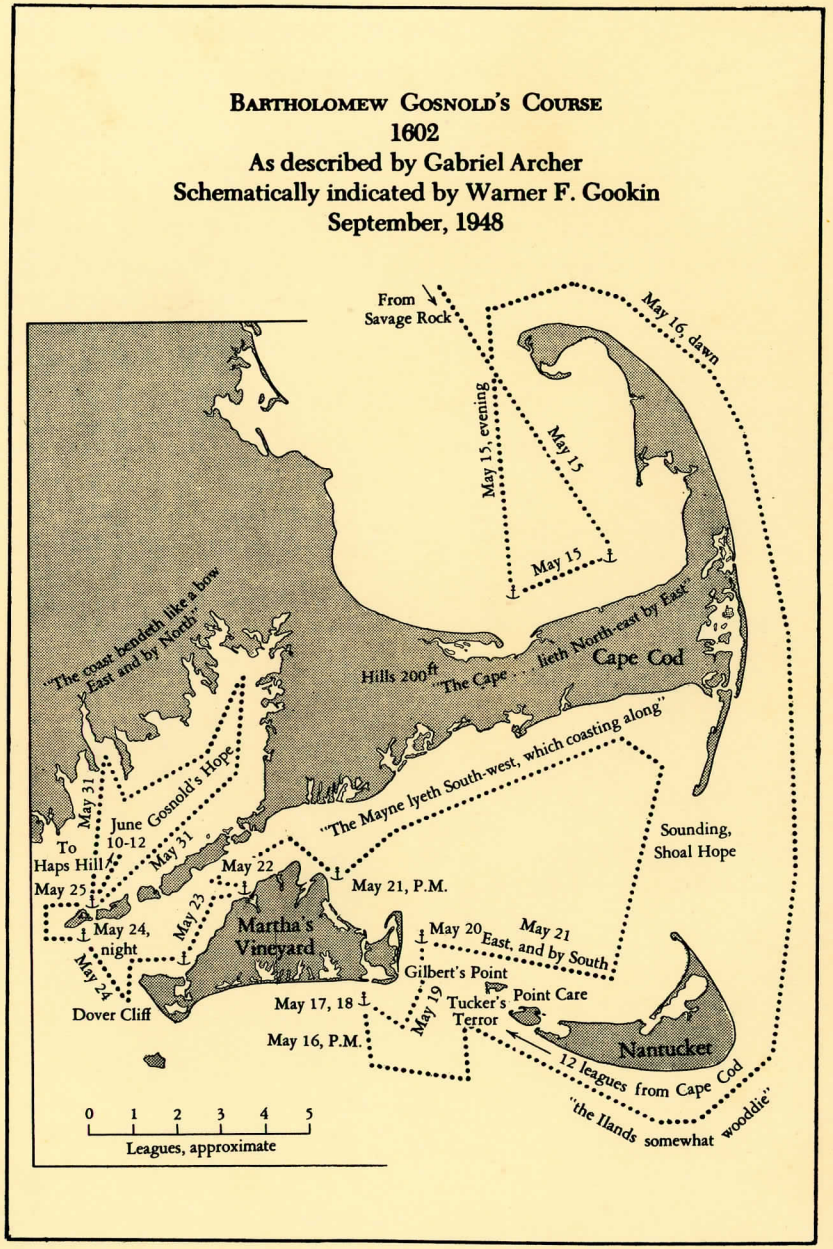



Fig. 3. Gosnold's voyages round Monomoy Point ('Point Care'), Capoag I. ('Marthaes Vineyard' [I]), and Martha's Vineyard ([II] also Capawack) and Cuttyhunk-Nashawena I. ('Elisabeths Ile').

From *The English New England Voyages* by Quinn and Quinn

*Course followed by Bartholomew Gosnold from May 16, 1602 until May 25, 1602. On May 22, he went ashore at Cape Poge, naming it Martha's Vineyard, according to David B. Quinn (see p. 130). For a different analysis of the voyage see back cover.*




From *Bartholomew Gosnold* by Gookin and Barbour

*Reverend Gookin's interpretation of the Archer account has Gosnold sailing along the south shore of Nantucket, then up through Muskeget Channel, going ashore at East Chop (see inside back cover).*