Martha's Vineyard Historical Society MESSENGER

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Curator Linsey Lee Honored by Massachusetts Cultural Council

Oral History Center Receives Humanities Grant and "Gold Star"

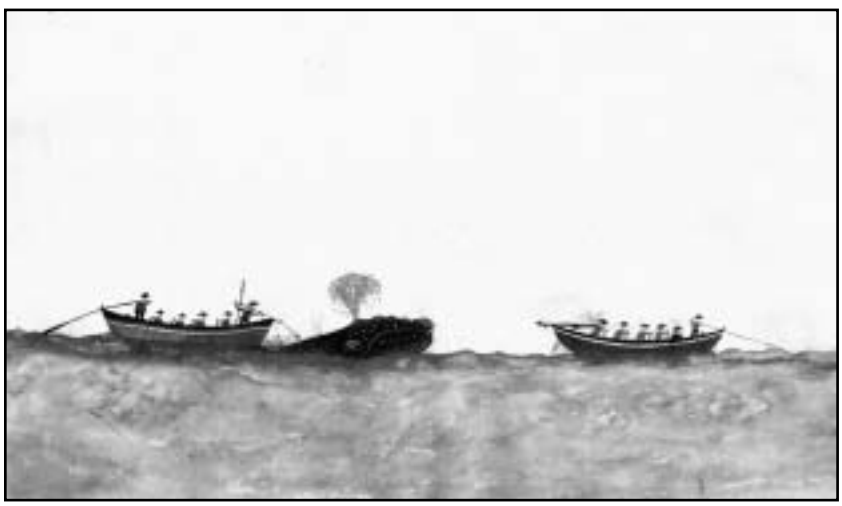


The Martha's Vineyard Historical Society's Oral History Center and Curator Linsey Lee were honored last month by the Massachusetts Cultural Council in ceremonies held in Mechanics Hall in Worcester for her work-in-progress on a documentary video.

The project, called *Vineyard Voices—American Stories*, received funding from the local Island Cultural Councils, and was one of only 18 selected from across the Commonwealth to receive the "Gold Star Project" award. [The Cultural Council is the state agency promoting the arts in Massachusetts cities and towns.]

Cultural Council representative Daniel Kertzner said, "Your project received this designation because of its unique blend of arts and community. Gold Star Projects like yours tell the story of how culture contributes to the quality of life in towns across the state. Your project makes a contribution to the social fabric of

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Logbook painting from whaleship* Charles W. Morgan *now on exhibit in Gangway Gallery.

President's Letter

Summer has returned to the Island, and it follows a busy winter for your Society. We continue our process of making the Society an even stronger voice in telling the story of Martha's Vineyard. We are looking at improving and expanding all aspects of our operations. We are looking at all the new opportunities available when we make our move to the new site in West Tisbury, several years ahead.

I welcome back our seasonal members. After a stressful winter with stories from overseas, I am sure it will be good for all of us to feel at home on the Vineyard. I invite you to feel at home at the Society.

This summer will be busy for us. The staff and volunteers have put together new exhibits at the museum in Edgartown. There is a new lecture series at The Grange in West Tisbury. A gala cocktail party and auction will take place on July 24th at Tower Hill, overlooking Edgartown Harbor.

I invite you in particular to attend our annual meeting in August when we will discuss future plans. As always, we need and welcome your thoughts and suggestions.

Hugh Knipmeyer
President

STUDENT GALLERY SUMMER EXHIBIT

"Stories from the Island Past & Present: Martha's Vineyard Public Charter School Oral History Project" *is presented by the 8-9-10-year-old class taught by Deb Dunn and Dede Hagen. Also on exhibit is a "***Colonial Kids' Corner"** *with work by Edgartown third graders in Ellie Bates, Cindy Smith and Mary Crowley's classes.*

Island Oral History Video: *Vineyard Voices – American Stories*

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the community life of the state."

The documentary project is the logical extension of Linsey's successful book of oral histories entitled *Vineyard Voices: Words, Faces & Voices of Martha's Vineyard*, published by the Society in 1998. When completed, the documentary will feature a series of short vignettes based on interviews with 10 or 12 Islanders, weaving audiotape and video images together with archival photos and film footage from the Historical Society and other collections to tell the remarkable stories of the diverse communities of Martha's Vineyard.

The initial 7 minute vignette featured the late Craig Kingsbury of Tisbury talking about his colorful experiences during the Prohibition years.

Subsequent segments will feature, among others: Eric Cottle of Menemsha talking about fishing and of the Island's deaf community; Dean K. Denniston speaking about what it was like being the son of the first African-American minister on the Island; and Dorothy Brickman sharing stories about the Vineyard's early Jewish community.

Linsey also received a $2,500 grant from the Massachusetts Foundation for the Humanities to pay for the cost of videotaping four more interviews and to help with the production of one complete vignette for the documentary.

"We so appreciate receiving this grant," said Ms. Lee, "as it enables us to gather the raw material in a timely way. The Foundation's emphasis on the Humanities has helped shape the documentary focus so that it will be evocative, educational and appeal to a broad audience beyond the Vineyard shores."

We are proud of Linsey and the Oral History Center's accomplishments, and excited that the documentary project is moving forward.

Fundraising is crucial, however, and we encourage members to contribute to making this vital project actually happen!

Please earmark your checks with ***"Vineyard Voices documentary"*** and thank you!

Making Connections: A New Phone System

In December Director Matthew Stackpole received a phone call from a Society supporter who asked if there was anything needed that was not in the 2003 budget. He immediately replied that a new phone system was badly needed, but not in the budget. Over the past three years the Society has averaged over 6000 phone calls annually, which were handled by a 15-year-old system. It rang every extension whenever a call came in, had hard-to-get parts and service, and did not have voice mail.

The supporter inquired what an appropriate modern system would cost and, when told $5000, said to expect a call back in 10 minutes. In 8 minutes Mr. Stackpole received a call informing him that a check to cover this cost would be in the mail that day! A new system was installed in February. It is now possible to reach a staff member directly or leave a voice mail message for any of the employees and volunteers at the Society. And the phone only rings at the front desk or at the extension of the person being called. Our staff is enormously appreciative of this wonderful anonymous gift as it supports their efforts every day. So much of the work of the Society is about making connections and the new phone system is indeed a great help.

NEW ISLAND-WIDE GRAVEYARD TOURS OFFERED THIS SUMMER BY SOCIETY

This summer the Society will offer guided bus tours of selected Island graveyards. The two and a half hour tour includes walks in West Tisbury, Vineyard Haven, and Edgartown graveyards as well as visits to several smaller cemeteries. Tour leader, local historian Liz Villard of Vineyard History Tours, comments: "The Island's graveyards are remarkable. The epitaphs combine tragedy, whimsy, and even some unexpected humor. The gravestones themselves are often works of art." The tour includes mysterious deaths, Nancy Luce's chickens, Puritan missionaries, Revolutionary and Civil War heroes, flying skulls, and whaling mutinies.Tours, which cost $20 for adults and $10 for children under ten, begin at the Edgartown Visitor's Center on Church Street. A portion of the tour fee benefits the Society. For specific information on tour times and to make a reservation please call 508-627-8619.

Wampanoag Genealogy

The first volume of *The Wampanoag Genealogical History of Martha's Vineyard* was published this spring. These 700 pages by Dr. Jay Segel and genealogist Andy Pierce cover Island Native American history to about 1815.

This is the first comprehensive collection of data about the ancestors of Island Wampanoags. The focus is on the individual Wampanoag. The volume includes native place names and names of New England sachems. Segel and Pierce also include references to some African-Americans and Whites from this Island and Nantucket. There are sections on the language, local history, and political structure.

Island contributors are: Mark Cohen, executive editor; David Dana Gaines, cartographer; Joan Walsh, original artwork; and Ashley Hunter, computer technology. Among the Islanders reviewing the original manuscript were archivist Faith Davison-Mohegan, the Rev. Greg Bar, and Kay Mayhew. Kay also wrote a section on how to use the volume. The introduction is by Helen Manning with a section on law by Ronald Monterosso.

Precious Whaling Logbook Art on View at Gangway Gallery

Logbooks and the art they contain are the theme of this summer's main exhibit. Some of the most attractive and interesting pages held within the society's archives will be featured in an exhibit of logbook art in the Gangway Gallery called "**Illustrious Mates — Artwork from Whaling Logbooks.**"

The Society has more than 200 logbooks and they represent a significant part of the great age of New England whaling. Most of the daily journals contain page after page of written reports of days at sea. It is black ink writings on aging yellowing paper. This show draws attention to the sailors' musings recorded in pictures. And while they may have been of little importance 200 years ago, their work today qualifies as precious art.

Jill Bouck, curator, now in her 12th year, said the collection of colorful drawings as a body of art and history is remarkable, more than originally thought. It was widely known that the logbooks had drawings of interest but this is the first time they've been brought out center stage in an exhibit.

Last winter Marian Halperin, former director to the Society, and Dana Costanza, Assistant Curator, spent long hours looking through books, picking favorite illustrations. They looked up old favorites and discovered new ones.

Most logbooks were written by the whaling-ship first mates, Mrs. Bouck said, and the language used was at times sparse and bordering on boredom.

The Society has more than 200 logbooks representing a significant part of the great age of New England whaling.

Interspersed in the pages, pictures were drawn. After much effort by the Society staff and volunteers, it turns out there is plenty to share.

With the help of modern digital technology, drawings were reproduced safely from the original logbooks for public viewing. What might have been costly to reproduce a few years ago is today fairly easy. The well-being of each logbook was not jeopardized.

"A lot of these logbooks report of wonderful visits to distant places and they contain pictures of these places. There are drawings of whales and events that happened on the voyage," Mrs. Bouck said.

"It is hard to know where they got all the inks they used. Some drawings are very colorful," Mrs. Bouck said. "With the help of the new technology I can safely reproduce the images and not use the original."

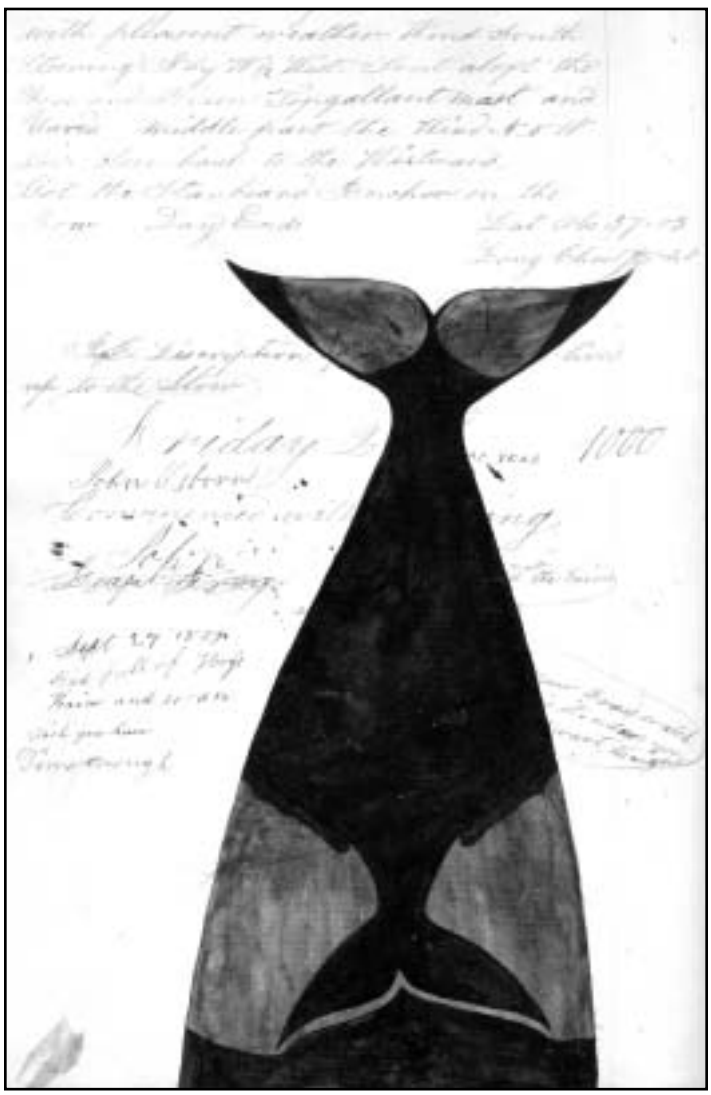
The Society has drawings from the logbooks that once belonged to the whaling ship *Charles W. Morgan.* Though the ship itself may reside in Mystic, Conn., nevertheless its history is deeply tied to this Island. "Most of the crew on her maiden voyage were Vineyarders," Mrs. Bouck said. Many of the drawings have never been seen in this century.

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In the Northeast Gallery there is an exhibit called **"Crossroads."** It is a timeline of Vineyard history going back 70 million years. "It is a sample collection of materials and events going from the past to the present," Mrs. Bouck said.

The exhibit is perfect for the youngster trying to comprehend the span of time from the age before recorded history to today's topical present, shown with newspaper clippings. That exhibit was completed on April 16.

Society members had an early view of the **"Illustrious Mates"** and "**Crossroads"** exhibits on Friday, June 13 at a special members-only gathering.



This painting from the logbook of the whaleship **Charles W. Morgan's** *first voyage (1841-1845) was done by First Mate James Coffin Osborn of Edgartown and is part of the "Illustrious Mates — Artwork from Whaling Logbooks" exhibit at the Gangway Gallery.*

Fall New Bedford Trip

By popular request, the Society will again offer a trip to the New Bedford Whaling Museum in late September. The cost of $45 includes transportation to New Bedford, admission to and a guided tour of the Museum, and lunch. Please call the Society in early September for details and to make a reservation.

Lighthouse Wedding Schedule Maestro: Volunteer Rudy Kuser

R.V. Rudy Kuser is not an authority on weddings or lighthouses. Yet, he is an important asset in helping the Martha's Vineyard Historical Society on such matters. Rudy is a volunteer and for three years he has coordinated the weddings that take place at the Society's three lighthouses. Last year Rudy scheduled 35 weddings. He talked to brides, wrote a log of the dates and times and kept the events from overlapping; one wedding at a time. His efforts are greatly appreciated and the Society is in need of more people like him.

"Rudy is a gem," says Craig Dripps, chairman of the lighthouse restoration committee. "Monies raised from the fees collected for these weddings help maintain these important buildings. Each summer we raise thousands of dollars. It all matters and Rudy makes it happen."

Rudy, 72, lives in Edgartown. For 28 years he worked for the New Jersey Division of Taxation and when he



retired on the Vineyard, he says he wanted to be involved with people and a good organization. He now dedicates some of his free time to the Society and he has the weddings to show for it.

In the first of his five years with the Society he volunteered his hours at the weekend desk. He answered questions and helped attend Society needs. "I handled the museum shop on Saturdays. I sat behind the desk, answered questions and sold trinkets," he says.

For the last three years, Rudy has been on the phone and on the Internet coordinating weddings at the Gay Head lighthouse in Aquinnah, the East Chop lighthouse in Oak Bluffs and the Edgartown Lighthouse.

"Gay Head is the most popular. It is big, there is a lot of open space and lots of room," Rudy says. Last year there were 17 weddings at the Gay Head lighthouse; 11 at the East Chop light and 7 at Edgartown.

Anyone planning a wedding ceremony at an Island lighthouse talks to Rudy. He is the scheduling maestro. Many of the referrals come through web pages on the Internet, not just the Historical Society's webpage. Contact him at rvmvhs@aol.com.

Couples seeking matrimony come from all over the country. "It is interesting. I get calls from Hawaii. Hawaii is one of the most popular wedding places and they come here," Rudy says. "They come from California, Texas, Mississippi, you name it. I am taking calls for 2004 already."

Rudy enjoys volunteering for this kind of work. "I enjoy the people. When they are getting married, they are happy."

The Society is in need of more like Rudy. If you have something to offer or are looking for an opportunity to connect with people, consider volunteering.

Wish List

The following items would be most useful and appreciated:

- A volunteer: an experienced handyman to help with routine maintenance
- A large format scanner and printer for the curatorial department $1000
- A computer and printer for the library $1000
- High speed internet access for the library $700
- Mylar sleeves for photo storage and archival boxes $500
- A new dehumidifier $400