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Cover image: YOUNG CAROL MAYO NICKERSON AT THE WHEEL OF THE ARAWAK IN 1896. Behind Carol Mayo Nickerson are her parents, Henry Crosby Nickerson and Dora Mayo Nickerson. (Photograph used with permission of Susan Ryder Hamar, the granddaughter of Carol Mayo Nickerson.)

Acknowledgments

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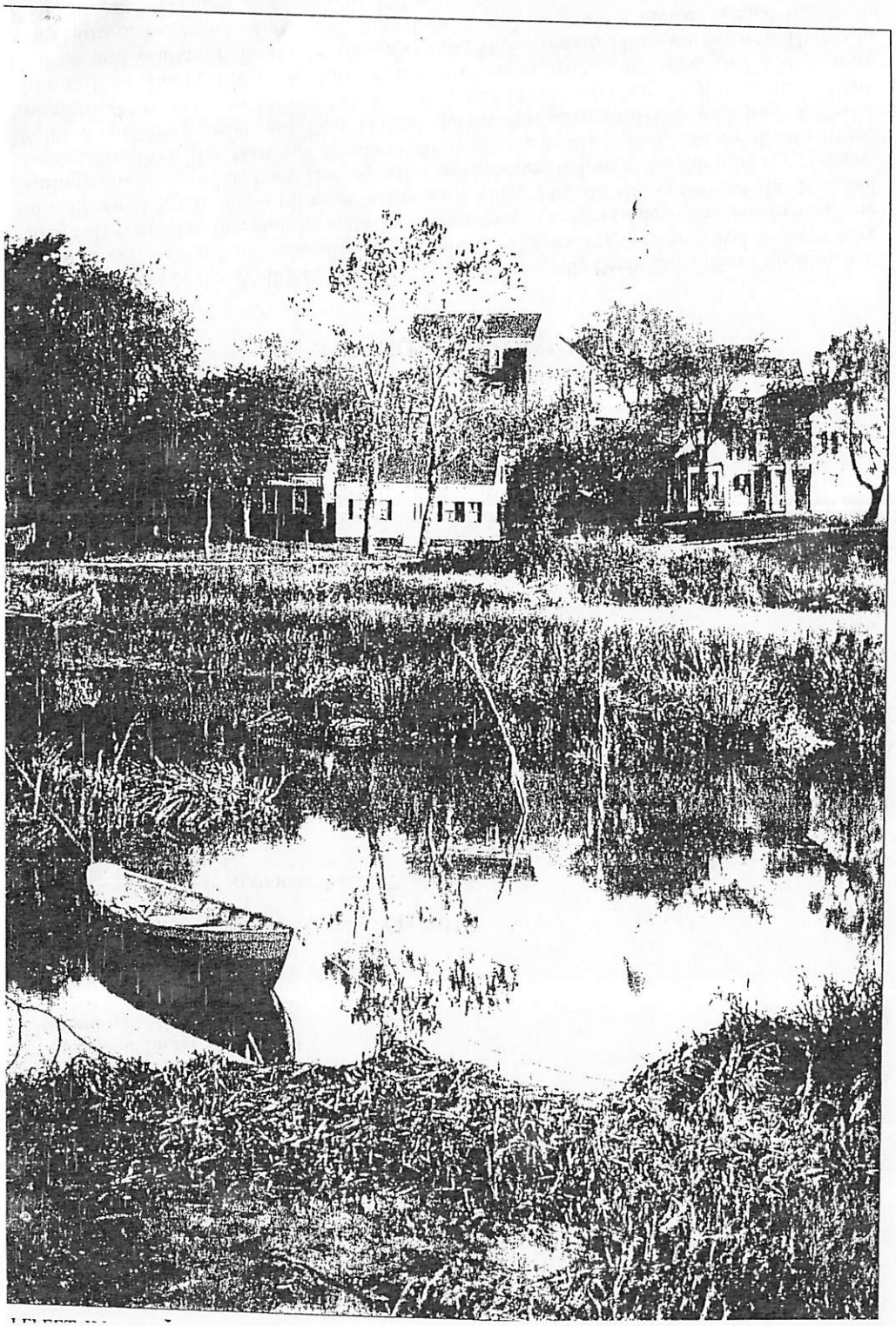

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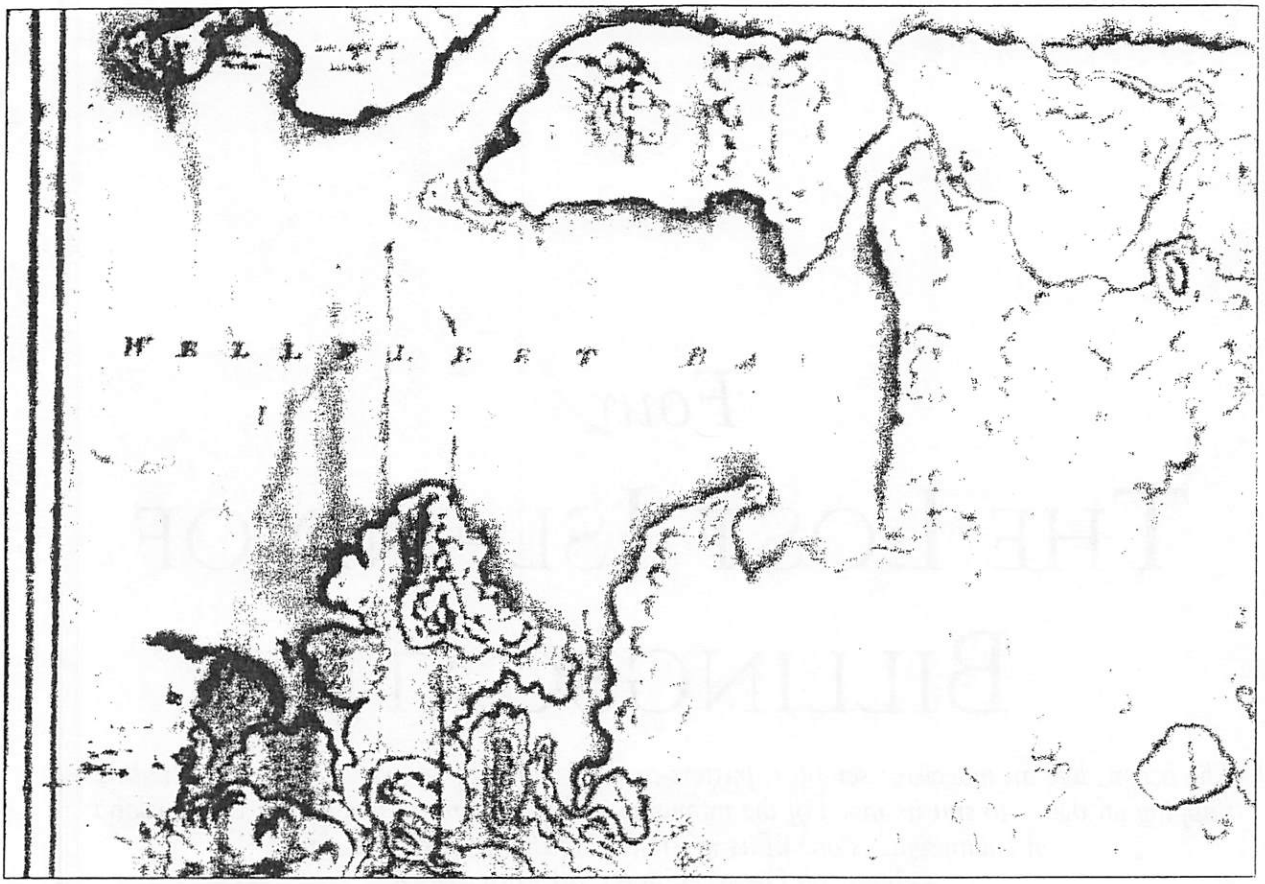
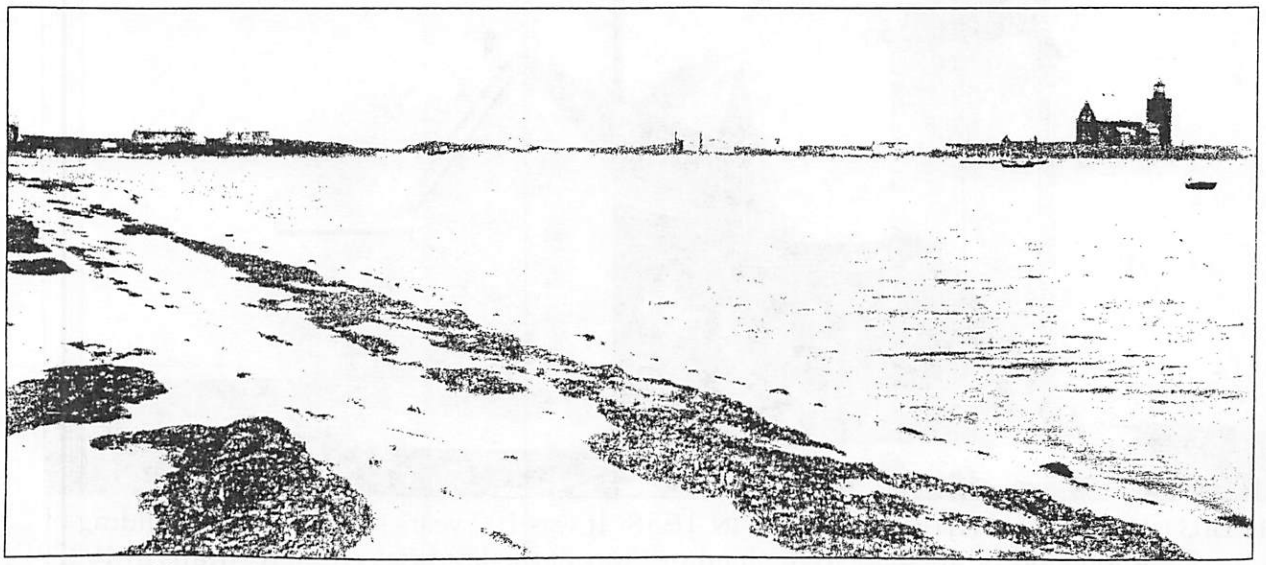
WELLFLEET
A CAPE COD VILLAGE

Daniel Lombardo



A MAP OF WELLFLEET HARBOR, 1831. The top of this map shows the western end of Wellfleet Harbor, with Billingsgate Island, Great Island, and Griffins Island. In December 1620, as the Pilgrims explored Cape Cod Bay in their shallop, William Bradford spotted Billingsgate Island. He described it as "a tongue of land, being flat, off from the shore, with a sandy point." Mayflower passenger Constance Hopkins and her husband Nicholas Snow were the first-known European owners of the island, possessing it in the 1640s. (N.S.)

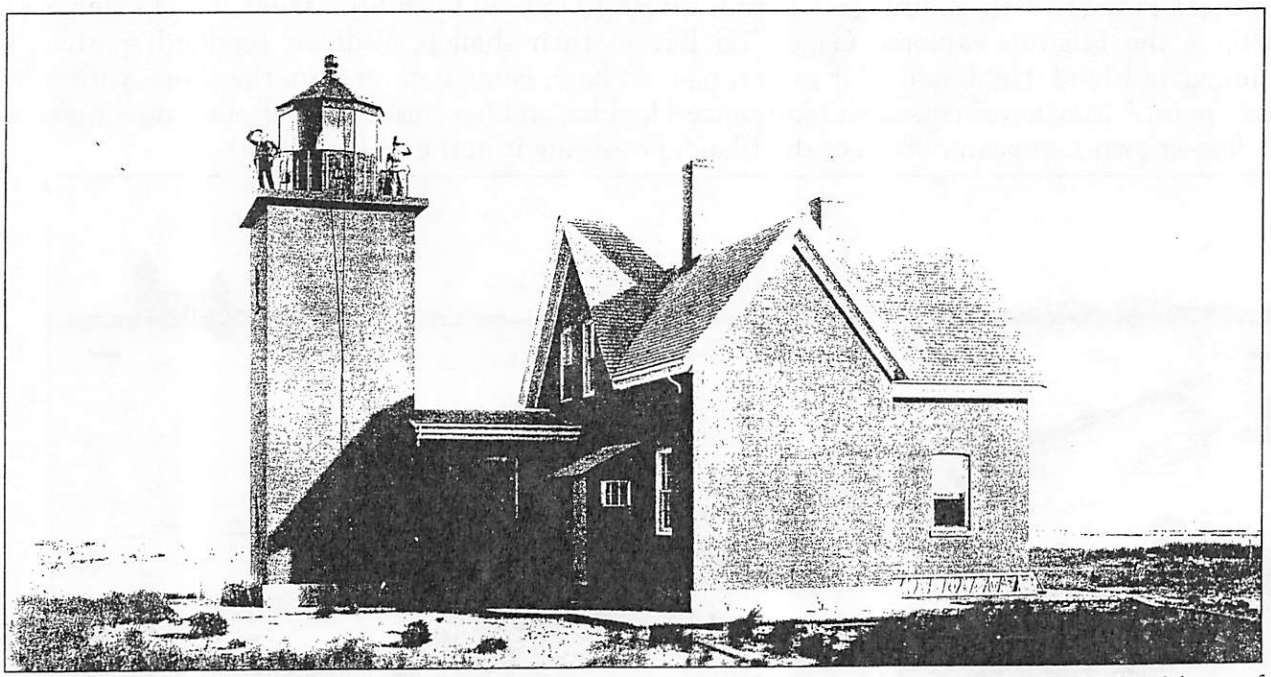


THE LOST VILLAGE ON BILLINGSGATE. In its earliest recorded years, Native Americans fished from the island. In 1822, the first lighthouse was built here, only the third one on Cape Cod, preceded by one in Truro and one in Provincetown. There were nearly 30 homes on Billingsgate Island; however, the families' security was threatened early on. The battered lighthouse was repaired in 1854, but a gale that winter carried away much of it. A new lighthouse was completed away from the eroding shore in 1858.

Four

THE LOST ISLAND OF BILLINGSGATE

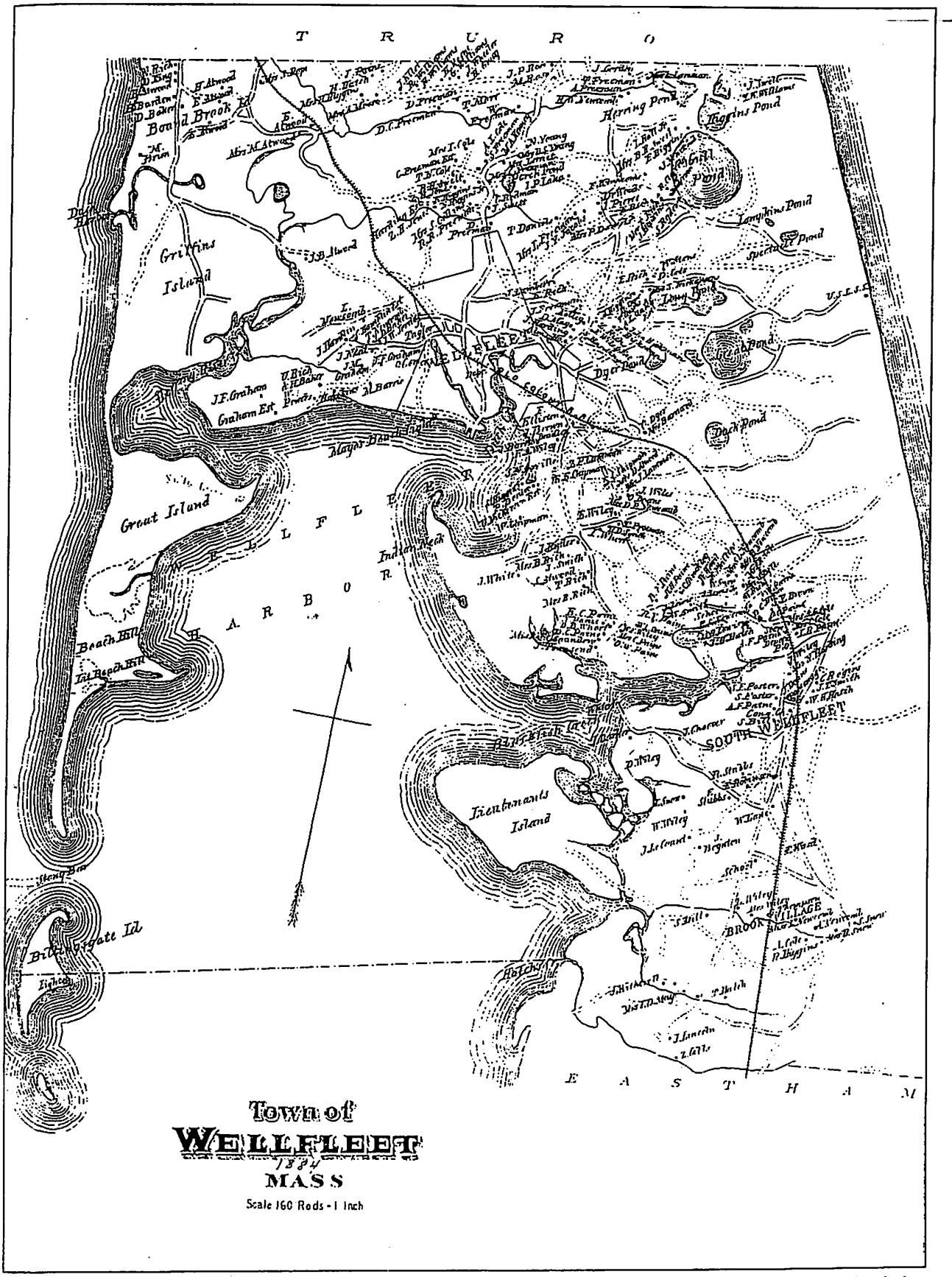
The ocean, like an indecisive sculptor, putters around with Cape Cod, chipping off here and slapping on there, to suit its mood of the moment; and the recent disappearance of the island of Billingsgate is one of its most striking changes in the design.
—*Jeremiah Digges*, Cape Cod Pilot, *1937*



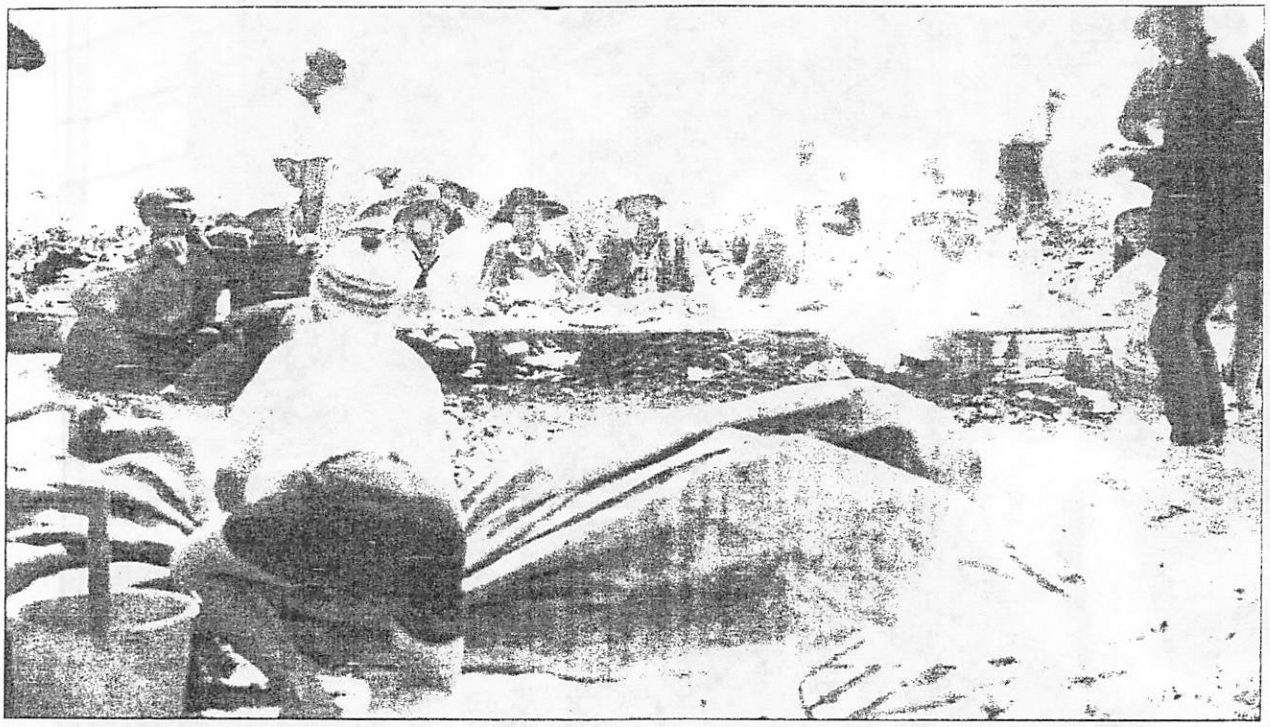
THE BILLINGSGATE LIGHTHOUSE, BUILT IN 1858. It was 100 years from the 1822 building of the first lighthouse on Billingsgate to the hauling away of the last bricks from the ruins in 1922. Generations had lived on the island, built homes, a school, wharves, and made their living from the rich sea. But the sea swallowed Billingsgate, and nothing is left but the legends of its lighthouse keepers and the ghosts, from the first Native Americans to the last Finn to live there.



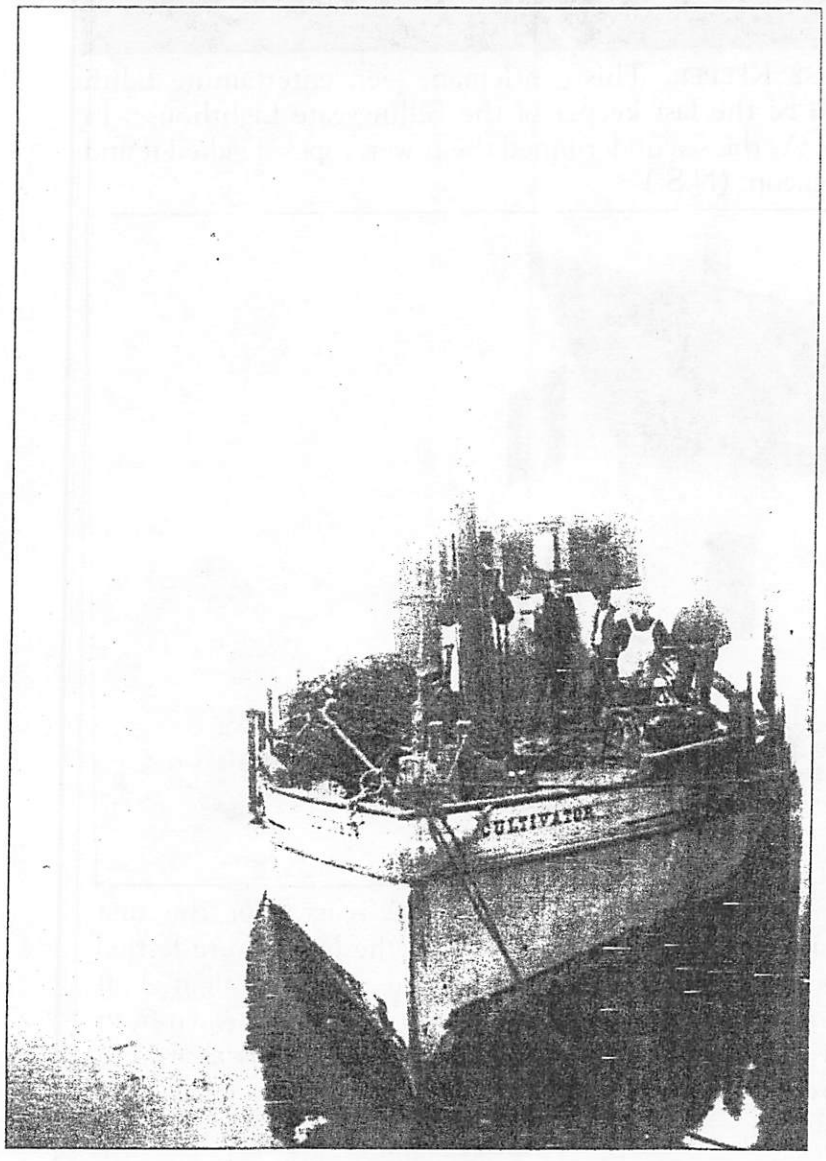
A POSTCARD OF BILLINGSGATE LIGHT. On December 21, 1874, lighthouse keeper Herman Dill wrote in his log, "We have had quite a heavy blow and a very high tide, the highest for a number of years. [The sea] broke through at the north end of the island, filling the middle of the island full, running up to the south corner of the foundation on which stands the lighthouse, carrying away the walk which leads to the wharf. I could stand on the south corner and jump into four feet of water." On February 7, 1875, he wrote, "it has been very Cold here for the Last Month and the most ice that I ever see. . . We are almost buried up in it. No salt water to be seen from the Island I have not Seen a Living man for over a month no prospect for the Better. I do get the Blues some times . . . I Can Not Move in either Direction for the ice is 15 feet high in some places." On November 17, 1875, he wrote, "i do not know but the Island will All wash away." His last entry was made on March 26, 1876: "the very worst storm for the winter was Last Night." Herman Dill was found dead, afloat in the lighthouse dory the following day.



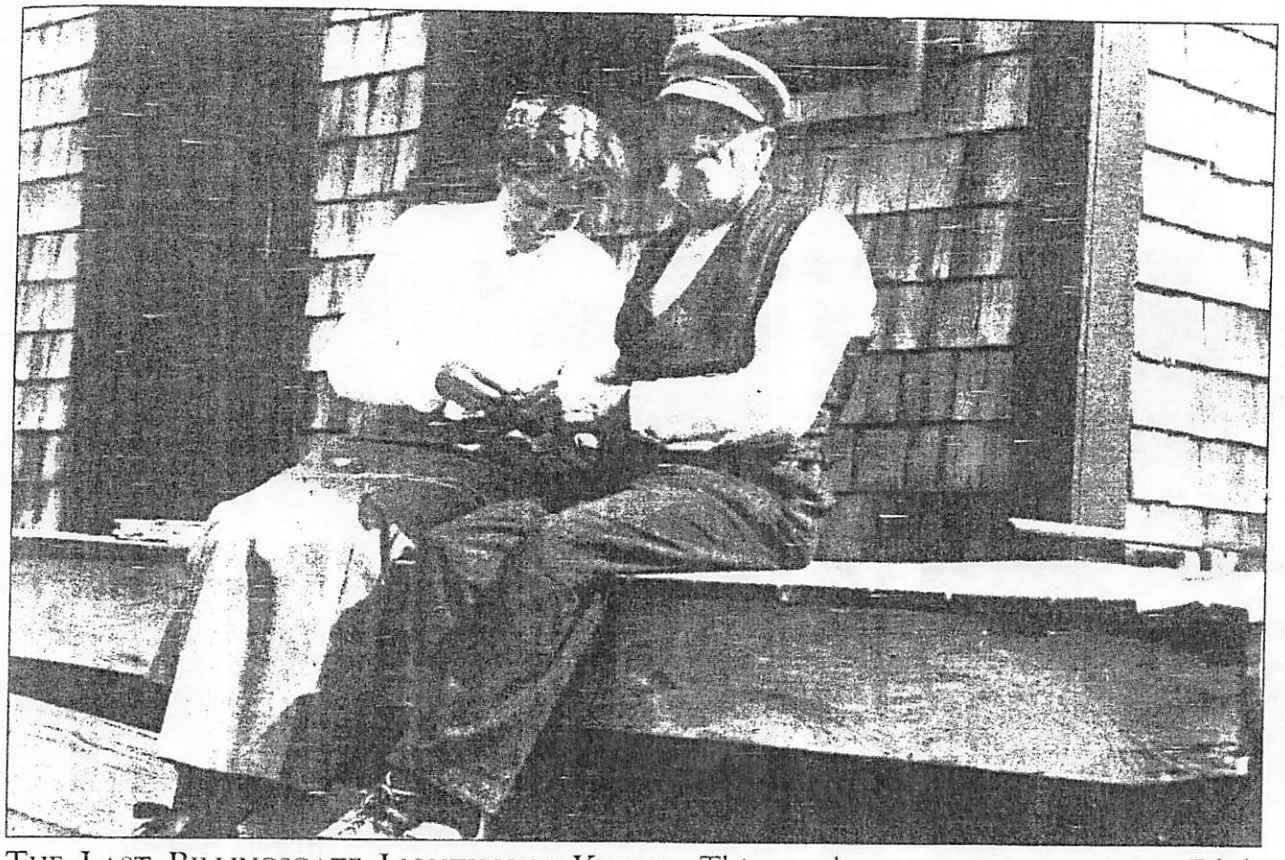
A MAP OF THE TOWN OF WELLFLEET, 1884. Billingsgate Island and its lighthouse marked the southwest perimeter of Wellfleet Harbor. An 1880s keeper's log records "Eighteen whales shot to-day," and "hundreds of seals nearby." In a two-year period, 14 diggers at the island reaped 35 barrels of clams a day.



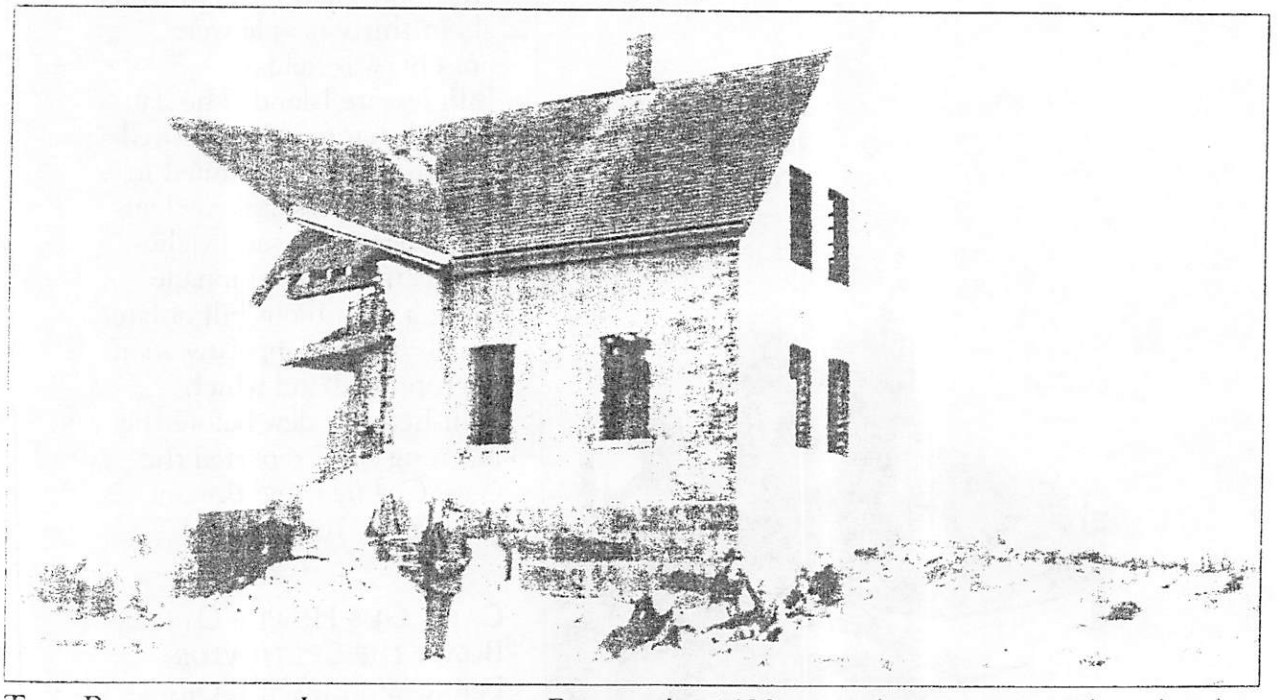
Billingsgate Island, c. 1915. "By invitation of Mr. Walter S. Baker of Concord, N.H., who is summering at the Morning Glory, a very enjoyable clam-bake, at which about thirty people were present, was held at Billingsgate Island. The day was all that could be desired, and all the people smiled in their happiness. Baked clams and green corn, sandwiches, pastry, fruit and lemonade made a sumptuous bill of fare, which healthy appetites soon appropriated and which vanished like dew before the morning sun," reported the *Cape Cod Item and Bee* on August 22, 1899. (N.S.)



Capt. Gus Howe's Oyster Boat, the *Cultivator*. Before World War I, Gus Howe used his oyster boat to take parties out for excursions to Billingsgate. In 1897, Dr. Maurice Richardson, a Boston surgeon, bought part of the island for a summer place and sportsmen's club. (N.S.)



THE LAST BILLINGSGATE LIGHTHOUSE KEEPER. This gentleman, seen entertaining Edith Thatcher of South Orleans, could well be the last keeper of the Billingsgate Lighthouse. In 1910, the lighthouse was uninhabitable. As the sea undermined the tower, ropes steadied it and men climbed to remove the lens and beacon. (N.S.)



THE BILLINGSGATE LIGHTHOUSE IN RUINS. In 1922, exactly 100 years after the first Billingsgate Lighthouse was built, the last lighthouse was in ruins and the bricks were ferried from the island. Several of the Billingsgate houses and oyster sheds were eventually floated off the remains of the island and became noted landmarks in other parts of Wellfleet. Down from about 50 acres to barely 5, the island was becoming a ghost town. Along with houses that were carried across the bay went tales of mysterious lights and witches.



A BILLINGSGATE CLAMBAKE. The *Cultivator* can be seen on the shore after delivering a clambake party to the island. In *I Remember Cape Cod*, E.G. Janes wrote of the Cape Cod Clam Chowder Club, which took the *Cultivator* out to the island with a "great heap of baggage and provender." A clam pit was dug on the beach and lined "with rocks from the dilapidated jetty and the foundation stones of tumble down homes." The meal of baked clams and quahog chowder ended with ice-cold soda, or tonic, and watermelon. "For the younger element, it was time to explore the ruins of the old houses, or to climb the iron framework of Billingsgate Light tower, to hunt for shells across the flats . . . before it was time to pack up the baggage and board the *Cultivator* for the sail home across the sunset-tinted waters of the bay." (N.S.)