

## Historical Notes and Excerpts II

One of many documents containing miscellaneous notes from readings on the history of the Vineyard.  
These were compiled over a six-year period beginning in 2011.

Devens, S. A. 1838. Sketches of Martha's Vineyard and Other Reminiscences of Travel at Home, etc. by an Inexperienced Clergyman. James Monroe & Co., Boston.

Plain

the adjacent country. This range of hills is denominated the back-bone of the island. There is a plain in the southern part, upon which Edgartown is situated, eight miles in length and five or six in breadth. Various roads intersect it, running in all directions ; but the beauty of the plain consists in this, that on horseback, or with any vehicle, you may strike from the beaten track and make a course for yourself wherever you please upon a firm foundation of smooth, closely-matted grass-ground. On this plain it is a delightful ride of three miles from Edgartown to the South Shore where the full swell of the sea comes in with its mountain-waves. Indeed, when

The beach is continually changing. One day you will see it a smooth and gentle slope to the water's edge ; the next thrown up into a perpendicular bank several feet in height. Within a century one half a mile of the shore has been carried away. The noise of the surf is heard for miles, and in Edgartown it so fills, literally *fills* the air at times that you may easily imagine the waters of the great deep have burst their barriers, and are approaching the town to overwhelm it in their terrible wrath. Along the shore

CHappy

rode hastily home.—In the neighborhood of E. there is an elevation of land of no more than 50 feet, from which is a fine view of the town ; the harbor with its shipping ; the sweeping course of Chappquiddick island ; the plain spotted with sheep ; several cottage-houses in the distance ; the oak-forests in the interior ; the blue waters stretching along the horizon till lost from the eye by the high land on the North and West.

The harbor of E. is almost entirely protected from winds and is one of the best in the world. A Nothwester<sup>g. E.</sup> drove in something like an hundred sail a few weeks since. Though the wind blew a hurricane, and every thing on land shook as with the palsy, the surface of the bay was but little agitated and the vessels lay as tranquil as sea-birds in a calm. Next day the weather changed, and the scene I can never forget. The wind coming from the opposite quarter, the clouds passed off and the sun came down upon the waters bright and beautiful. The craft, small and great, uplifted their silver sails, and with a good breeze made out to sea in almost regular succession. For an hour or two they might be counted a few hundred rods apart, cleaving the deep blue waves with their dashing prows. At length they broke from the line and dispersed in all directions upon the boundless ocean.

The harbor is so much superior to that of Nantucket, that the whale-ships belonging to the latter are obliged to resort to it to prepare for their voyages, and, I believe, to unlade when they return. —

Soils    Small oak

between the islands. The soil of the island is in many parts fertile, producing good crops of Indian corn, rye, potatoes, &c. more than enough for home consumption. Some of the grass land is as good as it is upon the continent. There are some fine orchards and different kinds of berries are plentiful. Much of the island is covered with a growth of small oak. At Gayhead, the western extremity of the island, are some objects of no little curiosity. This is the territory of the Indians, of whom there yet remain several hundred. The clay banks or cliffs at

world. Although G. is twenty miles from E. and it is necessary in going thither to take down and put up, some thirty pairs of bars, it will well repay the perseverance of the visitor. Here he will see the is but little over eighty miles. There are two routes. You may go to N. Bedford and thence take the Nantucket Steamboat, which touches at Holmes' Hole—or to Falmouth through Plymouth and Sandwich, thence in the mail boat to the same point. The distance from N. Bedford to Holmes' From Falmouth to the Vineyard it is common to sail in an hour or a little over, and from N. Bedford to Edgartown, not uncommon to sail in three hours and a half. The packets, though not large, are first

The Vineyard is a paradise for sportsmen,abounding in all sorts of fish and wild-fowl. Forty species of the latter might be enumerated without comprehending near all. Domestic animals of all sorts, especially sheep, are raised upon the island. In 1807 there were about fifteen thousand. There has been some diminution since, and the exact number I cannot state. Nantucket is somewhat indebted to the Vineyard for its meat as well as vegetable market. The roads on the island are good or bad according to the nature of the soil. The road to the south

agreeable ride. Some parts of the Vineyard are covered with shells to the depth of three feet. They are mostly the scallop and quahaug. In Edgartown there is an acre and a half covered to this depth. These are, unquestionably, spots where the Aborigines had their abode. Their remains and implements are frequently exhumated in different parts of the Island.

en up. I am informed that eighty captains of whaling ships belong to Edgartown. They sail mostly from N. Bedford and are esteemed the most skillful and trust-worthy that can be found. It has been re-  
ilies put upon the table three times a day. The inhabitants are remarkable for their kind-heartedness; and, though a certain class are said to be grossly ignorant, the standard of intelligence is much higher than in the inland towns of our State. The propor-

two more observations. In Winter the winds are boisterous. From whatever quarter they blow they have an almost unimpeded sweep across the Island. In Spring and Summer fogs are frequent but not injurious to health. The suddenness with which, however dense, they are burnt up by the morning sun in Summer, is truly astonishing. It is almost a fairy scene. During the most severe and fleecy winters upon the main snow falls but very seldom, and even *poor* sleighing is a rare phenomenon. Last Winter there was not snow enough on the ground for sleighing until March, and then only for a few days. In mid-winter the Island is mostly encircled with ice. For some days all communication with the main is cut off. Last winter the Packets were obliged to lie by for four weeks; the mail-boat however was detained but a week. The climate is

Jury in the space of five years. Of course there is little or nothing for lawyers to feed upon. Knitting was a very general occupation some thirty years since. We are informed by Dr. Freeman,\* that 15,000 pairs of stockings,—3,000 mittens, and 600 wigs for seamen were knit annually. It is far from

THE Vineyard is set off into three townships, Chilmark, Tisbury, and Edgartown. Gayhead, which contains the best land on the Island, is comprised within the limits of Chilmark. It is, as I have before observed, in possession of the Indians. Some of it is cultivated by them, but the larger part is used for pasturage. As you ride over its uneven surface, now to the summit of a rugged knoll, now down the precipitous sides of a deep hollow, again along the margin of an extended, irregular pond, it gives an aspect of life to the bald and desolate scenery to catch a view here and there of the herds of

scrub oak

grazing cattle. One half the inhabitants of the Island are dispersed over the townships of Chilmark and Tisbury. Much of these townships is covered with shrub-oak. That portion which is cleared is good for pasturage or tillage. The northern and western parts swell into hills, on whose summits rise granite rocks of peculiar shape and appearance. At a distance it is easy to mistake them for houses and barns. Some are hollowed at the top, and, if in the neighborhood of houses, are turned to good account by being converted into watering troughs. The goat race, like the Indian, is fast disappearing before the tide of civilization. Among the few that are

One may readily determine the great difference between the night air along the shore and inland by taking a ride of a few miles from Edgartown — say as far as Tisbury. In Tisbury and Chilmark, as soon as the sun has set, the dank vapours rise and the chill dews fall. Early in Autumn a coat is needed, and thin ice makes in the pools and ponds. While in Edgartown the evenings are mild, clear, and summer-like. However in all parts of the Island about the Island. Credible men say that the hystericks prevail more or less in those families living along the Southern shore. The air is saturated with when it was entered by Mayhew. As it seems capable of supporting scarcely a greater number of white inhabitants, who occupy much less space than savages, it may be asked, whence did so many of these children of nature derive their subsistence? From the account that has been given of Martha's Vineyard, it will be easy to answer this question. The truth is that its harbors, coves, lagunes, and ponds afford an inexhaustible supply of food. They could obtain the shell fish, which lie in such parts of the coast which resemble them: they appear barren to those who think that no country is fruitful, where the fields are not green; but to an Indian they were the most fertile parts of America. That Martha's Vineyard then was capable of sustain-

Uses Freeman's account of the Indians. 1807 -- 240 Indians

**“ Number of Indians in Duke's County at five different periods: in 1642, 3000; 1674, 1500; 1698, 1000; 1720, 300; 1764, 313.**

attention or interest curiosity. Beginning east the first collection is found at Chappaquiddick. On this Island they have a tract of land reserved to them, containing about eight hundred acres. They are much intermixed with white and negro blood, very few of them being pure Indians ; and they have been improved in their habits and industry by the intermixture. Several of them live in framed houses, are good farmers, and are tolerably neat in their persons and habitations. The old men only are farmers, and are assisted by the women, who sow and hoe the corn : the young men are seamen. Their lands are not enclosed ; but their cattle are kept with a tedder. Their numbers which are probably increasing, are sixty-five, of whom nine are strangers, intermarried with them. The framed houses are ten ; the wigwams two.

“ Near Sangekantacket, adjoining the Lagune, at a place called Farm Neck, there was formerly a large town of Indians ; and twenty persons of a mixed race still remain, who live in six houses, are divided into six families, and retain near two hundred acres of land.

“ At West Chop in Tisbury, there is one Indian family, consisting of five persons,

#### Gayhead description

“ In the north-west part of Tisbury there is a tract of land, called Christiantown, assigned to the Indians, who are placed under guardians. They consist of nine families and thirty-two souls, of whom one male and six females are pure ; the rest are mixed, chiefly with whites.

“ The great body of the Indians is at Gayhead. They have here a tract of excellent land, containing three thousand acres, reserved to them. It is destitute of trees ; but there are many swamps, some of which afford peat, and others, springs of good water. The land is broken into hills ; and there are no roads. The Indians have twenty-six framed houses and seven wigwams. The framed houses are nothing better than mean huts ; some of them have two apartments ; but the greatest part of them, not more than one. There are three barns, and two meeting-houses, which are small buildings not more than twenty feet square. The number of families is thirty four ; and of souls one hundred and forty two : beside whom about a hundred Indians are absent from Gayhead ; some of whom are children put out to service in English families ; and others whale-men ; making the whole number of proprietors, about two hundred and forty. Ev-

No sheep. Mixed race has cows

support of their poor. The Indians raise very little corn, but have pretty good gardens. They annually sell a hundred or two hundred bushels of cranberries, which grow in great plenty in their cranberry bogs. The rest of their subsistence is derived from fishing; and from the sale of clay, which they dispose of on the spot for three dollars, and when they carry it to market, for five dollars a ton. Small as their numbers are, they have two members of one of the Christian Religions; the other Indian. Beside the houses at Gayhead, there is one Indian house and three wigwams at Chilmark; all the inhabitants of which, except a woman living in one of the wigwams, have rights at Gayhead, and are included in their number. The Indians in this part of the island, are generally unchaste, intemperate, without forethought, and many of them dishonest. They are however more industrious, and neater in their persons and houses than is common for Indians." Yours.

Freeman has section dealing with King Phillips war and fact that MV Indians pledged allegiance to England not the Indians on the mainland.

Skunks became a real nuisance – bounty put on them

**that a bounty of 25 cents was offered for every one that should be despatched to that 'bourne whence no traveller returns.' They disappeared rapidly and became so rare and seldom troublesome that some were half ready to lament their loss, and almost wished their old and misused friends back**

Norton, H.F. 1923. History of Martha's Vineyard. Henry Franklin Norton and Robert Emmett Pyne, Publishers.

Edgartown on the east, named for Edgar, son of James II, who bore the title of Duke of Cambridge; Oak Bluffs on the north location and oak trees; Tisbury for the Mayhew Parish in England; later the village post-office was named Vineyard Haven location; West Tisbury; Chilmark, for the English Parish of Governor Mayhew's wife, and Gay Head on the west, named for different colored clay.

About five years later, in 1607, Captain Martin Pring, with a more courageous company than Gosnold's, anchored in what is now Harbor on Whit Sunday and called it Whitsun Bay. He built a stockade on Chappaquiddick Bluffs which he called Mount A

January 11, 1651, Thomas Mayhew, Jr., established the first school on Martha's Vineyard to teach the native children and a few Indian men who were willing to learn. He hired Peter Folger to become the first teacher. [Later grandfather of Ben Franklin]

He spent his last week with his Indian converts. While at what is now Farm Neck the Sachem of Sanchakantackett gave him a feast. After the dinner Mayhew praised the good split eels for which that neighborhood is famous. The Sachem said: "Mr. Mayhew, I have a black snake from big swamp; no venison, him my best dog me kill for you." Whether or not young Mayhew enjoyed the feast is not known to the reader. In any event it showed that the Indian thought a great deal of him and the best dog was none too good for him. Mayhew's last meeting with the Indians before he sailed was held at a place about half-way between Edgartown and West Tisbury. "The Place on the Wayside." Here all the Indian converts met him, about fifteen hundred in number. [Indians now put stones on the high]



As the writer looks back and sees that old Indian woman, the granddaughter of the last Sachem of Gay Head, and the great-granddaughter of the last Sachem of Chappaquiddick, placing her tribute on that pile of stones, the place becomes Holy Ground. What grand wish than to have a stone placed to his memory two hundred and forty years after by the Indians because of his work and sacrifice? [Monument there – 1901 dedication. Stones removed by souvenir hunters]

#### THE PASSING OF THE RED MAN

To-day the race has become extinct in all the portions of the fair island where young Mayhew dwelt and worked; a few scattered survivors survive about the painted cliffs at Gay Head. Old deacon Simon Johnson, the last full-blooded Indian, is remembered only by the names of the inhabitants. The last wigwam fell into decay on the slopes of Sampson's Hill long ago. They sleep in unknown graves; their names are in no chronicle of their lives can ever be written, but they have left us a stainless memory. A pleasant heritage they have bequeathed to us, sounding names for our hills, ponds and many quiet nooks. [Sampson's Hill Meeting House]

The island was well-wooded, chiefly with oak and pine, sufficient for all building purposes. Sawmills were soon established and homes built.... Another interesting fact is that near the site of these ancient dwellings can be seen old pear and cherry trees, which tradition says were planted soon after these houses were built... There was a saw pit in the neighborhood, to which these great trees, many of which were three feet in diameter, were hauled by oxen and sawed into convenient dimensions by hand, one man in the pit and another above.... Foundation and cellar walls were of old field stone; one hardly, if ever, finds a stone that has been split by drill or wedge... The lime used to make the mortar was as of the very best quality, made by burning oyster, clam, and other shells found along the shores.... The old wide boards were called "Bayboards" because they came from Buzzards Bay.

These early homes were lighted before 1700 by the light of the fireplace and burning of large pine knots of the fat pitch pine which was here in abundance. All the settlers kept sheep and oxen, and the tallow from these animals was made into candles by hand and later by molds. Later the tallow candles were abandoned for sperm candles made from oil from the largest sperm candle factory in America was at Edgartown. Still later the sperm candle was given up for the sperm oil lamp.

It was for their own good to stand neutral because of their exposed position; but they were willing to send all their men to fight for the British in the Revolutionary War. The British were to march on to Washington, for there was not a battle of the whole war from Bunker Hill to the surrender of Cornwallis at Yorktown in which they did not take part and do his duty. One of the leading citizens of the time expressed the whole matter as follows: "The British can give you good prices for your sheep, cattle and provisions. You can take this money and help our army in many ways. If you refuse to do this, they will take everything as they can land anywhere, anytime, and you haven't any way to protect yourselves." This was said at a town meeting where a man was called a traitor, and a vote was passed to hang him. He looked up with a smile and said: "Here I am, boys. You will find the truth sometime." They let the matter drop. Later the Vineyard openly declared herself for the cause of liberty.

September 10, 1778, General Grey in command of a transport of eighty-two sails and ten thousand British troops made a raid on the island carrying off all the sheep, swine, cattle and oxen that could be found.

A very good idea of this period is given in the diary of Colonel Beriah Norton, which reads as follows:

"September 10th. -- Gen. Grey commanding a detachment of his Majesty's army arrived at Martha's Vineyard, when I waited on him on shipboard. Agreed to deliver him 10,000 sheep, 300 head of cattle; the General informed me that payment would be made for the same if they were not resisted. The General then required the stock to be brought to the landing the next day, which was punctually complied with.

"September 11th. - This day the troops landed under the command of Col. Sterling. Said Sterling then informed me that Gen. Grey had directed him to assure me that the whole stock would be paid for if they came down according to the conversation of the evening before. Sterling then informed me that a person must be appointed to appraise the stock before they would take any on shipboard. To which I agreed and we jointly agreed to. I did appoint proper persons to do that business; who were sworn by me to do their duty faithfully by the request of Col. Sterling. The stock was by this time coming down to the landing and was taken on board to the amount of 10,000 sheep and 312 head of cattle.

"September 14th. - Col. Sterling then informed me and other inhabitants of the island that he had a message to deliver to the people. Then he recommended them to meet in a field for there was not room for them in doors, accordingly they met to the amount of several hundred. He informed us that we were to apply to New York for payment for the stock that they had received. I asked the Colonel if we best send a man in the fleet at this time for the payment to which the Colonel replied, we might if we chose but he recommended us to wait a little time before application was made.

"September 15th. -- The fleet sailed for New York."

In the diary, September 12th and 13th are omitted. Those were the days when the British troops were ravaging the island from Head.

A man was sent to New York to receive payment for the stock, but Grey had forgotten that he had ever stopped at Martha's Beriah Norton made two special trips to London for the same purpose, and at one time he was given a hearing in Parliament accomplished in these two trips to England.

When Captain John Smith passed through Vineyard Sound in 1614 he saw: "mighty whales spewing up water like the smoke making the sea about them white and hoary."

Fifty ships were fitted out at Edgartown at one time. In those days the Port of Edgartown was one of the most important on its own custom house and doing thousands of dollars worth of business. Ships from all parts of the world came there for clearance pay the duty on cargoes.

There is hardly a cemetery on the island but what has a stone to the memory of some dear husband, father or son, with the inscription "Sea." The first gravestone on the Vineyard so marked is at Lambert's Cove, with the inscription, "To the memory of Anthony 1769, aged thirty-six years."

Tisbury Town Records March 1862

The following resolution was offered by Jeremiah Pease and adopted unanimously That Henry L Whiteing Esqr of Tisbury of the U. S. Coast Survey service be employed to determine of the bound fifty one rods south from Tashmoo spring and of the bound on the Mill road south of said first bound : Also to determine the course and distance from the last mentioned bound to the bound on Watcha Neck and the course and distance from the bound at the stepping stones to that next the South of Tashmoo spring marking the point where the line crosses the Holmes Hole road

Voted That the expenses attending upon the above resolution be bourn by the Two Towns Equally.

Voted That the chairman of the board of Selectmen of Tisbury Capt N M Jernegan of Edgartown be a committee to lay before the facts necessary for him to determine the lines between the two Towns  
Henry Bradley reported that he had procured the bound stones as instructed at the last meeting

Voted That when we adjourn we adjourn to meet at the store of W" B Mayhew in West Tisbury on the third Monday in March

Voted that the records be approved.

Voted to adjourn

Voted that two additional bound stones be procured and placed as hereafter Ordered

Voted. To adjourn

W B Mayhew Secretary

**MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report. WEST TISBURY. Report Date: 1984**  
**Associated Regional Report: Cape Cod and the Islands**

First Middletown purchases were made from natives in 1669, with one mile square in the northwest set as an Indian reservation. Middletown was incorporated as "Tisbury Townet" in 1671 under New York jurisdiction. "Chickemoo" territory was purchased in 1659, and annexed to Tisbury Manor (later Chilmark) in 1671. These lands were purchased by Tisbury in 1736. Boundary disputes and land rights litigation over Christiantown territories continued through the 18th century. New northeast boundary was established in 1892, with the separation of Vineyard Haven (formerly Tisbury) as "Tisbury," while larger, western territory was renamed West Tisbury.

First European settlement occurred ca. 1666, with 17<sup>th</sup> century home lots and early regional mill focus on the Mill River corridor, with second mill focus on Tiasquam River. In 1670, native lands in the MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town of Tisbury northwest hills were set off as Christiantown reservation, with pre-1680 meetinghouse. Late 17<sup>th</sup> century meetinghouse site was established at South Road burying ground. Dispersed agricultural settlement continued through the 18th century, with separation of Holmes Hole as East Parish Tisbury in 1796. Civic centers shifted south of the meetinghouse, and mid-19th century center village developed along Mill Brook corridor, including Martha's Vineyard Agricultural Society.

At least two major Indian trails may have crossed the West Tisbury area. One trail probably paralleled the Vineyard Sound coastline connecting village and coastal areas in present-day Tisbury and Oak Bluffs with Gay Head area. A southern coastal trail also probably existed extending east/west north of the Tisbury area. This trail may have connected coastal areas in Edgartown and Chappaquiddick Island with the native trail in the South Road area of Chilmark. Interior secondary trails were also probably leading from main coastal trails.

West Tisbury area was originally called by its Algonquian name, Takemmy, led by one of the reportedly named sachems on Martha's Vineyard during this period carbonized corn kernels were found at two sites: the Peterson site in the town of Edgartown, and the Hornblower II site in Gay Head (1969). At the Hornblower II site, carbonized corn kernels were C14 dated to A.D. 1160 + 80 years (Ritchie 1969). This suggests a corn agriculture well within the Late Woodland period. Thus, some form of agriculture may have been present on Martha's Vineyard for some time prior to the Contact period.

Scotchman's Bridge Road may also have been laid out with the original division of land in ca. 1666, as it contains the earliest home lots. West Tisbury had no known white settlement before 1670, when the First Purchase was made. The proprietors of the land opened it for settlement.... The general name for the new settlement was Middletown, derived from its relative position between Great Harbor and Nashowakemuck.

The grist mill built by Benjamin Church of Duxbury by 1669 had possibly been as early as ca. 1651-52 on the Mill River.... The earliest reference to a roadway in West Tisbury is found in 1699 when the Mill Path leading to the Old Mill Brook was laid out. The School House Path was also laid out at the same time as a continuation of the Mill Path to the Chilmark line. Scotchman's Bridge Road was the first highway noted in West Tisbury as early as 1671. Other routes developed during the period include the Holmes Hole Path (ca. 1700), Meeting House Way (ca. 1700), the Back Road (1726), Pow-wow Hill Way (1700), and Lamberts Cove Road (1751).... At least one early grist mill was built on the Tiasquin River during the later Plantation period. In addition, by 1760 or earlier another grist mill was built on the Old Mill River. An older mill is also reported for which no record exists. A later mill was also constructed farther up the Mill River from the shore mill. All mills were apparently grist mills.

The growth in population at Holmes Hole led to the division into two parishes in 1787. The town held a number who engaged in a long struggle at meetings over ministerial taxation and use of the meetinghouse

Sheep raising continued to be an important activity for which fulling and carding mills were erected by 1 David Look (1766-1837). Look's store, and grist and woolen mills gave to the mill village at the confluence of 11 brooks the closest approximation to a mainland mill village of any of the towns in the study unit.

North Road from Chilmark to North Tisbury was officially laid out in 1849, although an earlier road almost certainly existed along this route. Tiah Cove Road loop was laid out south of Edgartown Road.

In 1845 the mariner and Holmes Hole whaling merchant Thomas Bradley purchased the Look woolen mill. There he produced a brand of sateen ("Vineyard Sateen") favored by whalers.

The most significant event of the period was probably the arrival of Dr. Daniel Fisher (1799-1876), the Edgartown oil manufacturer. Believing that wheat could be grown and flour made on the island, Fisher built five large stone dams on Mill Brook for storage reservoirs. At the lowest, the site of Atherly's early mill, he erected in 1860 one of the most complete mills "in the U.S. for grinding wheat and bolting flour," containing every appliance known in these days for perfect milling" (Grinnell). His project to grow wheat, however, did not flower, and he was forced to import all his wheat from Maryland. After Fisher's death in 1876, the mill ground only corn.

The combined Tisbury/West Tisbury had 125 farms in 1865, the same number as Edgartown, but it had more than twice the number of people employed in farming, and it had more than half of the number in the county. The same year, old Tisbury also had over 80% MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report: West Tisbury of all the firewood harvested in the county, ranking fourth in the study unit. The town's 553 tons of English hay also was more than any other town in Dukes County. Though cranberries were not a major crop by study-unit standards, the town's 20 acres made up 60% of the county acreage.

West Tisbury's population probably continued a slow decline. In 1895, the first census year after incorporation, there were 460 year-round inhabitants, of whom 3% were Portuguese. By 1905, this percentage had doubled, while the decline was slight. In 1915, West Tisbury reported 441 residents.

Farming remained West Tisbury's chief occupation. The products of her dairy farms in 1915 made the town the leader in the county for milk, and the third highest product value in the study unit. In vegetable growing, the town also led the county.... West Tisbury's population continued to fluctuate downward: from 441 in 1915 to 260 in 1940.