

## Martha's Vineyard History Notes and Excerpts VI

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.

Wikipedia – MV

It is the 58th largest island in the United States and the third largest on the East Coast of the United States. It is also the largest island not connected to mainland by a bridge or tunnel on the East Coast of the United States.

It is located in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, as a part of Dukes County, which also includes Cuttyhunk, as well as the island of Nomans Land, which is a US Wildlife preserve, and was a US Naval practice bombing range until 1996.

The 2010 census reported a year-round population of 16,535 residents;<sup>[1]</sup> however, the summer population can swell to over 100,000 people. About 56% of the Vineyard's 14,621 homes are seasonally occupied.<sup>[2]</sup>

A study by the Martha's Vineyard Commission found that the cost of living on the island is 60 percent higher than the national average and housing prices are 96 percent higher.<sup>[5]</sup> A study of housing needs by the Commission found that the average weekly wage on Martha's Vineyard was "71 per cent of the state average, the median home price was 54 per cent above the state's and the median rent exceeded the state's by 17 per cent."<sup>[6]</sup>

Mayhew's successor as leader of the community was the Hon. Leavitt Thaxter,<sup>[4]</sup> who married Martha Mayhew, a descendant of Thomas Mayhew, and was an Edgartown educator described by Indian Commissioner John Milton Earle as "a long and steadfast friend to the Indians."<sup>[5]</sup> After living in Northampton, Thaxter, a lawyer,<sup>[6]</sup> returned home to Edgartown, where he took over the school founded by his father, Rev. Joseph Thaxter,<sup>[7][8]</sup> and served in the State House and the Senate, was a member of the Massachusetts Governor's Council and later served as U. S. Customs Collector for Martha's Vineyard.<sup>[9]</sup> Having rechristened his father's Edgartown school Thaxter Academy, Hon. Leavitt Thaxter was granted on Feb. 15, 1845, the sum of \$50-per-year for "the support of William Johnson, an Indian of the Chappaquiddic tribe." By this time, Leavitt Thaxter<sup>[20]</sup> had taken on the role, described in an act passed by the General Court of Massachusetts, as "guardian of the Indians and people of color resident at Chappaquiddic and Indiantown in the County of Dukes County."<sup>[21]</sup> Thaxter Academy, founded by Leavitt Thaxter as first principal in 1825, became known for educating both white and Native American youth.<sup>[22]</sup>

After the Old Colony railroad came to mainland Woods Hole in 1872, summer residences began to develop on the island,

In 1977, distressed over losing their guaranteed seat in the Massachusetts General Court, inhabitants of Martha's Vineyard considered the possibility of secession from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, either to become part of another state (having received offers from both Vermont and Hawai'i), reincorporating as a separate U.S. territory, or as the nation's 51st state. The separatist flag, consisting of a white seagull over an orange disk on a sky-blue background, is still seen on the island today. Although the idea of separation from Massachusetts eventually proved impracticable, it did receive attention in the local, regional and even national media.<sup>[27]</sup>

## **MV Camp Meeting Association**

<http://www.mvcma.org/brief.htm>

The MVCMA grew out of the religious "campmeeting" movement of the 19th century. The idea of holding campmeetings for religious purposes was first introduced by the Presbyterians with Baptists and Methodists taking part in the state of Kentucky, prior to 1820. The practice was soon followed by the Methodists in New England. The early meetings at first were temporary and held at different places each year and usually lasted for about a week. The living conditions were primitive. People slept in tents with straw spread on the ground or on a board floor and a blanket over them. The food was prepared a week in advance. The people brought with them what they needed, and took everything away again when they left. By the middle of the 19th century, the campmeetings became more permanently established and were held in particular locations for a series of years.

In 1835, Jeremiah Pease gathered a group of six men from the Edgartown Methodist Church to inspect a place he had found in a "venerable grove of oaks," located on land which was part of William Butler's sheep pasture, for the purpose of holding a religious campmeeting. The original half-acre site was located in what was then the northern reaches of Edgartown township close to Nantucket sound. The land sloped gently, embracing a fresh water lake and shelving into a white beach. Bordering the grove was the sheep pasture. The site was cleared of underbrush and a driftwood shed erected for the preachers with a stand built onto its front to serve as a pulpit. In front of this was the usual arrangement of a temporary altar, consisting of a railing enclosing a space about 25 feet by 12 feet with benches to be used mainly by the singers during the preaching service, and as a place for penitent sinners to gather. Beyond the altar were backless board benches and beyond them, arranged in a semi-circle, were the society or church tents.

Growth was rapid during those early years. Wesleyan Grove grew to become one of the largest and best-known campmeeting sites in the country. From the nine society tents in 1835, a five-year lease in 1838, 17 tents in 1839, 40 tents in 1842, 64 tents in 1847, an 11-year lease in 1850, 100 tents in 1851, to 200 tents in 1855. By 1860 there were 500 tents of all kinds with 12,000 people attending the Sabbath and in 1868 the number of tents reached 570. At times there were several, and once as many as 36, prayer meetings in progress at the same time.

Until 1855 the campmeeting met for one week to ten days and was exclusively religious in purpose. Between 1855 and 1865 the campmeetings began to change in character. They continued to be religious in nature, but the participants also began to enjoy the benefit of the sea air and social interaction as they revived both mind and body.

Between 1859 and 1864 a new American building type, the "Martha's Vineyard" cottage remarkable in its singularity in appearance and structure, was developed at Wesleyan Grove. The architectural form is unique and must be considered as an invention of local carpenters. There were about 40 cottages in 1864, 250 in 1869 and 500 by 1880. The number of cottages has decreased over the years as some were moved to other Oak Bluffs locations, some were joined together to form larger cottages and some fell into disrepair and were torn down. Today there are approximately 318 cottages remaining.

Topped by a large lighted cross since 1926, which towers above the town of Oak Bluffs, the MVCMA Tabernacle has become a "Beacon to All" across Nantucket sound.

In 1890 the roads of the Campground were dug up and water pipes were laid throughout the grounds and by 1903 flush toilets and cesspools began to replace the existing privies which were condemned in 1911. Prior to the laying of water pipes, there were at least 10 wells and pumps at

convenient points around the grounds. The roads were dug up, once again, in 2000 when most of the Campground was connected to the Oak Bluffs sewer system.

[http://www.nytimes.com/fodors/top/features/travel/destinations/unitedstates/massachusetts/marthasvineyard/fdrs\\_feat\\_617\\_9.html?n=Top%2FFeatures%2FTravel%2FDestinations%2FUnited+States%2FMassachusetts%2FMartha's+Vineyard](http://www.nytimes.com/fodors/top/features/travel/destinations/unitedstates/massachusetts/marthasvineyard/fdrs_feat_617_9.html?n=Top%2FFeatures%2FTravel%2FDestinations%2FUnited+States%2FMassachusetts%2FMartha's+Vineyard)

While many of the Wampanoag tribes on the mainland and Nantucket were eliminated by disease, the Martha's Vineyard tribe managed to avoid complete devastation

Between Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket, Wampanoags numbered about 700 until an unknown epidemic wiped out nearly all the Nantucket tribe. The last surviving Nantucket Wampanoag died in 1855. Wampanoags from the mainland and Cape Cod emigrated to Martha's Vineyard, adding to the numbers somewhat, but by the mid-19th century, only about 40 island tribal members were full-blooded Native Americans. Under the federal controls of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Wampanoags of Martha's Vineyard and the mainland banded together in 1928 to become the loosely organized Wampanoag Nation. This designation allowed for limited self government within tribal lands and was a precursor to eventual full recognition of the tribe. There are currently five bands of Wampanoags in Massachusetts, but only the Martha's Vineyard Aquinnah group has been granted federal and state recognition as a Native American tribe. Status was approved in 1987 after years of petitioning the U.S. Congress.

<http://www.arenastage.org/shows-tickets/sub-text/2009-10-season/stick-fly/hidden-history.shtml>

### **A Darker History**

Emerging as a port for maritime business by the end of the 17th century, Martha's Vineyard also engaged in the slave trade. Recent evidence shows that Africans were actively bought and sold at the Vineyard. The slaves that remained on the island were mostly kept as house servants and farm workers. After the Emancipation Proclamation and the Civil War, many freed slaves moved to Martha's Vineyard to work in fisheries. African-Americans from the rest of Massachusetts soon followed and started businesses to support the growing black population.

<http://www.blackpast.org/?q=aah/inkwell-martha-s-vineyard-1890s>

Oak Bluffs on Martha's Vineyard, part of Massachusetts' Cape Cod Islands, is one of several historic African American summer resort communities along the Atlantic seaboard founded in the 1890s. The "Inkwell" or Town Beach in Oak Bluffs is the name of the popular beach frequented by African Americans beginning in the late nineteenth century. The strand was pejoratively called "The Inkwell" by nearby whites in reference to the skin color of the beach-goers. It is the most famous of beaches across the U.S. to transform this odious nickname into an emblem of pride.

Late eighteenth century Methodist and Baptist revival meetings were significant in bringing early white and some black visitors to Oak Bluffs. The visitors who came sparked the earliest summer resort community growth. Land developers saw money to be made from the religious pilgrims who also arrived to enjoy the secular charms of the Island's bucolic green interior and pristine oceanfront landscape cooled by sea breezes. By the early twentieth century an increasing number of African Americans came to the Island as servants to white families with summer homes.

Although racial discrimination and restrictive covenants persisted on the Island, some of these early black servants became property owners, year-round residents, and small business

entrepreneurs, particularly in Oak Bluffs. Much of the property purchased by these early African American Islanders continues to be owned by their descendants. In the 1920s the African American Islanders began to offer accommodations in their small cottages that attracted black visitors from Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and other Northeastern cities.

Women made up most of the first African American entrepreneurs and played a pivotal role in attracting and accommodating the growing number of black visitors to the Island. Shearer Cottage, founded by Charles and Henrietta Shearer in 1912 as a summer inn, actually began as a laundry operated by Henrietta which opened in 1903. The Cottage is the oldest and most well-known of these establishments that catered specifically to African Americans. Their daughters, granddaughters, and great granddaughters have continued management of the family's guest house into the twenty-first century.

As blacks grew more prosperous during and after World War II, many of them now brought their families to Oak Bluffs. Many of these new vacationers in turn became part-time or permanent residents, augmenting the heretofore small black population. In Oak Bluffs especially middle-class black vacationers rented at affordable prices or purchased cottages for less than \$30,000 from the 1950s through the early 1970s. By 2010 many of these properties were worth fifteen to twenty times their original sale prices, making Oak Bluffs arguably the wealthiest of the black resort communities.

Also by 2010, workers from Brazil and eastern European countries have replaced the African American service class. The small African American leisure community that first evolved in Oak Bluffs has now spread across all of Martha's Vineyard and includes far more people. The community life they now share revolves around social activities anchored by family ties, university affiliations, sorority and fraternity networks, and professional and business relationships. President Barack Obama and his family are perhaps the most famous recent vacationers. They stayed in Oak Bluffs (NO, this is not true) for their summer vacation in 2009, 2010, and 2011.

<http://www.historylecture.org/greatfires.html>





- **The island of Martha's Vineyard was decimated by a major fire in 1883.**