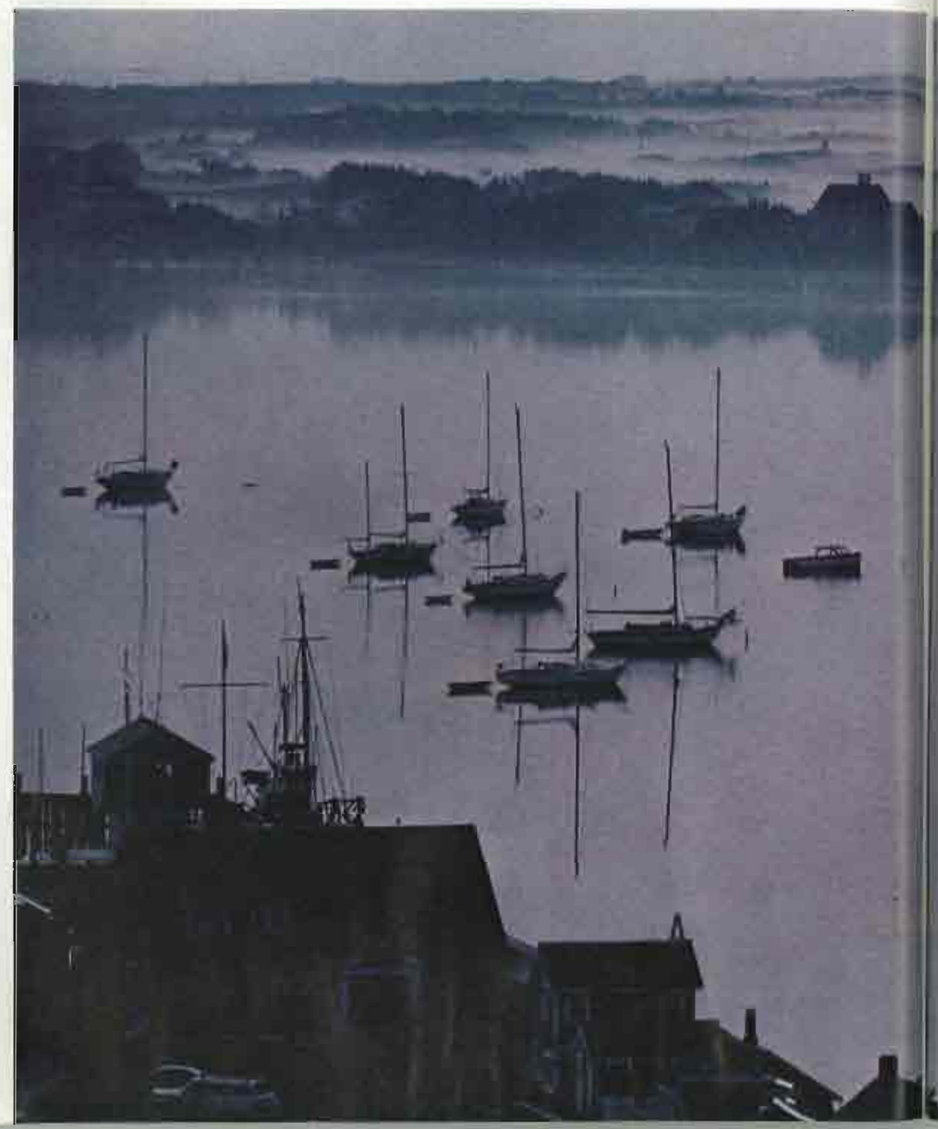
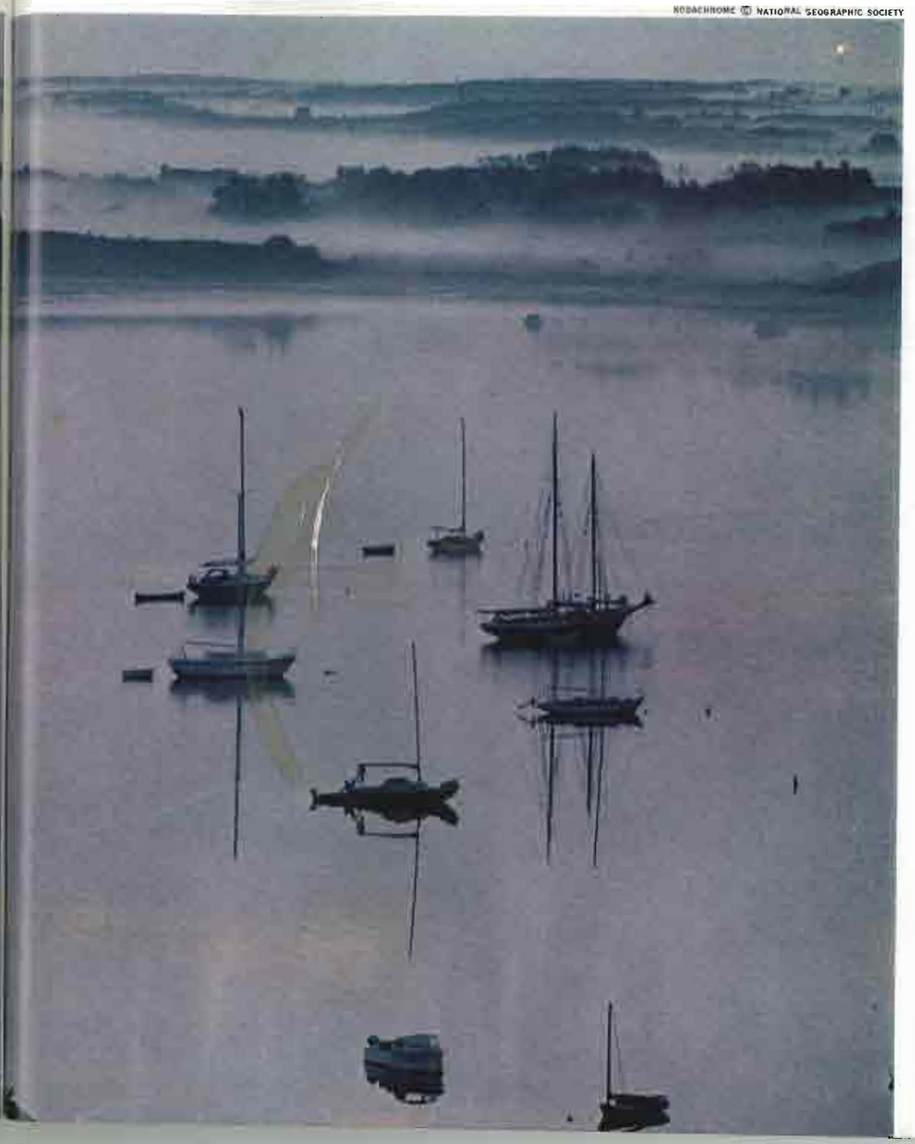
LIFE'S TEMPO ON NANTUCKET

By PETER BENCHLEY *Photographs by JAMES L. STANFIELD*

In the stillness of dawn, yachts rest on mirror-calm Nantucket Harbor. Across the mist-shrouded island, Sankaty Head Light warns mariners of treacherous shoals.





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ON ANY SUMMER DAY you will find some 16,000 people, from almost every state and from many foreign countries, in happy residence on a little island 20 miles off Cape Cod. A remote patch of sand, 12 miles by 6, with a scanty year-round population of 3,900, Nantucket obviously has a secret allure. Other resorts have as good beaches, bathing, and boating. What is it, then, that brings the summer's thousands and turns them into die-hard repeaters?

"When I am here, nowhere else exists," Gill W. Peabody told me. A New York insurance broker whose family owns a house in Siasconset (shortened to 'Sconset by islanders), he has been summering on Nantucket since 1941. We were sitting on the south shore on a foggy afternoon, watching as waves materialized from the mist and crashed onto the beach.

"There's nothing I like better than hearing that the boat had to wait outside the jetties all night or that the airlines haven't been able

to land a plane here for three days—unless, of course, it's me that's trying to get here. It gives me a real feeling of being away, in another country. You can walk the whole way around the island—I did that once when I was a kid—and look out to sea and never see anything but the ocean."

This most prized of Nantucket commodities—a sense of isolation—is what draws the summer visitor. For the Nantucketer it is the heart of the matter. Be he Negro or Portuguese, of English stock or Scottish (the whaling trade brought sailors to Nantucket from all over the world), he guards nothing more jealously than his identity as an islander.

He refers to the mainland as America, and

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if you were born in America you will always be an off-islander to him. A Nantucket student, asked to write a description of Alaska, placed it "in the northwest corner of off-island." Even Martha's Vineyard, Nantucket's neighbor to the west, is regarded as a pseudo-island (maps, page 815).* After all, if you can actually see it from Woods Hole—why, you might as well be in America.

One of the most venerable off-islanders is Mrs. Charles H. Walling, who has lived on Nantucket since 1912. In her nineties, she is still lively, with a pixie sense of humor. She told me she stopped driving a car in 1966 because "I thought it best for the public welfare. Then I stopped riding my bicycle—I used to ride out to 'Sconset for breakfast every Sunday

*In the June 1961 GEOGRAPHIC, William Graves found Martha's Vineyard folk equally proud of their insularity.

—because they told me I oughtn't to fall."

She has a favorite story to illustrate insular pride, about a man who waged a lifelong battle to become an islander.

"He was brought here by his parents when he was three months old," she said, "but whenever he saw his name in the paper, it was always prefaced by the words 'off-islander.' He wasn't about to take that treatment without a fight, so he did a little research into the newspaper editor's family and found just the weapon he needed.

"He saw that the editor's wife had left the island to have her first child. Complications were feared, so she went to a mainland hospital and came back the next week. Well, I tell you—when that editor learned that someone might spill the beans about his son's true place of birth, he never again called my friend an off-islander."

The Nantucketer's insularity has several dimensions. If you were born on the island but choose to make your living on the mainland, you are no better than an off-islander. Rowland Macy, who went away and founded a famous department store, was a target for some gentle ribbing.

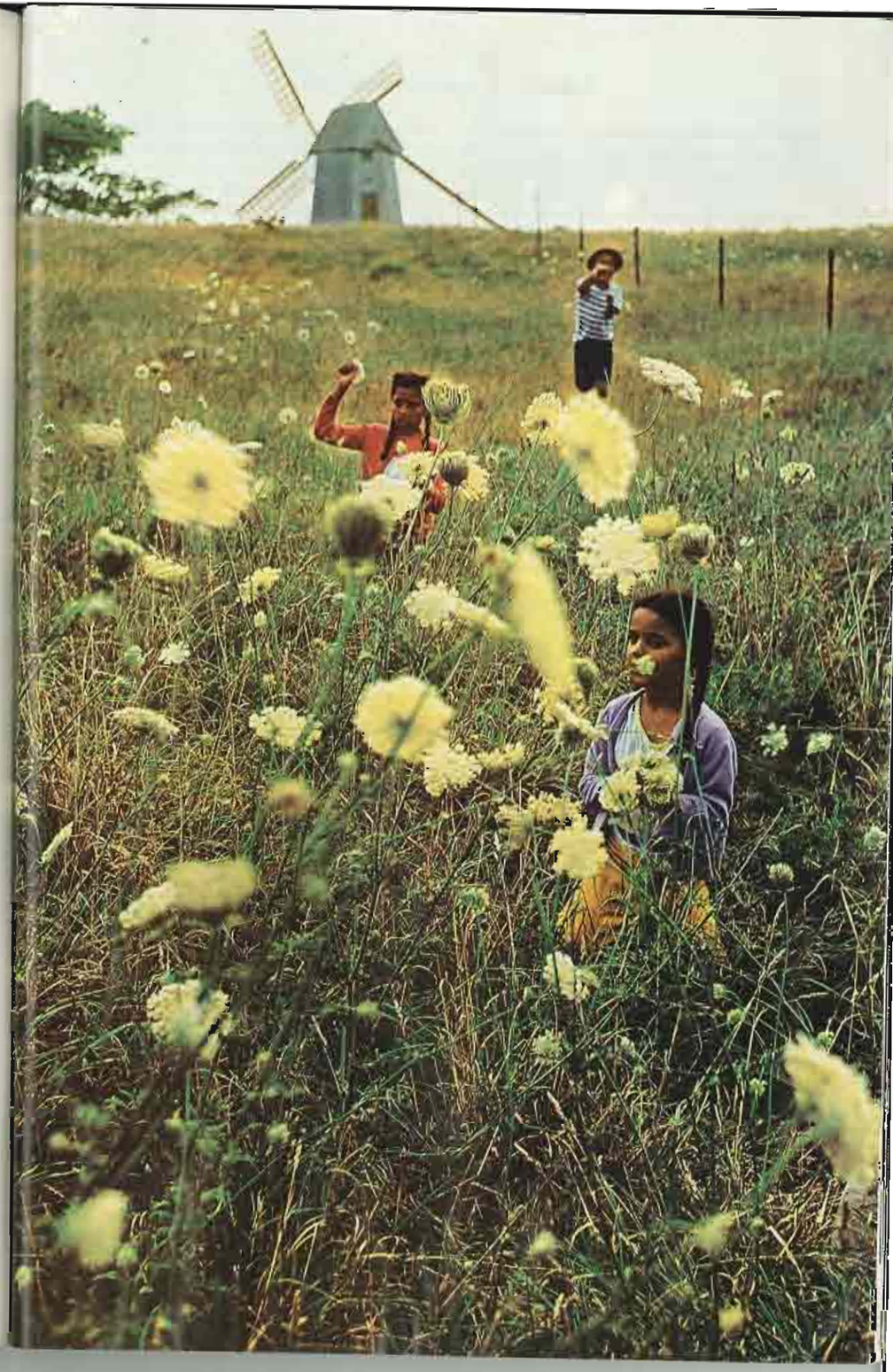
"Rowland just couldn't make it here," a Nantucketer might say. "He went to New York. I think he started a dry-goods business."

Benjamin Franklin's mother, born Abiah Folger on Nantucket, fared better. Though she defected to Boston, where she bore Ben, she is memorialized by a roadside fountain.

Ironically, the summer visitors, seeking to

Savoring salt-spiced air, a vacationist relaxes amid dune grass. Wampanoag Indians, who once inhabited Nantucket, called it "Faraway Land." Today, more than ever, the island provides a refuge from noise-filled, people-cluttered cities.

Creamy Queen Anne's lace trims a field where island youngsters romp. The population includes descendants of sailors of Negro and Portuguese stock as well as English and Scottish. The windmill, built in 1746 of timbers taken from wrecks, still grinds grain.



share the Nantucketer's easeful insularity, inevitably bring something of "America" with them—cars and motorcycles and surfboards, a penchant for pizza, and a longing for night life. From mid-June through Labor Day, the half-dozen big hotels are packed and rooming houses are filled.

A Few Hours in a Gentler Age

Every day, "trippers" pour ashore at Nantucket town and flood the island (page 823): tourists who come on the two boats from Hyannis and who, as Nantucketers are fond of saying, "arrive with a shirt and a $5 bill and change neither"—a characterization that Nantucketers themselves know is unfair. Some trippers take bus tours, or rent bicycles and ride the seven-and-a-half miles to 'Sconset, with its wide beaches facing the Atlantic. Others rush in and out of the quaint shops along cobbled Main Street, loll on its benches beneath giant 120-year-old elms, or wander through the Whaling Museum, and then spend the afternoon on a public beach.

They have a good time, are welcomed by the natives (especially the merchants), and revel in the feeling of living, if only for a day, in a gentler age. Somehow, the island's remoteness and its pervasive sense of history seem always to overcome any crowd. Old buildings like the Pacific Club, where weathered sea captains met to rehash turbulent voyages, are dignified reminders that Nantucket was once the whaling capital of the world.

The trippers' impact nevertheless disquiets the established summer residents, loath to share their haven. Decades ago actors dominated the warm-weather colony, but today it is a heterogeneous group: Washington lawyers, Boston bankers, Cleveland industrialists, New York advertising men. They buy or rent large houses on Cliff Road overlooking

Plucked from the Atlantic, lobsters sell on Nantucket for as little as $1 a pound. The skipper of the *Ellen Marie*, out of New Bedford, Massachusetts, weighs choice catches at a town wharf. A century and a half ago, the world's mightiest whaling fleet crowded the harbor, and docks were redolent of Sicilian oranges, Cadiz olives, and Oriental spices, luxuries imported with the profits of the sperm-oil trade.

the water, or small cottages covered with roses or ivy on one of 'Sconset's narrow lanes.

They play tennis at the 'Sconset Casino or the Nantucket Yacht Club and sail Indians and Beetle Cats in the harbor (pages 818-19). They swim along the south shore at beaches seldom reached by bicycling trippers. And, sooner or later, almost every woman among them sports one of the beautiful lightship baskets, used as purses, that have become a badge of the summer-resident set.

Woven of Javanese or Malaysian cane and often decorated with ivory carvings, Nantucket's lightship baskets originated a century ago, created by lonely light keepers to help pass the time. Mitchell Ray, grandson of a whaleman, made baskets in the 1920's, adorned them with hand-carved ebony whales, and sold them for $25. Today a similar basket, decorated with an ivory carving, may bring as much as $185.

A Filipino immigrant, José Formoso Reyes, began to make the baskets 20 years ago and has become so successful that he welcomes competition. He works 12 hours a day in his tiny rose-covered shop. A sign on the counter proclaims, "No repairs until next year."

"Sometimes it takes two or three days to make a basket," he told me. "My backlog ranges between four and seven years. From the day I started it's been like this."

Artists Disturbed by Clean-up Trend

Nantucket supports a summer art colony, though some of its members lament the island's trend toward a respectable neatness.

"This place has been cleaned up," an indignant artist told me. "Now Provincetown is really paintable; it's never been cleaned up."

Its paintability aside, Nantucket is indeed cleaner, more pristine, and quainter than most Cape Cod resorts. And, the day after Labor

LOPSIDED HORSESHOE, *the sandy chip of land known as Nantucket, 20 miles off Cape Cod, supports 3,900 year-round residents, who share space in warm months with 12,000 "summer people." Shoals almost trapped the island's discoverer, Bartholomew Gosnold, when he sailed past in 1602.*

Nantucket Island

Elevations and soundings in feet

0 4
STATUTE MILES

DRAWN BY ALFRED ZEGARTH
COMPILED BY LEO J. BOBINSCHMIDT
GEOGRAPHIC ART DIVISION
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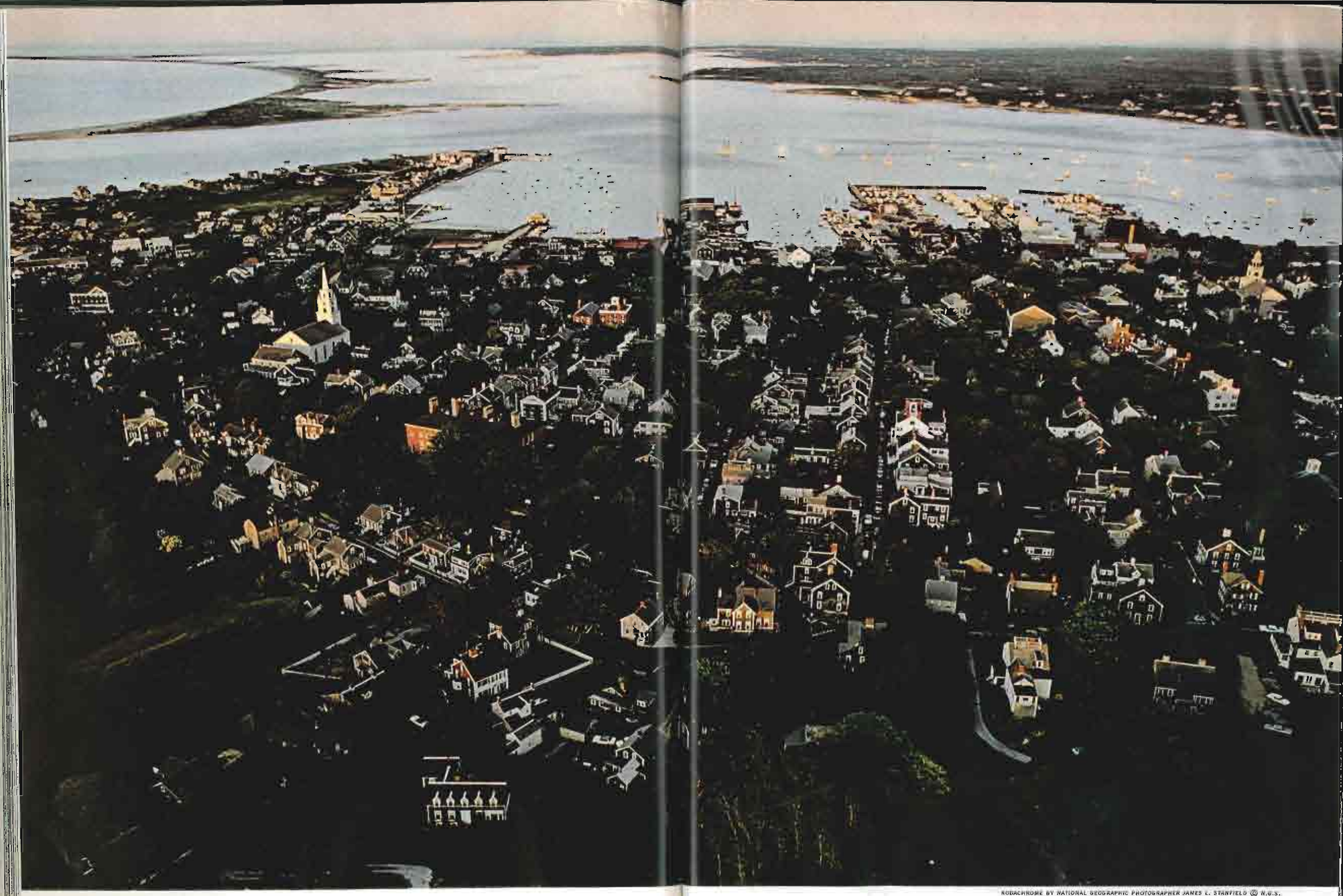


KODACHROME BY NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC PHOTOGRAPHER JAMES L. STANFIELD © N.G.S.

Wedded to the sea for centuries, Nantucket town reflects the marriage in countless ways. Along cobbled streets and narrow lanes rise stately mansions built with the white gold of sperm oil. Years of weathering have turned shingled cottages dove-gray, giving the island its nickname, "Little Gray Lady of the Sea." Towers of the Unitarian Church, extreme right, and the Congregational Church, left center, rise above the rooftops. Yachts and fishing boats throng the harbor. Vessels from the mainland follow the channel between the town and scalloped Coatue Point to berth at Steamboat Wharf, upper center.

Day, all these admirable qualities are intensified. As if by edict, the summer visitors flee, leaving the natives to batten down their island and wait for the winds of winter. Deer, which for months have remained hidden in clumps of bushes, reappear on the moors. The island begins to change her clothes.

"Nantucket has two suits," an old Nantucketer once told me. "One's green, for all the summer people. But she saves her best for us who live here. After Labor Day she really puts on her finery."

Autumn Brightens the "Faraway Land"

I have been coming to Nantucket for more than twenty years, and I love it in summer, but my favorite time has always been just after the island changes her clothes. Then the lumbering ships from Woods Hole cross Nantucket Sound full of cargo, and all but devoid of people. Standing alone on the deck, with scores of gulls hovering motionless above the ferry's fantail, you sense the isolation that inspired the Indians to name the island the "Faraway Land."

Ashore, the throngs have gone, but the days remain clear and lovely. The summer green on the moors gives way to the flaming reds and yellows of autumn, and small, secret ponds glisten placidly in the sunlight. Miles of beaches are deserted; footprints are erased from the sand by the building surf. Striped bass and bluefish still patrol the shoals off Madaket on the western side of the island; and on the eastern side, around 'Sconset, the winds are perfect for flying kites.

For those who cherish a landscape without human figures, autumn is the time to tramp the island's byways. Of 144 miles of public roads, 82 are paved. The rest are rutted dirt tracks crisscrossing the moors. On a crisp fall day, it is exhilarating to follow a winding trail to nowhere and watch the moors change into their spectacular regalia.

One day not long ago, I hiked from Altar Rock, one of the highest points on the island —about 100 feet—to Milestone Road (map, page 815). Vast patches of huckleberry had turned bright red, and some were beginning to soften down to rust. Green mealyplum (bearberry), the island's most common carpet vegetation, glistened brightly. Stands of scrub oak and bayberry and broom crowberry—the marvelously resilient "mattress grass"—dotted the undulating hills. By the road, skeins of brilliant red and yellow poison ivy climbed the trunks of small pines.

Looking at the shallow dips in the road, I remembered the awe I had felt when I first learned that they had been shaped by the Ice Age glaciers that created Nantucket. This bit of land began as early as 75,000 years ago as a moraine heaped up by the advancing ice. As warming climate melted the ice and raised the oceans, water invaded the coastal plains and made Nantucket an island. Wind and water continue to carve it, sometimes in spectacular fashion. In 1961 Hurricane Esther amputated the western tip, called Smith Point. Now Smith Point is part of Esther Island.

The glacial breath of winter still locks the island in an icy grip, at times freezing the

A fresh breeze on her quarter, the topsail schooner *Shenandoah* approaches Brant Point, where a light has guided seafarers since 1746. The 108-foot windjammer, depending entirely upon its sails for propulsion, cruises the Northeast coast weekly in summer with paying passengers.

Tending a spinnaker, a teen-age sailor helps maneuver an Indian in a race held by the Nantucket Yacht Club. The August regatta draws many sailboat classes, including the Beetle Cat, called Rainbow by Nantucketers because of its many-hued sails.

harbor so thick that supply ships can't buck through. Then cargo planes drop emergency rations—31,000 pounds one arctic day last January. But such crises only heighten the native's perverse pride in his insularity.

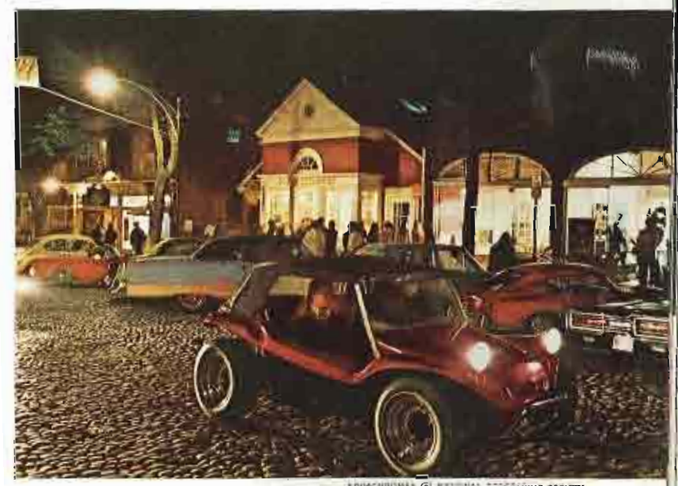
Off-season is the time to meet the real Nantucketers. They must make most of their income during the summer, and they have no time for socializing. They are a hardworking minority amid a crowd of vacationing strangers. But after Labor Day they are liberated.

One of the most engaging islanders is a tall, lanky man named Earl Coffin, a descendant of one of the families that comprised Nantucket's original elite. (The 1870 census recorded 76 Macys, 112 Gardners, 138 Folgers, and 185 Coffins.)

Rockweed Steam Gives Clams That Special Flavor

Earl is much in demand as Nantucket's most talented and knowledgeable gardener. But when gardening slacks off in the fall, he haunts the island's shores, wading in Polpis Harbor on cold and blustery days in search of scallops and clams.

One morning, Earl's wife Phoebe, a pretty and vivacious Newfoundlander, called to invite my wife Wendy and me to a clambake, a rare treat on Nantucket. To prepare a proper clambake, which consists not only of clams but also of lobsters, potatoes, corn on the cob, and cheesecloth bags stuffed



Zest of youth enlivens Nantucket in summer. Crowding a night spot called 30 Acres, the college set dances to a rock band's ear-shattering rhythm. Bouncing along cobblestoned Main Street, a dune buggy (above) scoots past the brightly lit Sweet Shop, a confectionery complete with an old-fashioned soda fountain. At the upper end of its business square, Main Street narrows to become one of the Nation's most distinguished summer addresses.

with sausage, requires skill and a lot of work. Only two or three men on the island relish a "bake" enough to bother.

The day before the bake, I went with Earl to gather the indispensable rockweed. The brownish-yellow weed, which grows on stones or mussels, contains small air sacs. When heated, it emits a steam that flavors the food. In an hour we gathered a couple of hundred pounds of weed in two burlap bags.

"There'll only be 10 of us this time," said Earl. "You should see it when we do the lodge bake. We need 15 bags."

Fire Builder Must Know His Business

The next morning a northwest wind was gusting upward of 40 miles an hour. "No problem," said Earl. "We'll find a lee."

We trekked off to the beach to set up windbreaks and build the fire. Earl dug a shallow pit, lined it with wood, and filled it with rocks. Then he carefully stacked wood around the rocks.

"This is the tricky part," he said. "You've got to build your mound so's air can filter around every rock. If you don't, you get a poor fire and the rocks don't get hot enough."

We flew kites for an hour while the rocks baked until they began to crack and flake. Earl spread them out and covered them with a layer of weed. On top of the weed went the food, and then another layer of weed. We threw a tarpaulin over the mound, and shoveled on sand to seal in the heat.

An hour later we reversed the process, removing the canvas in a great billow of steam, and treated ourselves to the tenderest, tastiest meal I can remember.

After lunch we packed our gear and drove into town to buy some new kites; we had lost two in the strong wind, and they were now heading for Portugal.

We walked along the waterfront, still the heart of the island. Square-riggers no longer crowd the wharves, of course, and the bustle of a thriving seaport is only a memory. But here still beats the pulse of the island. In bad weather, with planes grounded, the narrow channel is Nantucket's only lifeline.

As I gazed across the harbor at Brant Point, I recalled a remark by the venerable Mrs. Walling: "Something's changed, you know. When you come around the point, it just doesn't look like the Little Gray Lady any more. I hope that for the sake of a little money we haven't given up too many things that money can't buy."

The island, known fondly as the "Little Gray Lady of the Sea" (because of its weathered-gray houses),* has indeed changed in just a decade. The waterfront has been rebuilt to handle 180 boats, and finger piers stretch out in endless rows. Harbor Square has been constructed, complete with supermarket, Laundromat, gift shops—and cobblestones. Originally cobblestones covered Main Street for a practical purpose (preceding page)—heavy whale-oil wagons would have reduced a normal street to mire in a week—but now all of Harbor Square is paved with the picturesque but axle-jarring stones.

One-man Crusade Stirs Debate

The recent changes on Nantucket have been wrought largely by Walter Beinecke, Jr., board chairman of a company promoting Christmas Club savings plans. Mr. Beinecke's father established the Nantucket Historical Trust in 1957, and in 1961 Walter Jr. and other trustees launched a crusade to preserve the town's historical heritage. In 1964 he and several others formed Sherburne Associates to rebuild the rundown waterfront. Their efforts have aroused considerable controversy.

I heard Mr. Beinecke praised for saving the island in spite of itself, and denounced for trying to turn Nantucket into a rich man's refuge. Some islanders feel Sherburne Associates' ownership of so much of the commercial waterfront is unjust; others claim they

*See "Nantucket—Little Gray Lady," by William H. Nicholas, NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC, April 1944.

"The daily invasion," Nantucketers call this summer spectacle. Many hasten to harborside to watch the "trippers" swarm eagerly ashore, as many as 1,500 on a fine day. The three-deck passenger ship *Siasconset*—named for an island village and usually shortened to 'Sconset—makes the two-hour run from Hyannis on Cape Cod; supply-carrying car ferries churn out of Woods Hole.

Following the Civil War, which dealt the final blow to the once-booming whaling industry, impoverished families began to take in strangers during the vacation months. That modest beginning spawned today's tourist bonanza. KODACHROME © NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC SOCIETY

August — the golden time

FIFTY-FIVE MILES of sand beach rimming Nantucket provide sun seeker and sportsman alike with space and solitude to enjoy themselves in their own ways: A distaff Mickey Mantle slams a home run with a board bat; precariously balanced, a surfer struggles to ride a wave.

The Gulf Stream warms Nantucket waters to a summer high of 72° F., a happy contrast to the bone-chilling seas that lap most New England beaches even in the balmiest months.

KODACHROMES BY JAMES L. STANFIELD © N.G.S.

have saved the wharves from dilapidation. Some summer people complain that the new construction work has tripled the cost of labor; others say it has given the economy a needed shot in the arm.

A few summers ago the proprietor of a gift shop turned a modest profit by selling buttons with anti-Beinecke legends, one of which read, "No Man Is an Island." But in the eyes of many Nantucketers Mr. Beinecke is close to being just that.

Day-trippers Keep Out?

I was anxious to meet this man who was changing "my" island, so I made an appointment to see him at his large home on the Nantucket Cliffs. A stocky, curly-haired man in his early fifties, wearing half-rim glasses, he bounced in from a scalloping expedition and plopped himself into a chair.

When I asked him to explain his program, he said, "I want to make sure that the beauty and charm of Nantucket are never destroyed by having more tourists than the island can realistically accommodate."

Some island merchants think this means that Mr. Beinecke might attempt to limit the number of tourists, primarily by imposing restrictions on one of Sherburne Associates' tenants, the boat line that brings trippers from Hyannis. The thought outrages the merchants' traditional sense of democracy—and their Yankee business sense, too. Restaurant and shop owners fear that if the trippers are priced out of Nantucket, they may be out of business.

Mr. Beinecke brushes aside these fears: "The boat line is a tenant that we feel is not only desirable but necessary for the economy of Nantucket."

Nevertheless he firmly believes that tourism

EKTACHROME (ABOVE) AND KODACHROMES © N.G.S.

Recipe for a perfect beach party: a roaring fire, a full moon, a guitar, and a host of mellow voices. These members of the Historic American Buildings Survey, assembled near Great Point Light, spent last summer studying, drawing, and photographing notable Nantucket buildings, many of them protected by law.

Three in search of the sun amble down a boardwalk to Jetties Beach.

Shades of Red Grange! A broken-field virtuoso leaves his pursuer sprawled on the sands beside Nantucket Sound.

Light and lovely as spun silver, a spider web traps dew at the edge of a fresh-water pond. Perch, bass, and pickerel thrive in such pools, which lie in depressions left by the retreat of Ice Age glaciers. The frozen rivers, in fact, created Nantucket itself as a huge moraine.

must be controlled. "Nantucket can't hope to make a living as a resort if it offers only sunshine, the outdoors, and sports," he said. "To compete with the Cape, it must add something else—its romance, its isolation, its history. The normal approach in American business is 'more volume and more volume.' For us that would be death. Nantucket's charms are very fragile.

"We do not wish to run anyone out of business. But if a man wants to lease property from Sherburne Associates, we believe that the property should be used in a manner compatible with the historic and residential area. The commercial and residential parts of town should be run as a harmonious entity."

Bargain Price Included Beaver Hats

Whatever the feelings about Mr. Beinecke's crusade, no one denies that there is a great deal to preserve on Nantucket. Explorer Bartholomew Gosnold, off course on his way to Virginia, sighted it in 1602, when it was inhabited by Wampanoag Indians. By 1660 it had changed hands several times (once for the sum of 30 pounds and two beaver hats), and was owned by 20 English settlers.

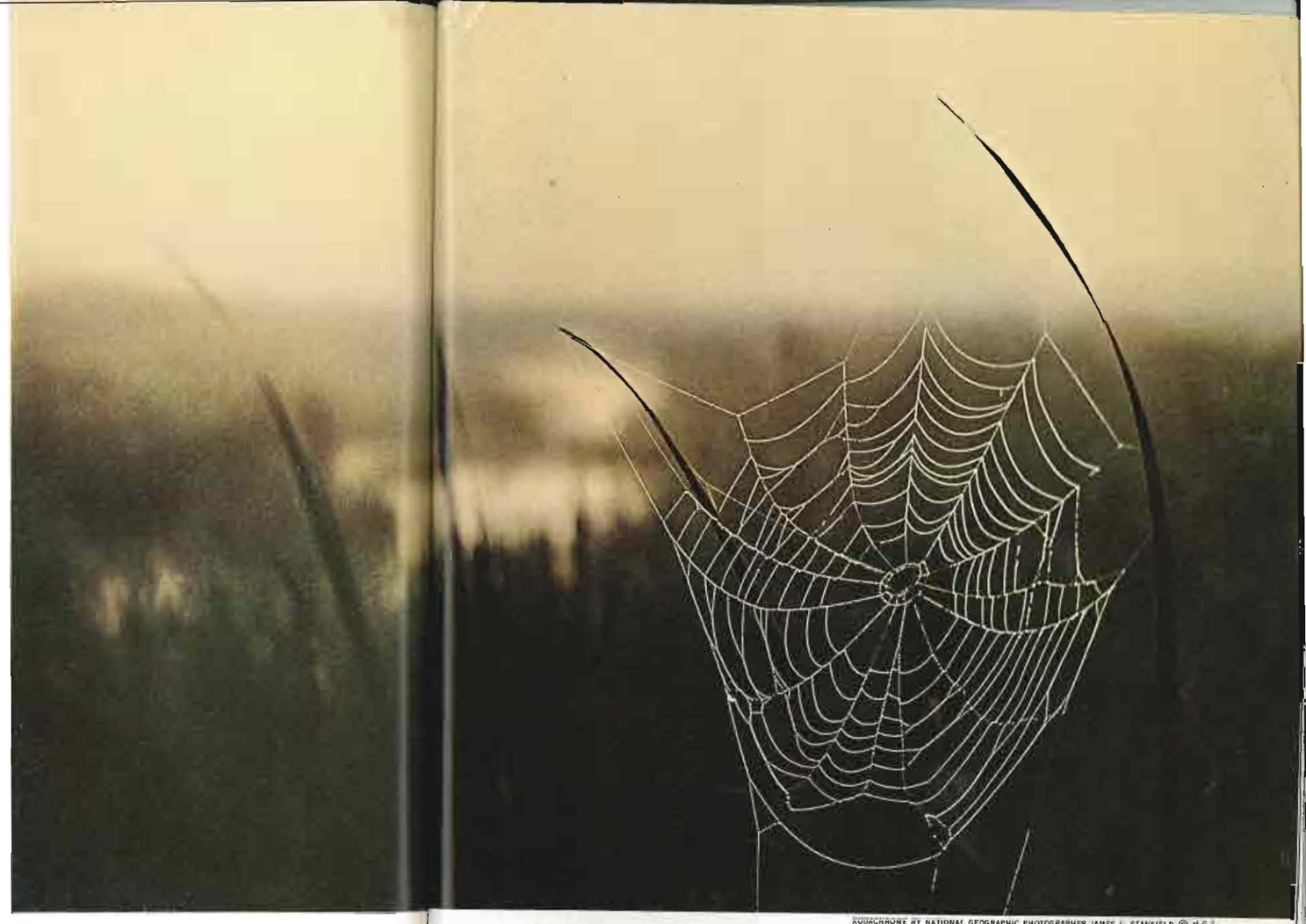
The first village, called Sherburne, stood about two miles west of present-day Nantucket town. The main occupations on the island were fishing, growing grain, and raising sheep. As the population boomed, other small settlements sprang up: Siasconset, Quidnet, Polpis, and Sesachacha.

'Sconset outstripped the others because it was an outpost for fishermen taking the blues, cod, and haddock when they ran to the east of the island. Several of the small houses still standing along the narrow streets of 'Sconset were fishing shacks 250 years ago.

In the 1690's the islanders began to make a business of pursuing whales, chasing them in rowboats and towing them to shore. Responding to an increasingly water-oriented populace, Sherburne slowly shifted toward the harbor. Having arrived there, it was renamed Nantucket in 1795.

As Nantucket whalers began to use larger vessels and range far oceans, the expanding whaling profession created an economy, heritage, and population that belied the island's size. As early as 1740 Nantucket was the leading whaling port in the world, a distinction it held for almost a century. By 1820 it had 78 ships in service, compared to New Bedford's 56. Enterprising fleet owners made fortunes, and they built majestic homes along upper Main Street.

Although I was born in New York, I remember reading with proprietary pride Herman Melville's paean to the island I have long considered my second home. "The Nantucketer, he alone resides and riots on the



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sea," Melville wrote in *Moby Dick*. "He alone, in Bible language, goes down to it in ships; to and fro ploughing it as his own special plantation. *There* is his home; *there* lies his business. . . . With the landless gull, that at sunset folds her wings and is rocked to sleep between billows; so at nightfall, the Nantucketer, out of sight of land, furls his sails, and lays him to his rest, while under his very pillow rush herds of walruses and whales."

But even while the world marveled at the epic stature of the Nantucket whaler, his demise was being written by changing conditions. By the 1790's whalers had to range into the remote Pacific to find sperm whales in profitable numbers, and they needed huge ships, large enough to carry all the oil gathered in a voyage that might last three years. While Nantucketers went willingly and successfully, they found that their fully laden vessels could not easily cross the shallow bar at the harbor entrance. New Bedford, with a deeper harbor and better access to mainland markets, began vying for world leadership.

Other factors, too, were working Nantucket's doom. In 1849 the California gold rush siphoned off a dozen or more ships and hordes of would-be prospectors. Then, only a decade later, petroleum was discovered in Pennsylvania, and the price of sperm oil

plummeted at a time when whaling was at its costliest.

The Civil War struck the crowning blow, drawing off the best sailors, and for a decade Nantucket knew terrible poverty. The population, which had climbed to almost 10,000, fell to 3,000. All construction ceased.

But poverty, in one sense, bred the prosperity the island knows today. In the 1870's, mainlanders began to come to peaceful Nantucket for restful summers. By the turn of the century, the former whaling capital of the world had become a budding resort. Poverty even helped retain the island's charm: Since no one could afford to build houses in the 70's and 80's, the island was spared the gingerbread Victorian architecture that was all the rage. History was preserved perforce.

Today it is preserved by municipal law. For 14 years the small core of the town has been an inviolable sanctuary for the past.

Three Houses for Three Sons

Though Nantucket town has some 1,500 houses, most built between 1790 and 1850, the keystone of its architectural heritage is the trio of red brick houses that stand in a stately row on upper Main Street. Built in the 1830's by fleet owner Joseph Starbuck for his three sons, George, Matthew, and William, they are named West Brick, Middle Brick, and East Brick.

Middle Brick is owned by Matthew's great-granddaughter, Mrs. H. Crowell Freeman, who treated Wendy and me to a tour of the house. Gale warnings had been posted that night. Rain slashed down on the cobblestones, and leaves flew along the deserted street. The only light on upper Main came from the softly glowing lamps in the living room of Middle Brick.

The Freemans ushered us to the rear of the house, where they have added a spacious, comfortable study.

"We were tired of living in a museum," said Mr. Freeman, a friendly man in his middle sixties.

I could see what he meant. The early-Victorian furniture in the double parlor was immaculate. Small tables were crowded with delicate scrimshaw, testimony to the boredom of long voyages.

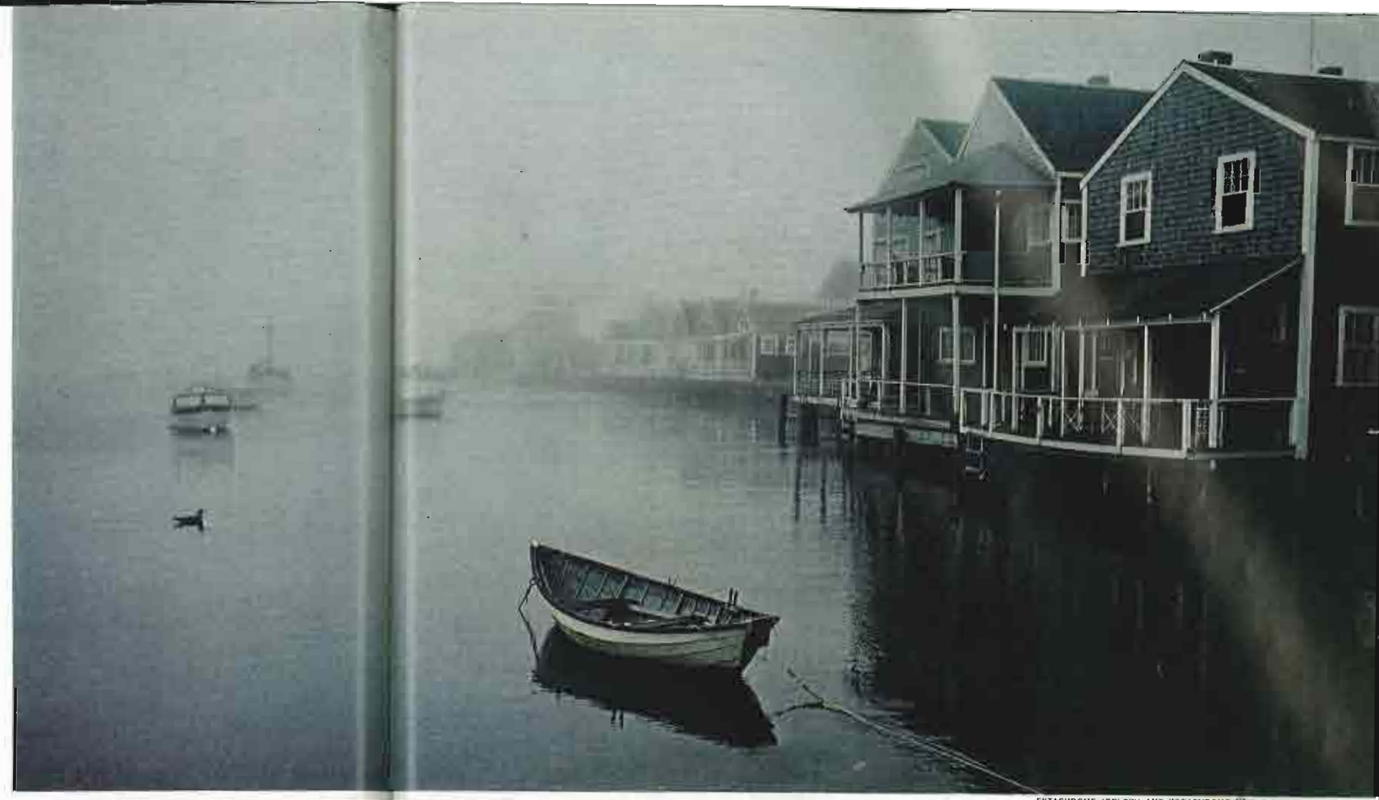
"Can you imagine how long this must have taken?" asked Mrs. Freeman, holding an intricate ivory gimcrack. "The carver started with a whole walrus tusk."

It looked like a child's rattle, with precisely round balls carved inside the ivory framework.

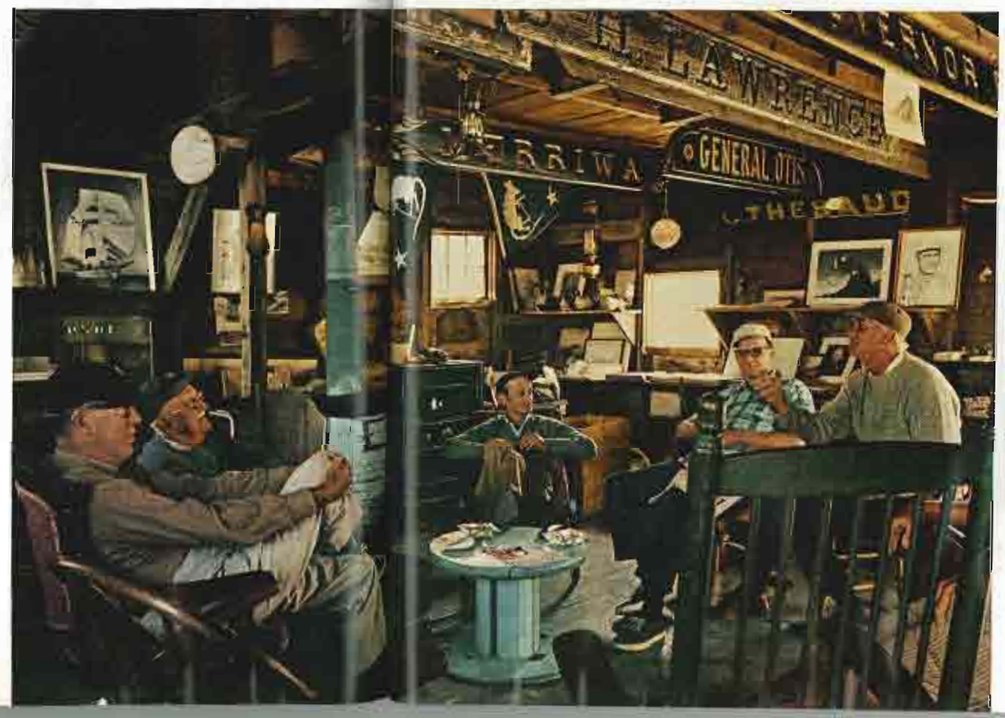
One of the Freemans' proudest possessions is a frayed account book from the *President,* a Starbuck ship that had sailed from Nantucket in the late 1830's. Each sailor was allotted two pages, on which were written all charges for items he bought from the ship's stores.

"If they were very thrifty," said Mr. Freeman, "these fellows might end a two- or three-year voyage making ten to twenty dollars. But many of them jumped ship before the long voyage ended."

One member of the ship's company was named Hugh VanBuren, and I asked Mr. Freeman to explain an



EKTACHROME (BELOW) AND KODACHROME © N.G.S.



Film of morning fog blurs Nantucket Harbor, its placid surface reflecting the dark pilings of Old North Wharf.

"No reserved seats for the mighty," reads the motto of the Wharf Rat Club, which meets in this shanty on Old North Wharf. Shunning dues, bylaws, and formality of any kind, the club requires only that members exercise the "proper amount of humility and self-effacement" during the chief activity: yarn spinning. Quarter boards of old vessels adorn the ceiling. Beneath them hang flags bearing the club emblem—a white pipe-smoking, cane-sporting rat—which members have carried to many parts of the world, including the Arctic and Antarctic.

Treasury of Nantucket's golden age, the Whaling Museum at the foot of Steamboat Wharf houses a whaleboat complete with harpoons, stowed mast, tubs of line, and a 20-foot steering oar in the stern. Jawbone of a sperm whale at left, most of its 44 teeth still in place, attests to the size of the seamen's quarry. Above the whaleboat stretches the beam of a massive spermaceti press,

used to separate the sperm oil from the candle wax. Visitors at center inspect a model of a "camel" —a form of floating drydock designed to help move heavily laden ships through the shallow channel to Nantucket Harbor. Beyond gleams the giant lens that focused Sankaty Head Light's oil flame for a century; overhead hangs a model of an early-16th-century Spanish merchantman.

item charged to him: "$15—for catching him."

"You mean they charged him for the honor of being shanghaied?"

"Sure," he said. "There were people who caught sailors for a fee. The whaling captain passed the cost along—to the poor seaman."

Evidently the unfortunate Mr. VanBuren never resigned himself to his fate. Among such items as "Jack knife—$.50; pair of shoes —$1.50; shirt and trousers—$3" was the sorry note, "To prison fee—$1.25."

"I wonder how much they charged a man to hang him," I mused. But for Mr. VanBuren, the need never arose. The last entry in the accounts, in 1840, was one word—"Deserted."

Mansion Ballroom Open to the Stars

Across the street from the Freemans sits a pair of stately white-pillared houses that were also built by a whaling tycoon, the husband of one of Joseph Starbuck's daughters. Number 96 Main Street is a Nantucket Historical Association exhibit, open to the public. Number 94 belongs to Mr. and Mrs. John A. Lodge of Washington, D. C. It was built in 1845, in faithful Greek-revival style. An elegant staircase curves up from the foyer and is capped by an elaborate domed ceiling.

Mrs. Lodge showed us to the main room upstairs, a large domed salon.

"A round opening in the center of the ceiling slides away," she said. "A similar panel in the roof slides, too, so the dancers could have the stars above them.

"This room is famous for its beautiful plaster work, done by craftsmen brought all the way from Italy, and for its unusual 'sprung floor.' The floor really does have a slight bounce to it, though you can't feel it now because of the weight of the furniture. Long, gently curved pieces of wood resembling barrel staves separate the downstairs ceiling from the upstairs floor.

"Remember the dances they did in those days—polkas and gavottes? You had to have some give in the floor, or a whole party might come crashing through the ceiling into the living room below."

As we went down the stairs, I ran my hand along the polished bannister. At the bottom I felt a small ivory bump.

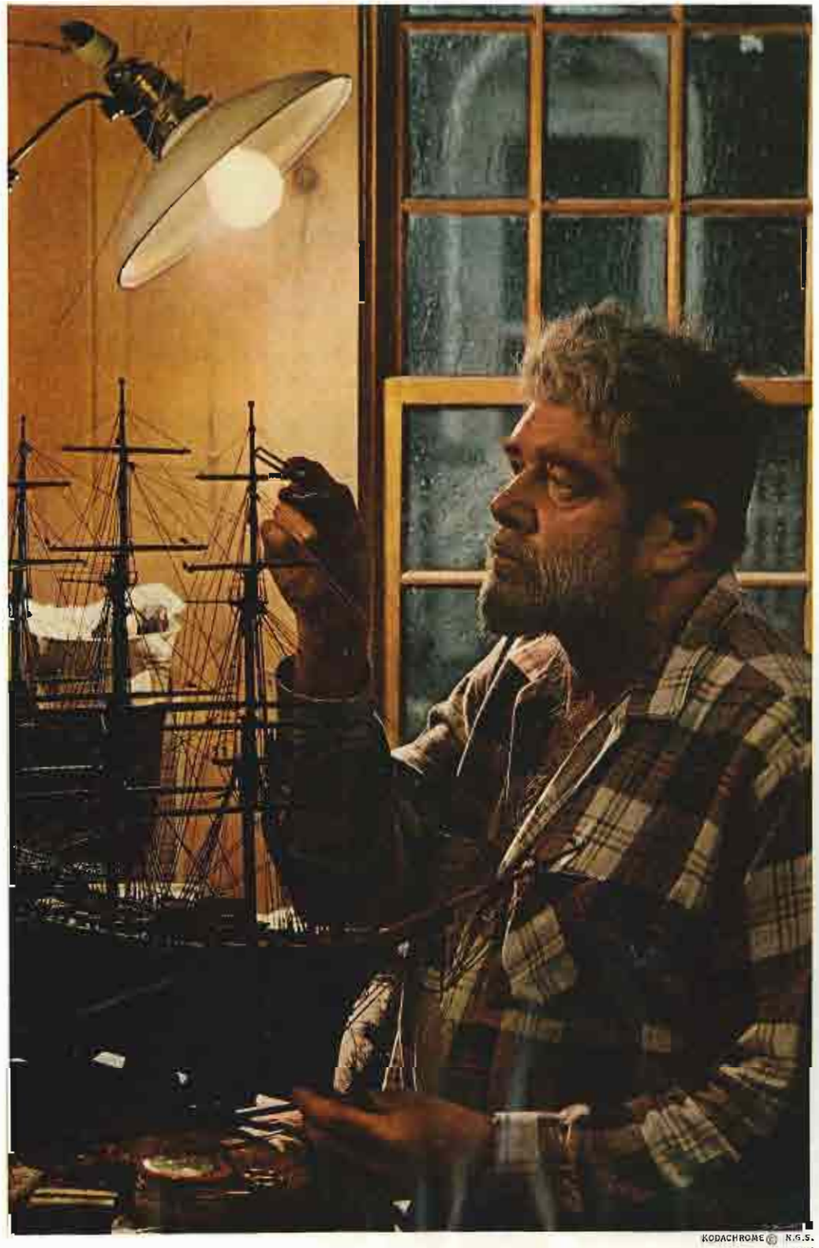
"That's called a mortgage button," Mrs. Lodge explained. "People on Nantucket used to plant an ivory button in the bottom post of their stairs when they had finished paying for the house. When we looked at the original bill for building this house, the last item on the

KODACHROMES © N.G.S.

Sailor in skirts, Mildred Jewett won honorary Coast Guard membership for patrolling Nantucket beaches during World War II. She lives in Madaket, and islanders affectionately call her Madaket Millie.

"Eight bells and all's well." A sun dial's shadow marks the hour as 8 a.m. in Siasconset, a fishing village that became a favorite retreat of Broadway stars in the early 1900's.

Only 15 when he first went to sea, 61-year-old Charles Sayle bears a fitting name; a Nantucketer for 40 years, he sails often with his sons and writes a column, "Waterfront News," for the island's weekly *Inquirer and Mirror.* But he spends most of his time in this workshop, patiently making ship models that require as many as 2,000 hours. Here he repairs a square-rigger.



KODACHROME © N.G.S.

sheet said, 'Ivory mortgage button—$.33.' The house must have been paid for in cash, on the spot."

Outside, Main Street was shrouded in a thick fog. Looking up through the mist at the lighted windows in the ballroom, I could almost hear drifting toward me the strains of a waltz.

By the next afternoon, the sea around Nantucket was warning in earnest about the coming winter. The wind whipped up whitecaps and streaked the surface of the water. The surf boomed onto the land and tore away great chunks of sand and soil. Some parts of the shore are being eroded at a rate of as much as 17 feet a year, and anguished property owners are watching helplessly as their investment washes out to sea. At the same time, the shore is building up around other parts of the island.

Nantucketer Relies on a Built-in Barometer

Despite the wintry seas, there were still fish to be caught—or so I had been told. Bass and bluefish were said to be feeding on the Point Rip, where tides surge over the shoals. So, bundled up like Antarctic whalers, Wendy and I set out for the rip with Capt. Gilbert Nickerson in his 25-foot powerboat *Flicka*.

"We may scare up a blue or two," said Gibby, as we bounced along the channel. "Anyway, it's a nice day for a boat ride."

By the time we reached the rip, the sea had calmed enough to permit Gibby to keep our fishing lines in the "white water." Almost immediately Wendy hooked a large bluefish.

Gibby tossed the catch into the fish box. "The weather's going to change," he said. "You watch." There wasn't a cloud in the sky. The water was quiet, the wind steady from the southwest.

"How can you tell?" I asked him.

"I've been on the water a long time," he said. "I can feel a change coming."

Within ten minutes we couldn't see twenty yards in any direction. A fog that had appeared as a gray line on the horizon had raced across the water, engulfing us in a windy cloak.

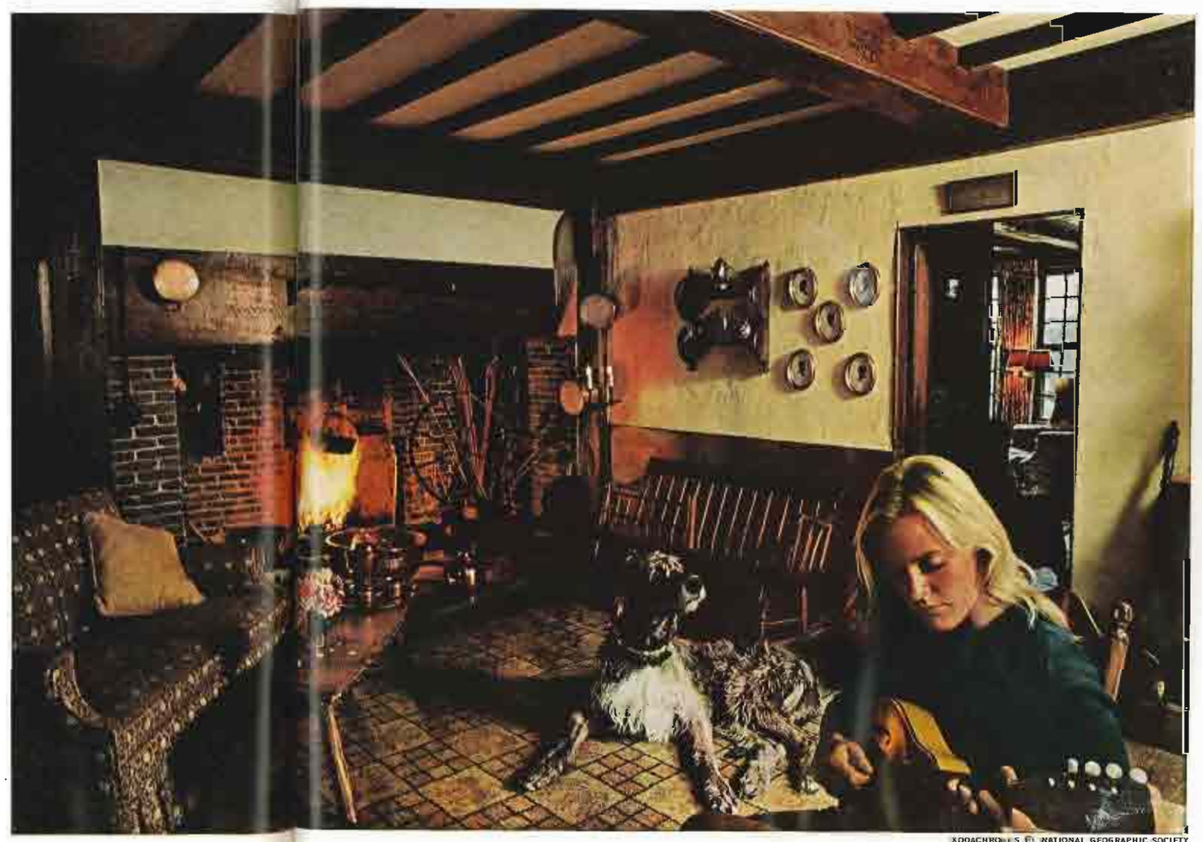
"Now there's a good old Nantucket fog," said Gibby.

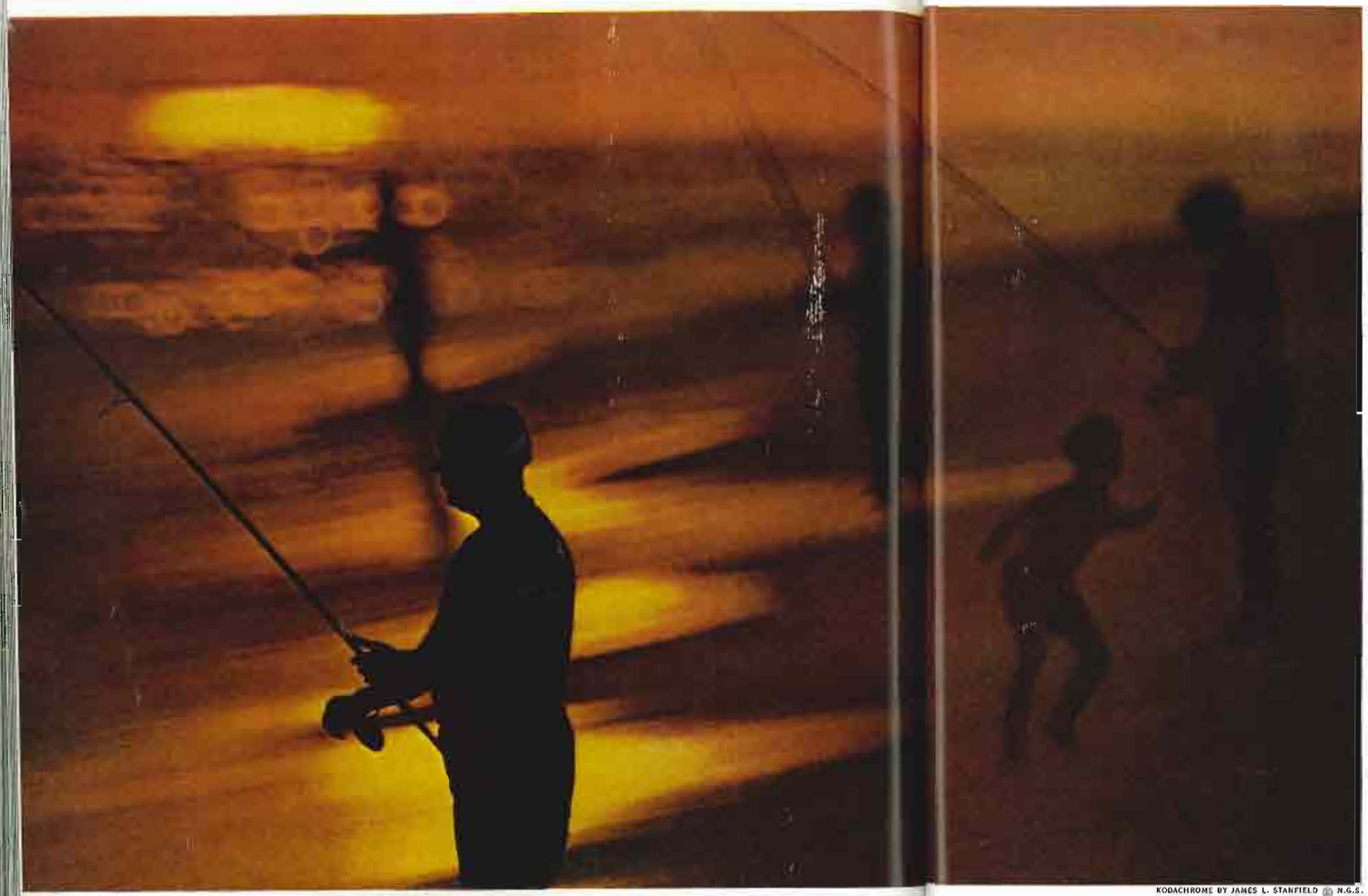
We moved silently up and down the invisible rip. As we worked our way home through the fog, I asked Gibby how much longer he would fish this year.

"About another week," he said. "Then the scalloping season starts." Like many islanders, he has two boats and two professions

History lives on in island homes

COMMANDING A VIEW at every point of the compass, Tashama Farm looms above flowering fields. A whaling master built the shingled mansion; his wife perhaps kept watch for his ship from the cupola-like penthouse. Most of the Kilvert home on Main Street (below) dates from 1695. One of its eight-foot-wide fireplaces blazes cheerily as Lilly Kilvert plucks a tune for an appreciative friend.





KODACHROME BY JAMES L. STANFIELD © N.G.S.

Daydreams of bluefish and striped bass hold surf casters to their sport as daylight wanes. Nantucket offers vacationists a wide range of pastimes: fishing, sailing, swimming, bicycling, or flying kites on the strong sea winds. After sunset, only an occasional beach fire will break the darkness along this lonely shore near Smith Point.

—charter-boat captain in the summer, scalloper in the winter.

The professional scalloping season begins November 1 and lasts through March. The law limits the quantity of scallops that may be taken: six bushel bags per person per day, no more than 12 bags to a boat. A bag of shellfish will usually yield a gallon of shucked scallops, which in a good year brings about $10.

Scalloping is backbreaking work. The scallopers cast off at first light, in any but the most perilous weather. Behind the boat they drag six dredges made of a material that resembles chain-link door mats. The dredges are hauled aboard—either by hand or by power-driven winch—and the heaping muddy mess is dumped onto a culling board, where it must be gleaned by hand.

At the beginning of the season, scallops are plentiful in the harbor, but by the end of February the boats have to travel all the way around Eel Point to Madaket. They leave before dawn and return after dark.

Gibby said he had just removed the inboard motor from his scalloping boat and was replacing it with an outboard, which seemed to me a reverse procedure.

"Not at all," he said. "Out at Madaket there's almost no water. If you go aground with an outboard, you can lift the motor up, which is something you sure can't do with an inboard. Can you imagine it getting dark and beginning to blow, and there's a whiff of snow in the air, and you're the only boat out there —and you can't get home?"

"What do you do?" I asked.

"You sit and freeze until the tide lifts you off the bar. Not for me, thanks just the same. I'm getting too old for that kind of work."

We were scheduled to leave November 1, so we couldn't go scalloping with the professionals, but I was determined to make an amateur try. Off-season you are permitted to collect a "family mess"—one bushel per family per week. You may use no dredges and no boat, but must walk along looking at the bottom through a plastic box while gathering the scallops with a rake or chicken-wire scoop.

Five of us went into Polpis Harbor one icy day, clad in waders and armed with bizarre paraphernalia. An inner tube attached to a line at my waist supported a basket into which I threw my scallops. I became so entranced looking at the moving bottom that I waded out too far and was rewarded with a cascade of freezing water down my boots.

In an hour and a half, we gathered basket on basket of spitting, snapping scallops—several gallons, I was sure.

Our total take, open and ready to eat, proved humbling: slightly less than one pint.

"You can't pick up a trade in twenty minutes," said Gibby when I told him of our dismal failure. "Stick around. You'll learn."

Sea Still Provides a Bounty

To be on Nantucket is to want to stay, but we had to get back to the mainland—to stoplights, drive-ins and parking meters, elevators and garbage disposals.

Departure day was crisp and sunny. With a blast of its air horn, the little motorship *Uncatena,* whose sole cabin furnishings during winter's stormier weather are airplane seats bolted to the deck, slid away from the pier.

It was the first day of the scalloping season, and the tiny boats bobbed and scuttled around the harbor, somehow avoiding entangling their dredges with their neighbors'. Wives labored over the culling boards as husbands manned the dredges.

Their contentment seemed unmarred. There were no sailboats or water-skiers to beware; no gift shop or carpentry work awaited them; no summer housewife would call to ask that her lawn be cut. They were gathering their living from the sea, as their forebears had done for 300 years.

They waved at us. We waved back. And then we sailed to America. THE END