

MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report

CHILMARK

Report Date: 1984

Associated Regional Report: Cape Cod and the Islands

Reconnaissance Survey Town Reports, produced for MHC's Statewide Reconnaissance Survey between 1979 and 1987, introduce the historical development of each of the Commonwealth's municipalities. Each report begins with an historic overview, a description of topography, and political boundaries. For the purposes of the survey, the historic period has been subdivided into seven periods: Contact (1500–1620), Plantation (1620–1675), Colonial (1675–1775), Federal (1775–1830), Early Industrial (1830–1870), Late Industrial (1870–1915), and Early Modern (1915–1940/55). Each report concludes with survey observations that evaluate the town's existing historic properties inventory and highlight significant historic buildings, settlement patterns, and present threats to these resources. A bibliography lists key secondary resources.

Town reports are designed for use together with a series of town maps that demarcate settlement patterns, transportation corridors and industrial sites for each historic period. These maps are in the form of color-coded, polyester overlays to the USGS topographic base map for each town on file and available for consultation at MHC. For further information on the organization and preparation of town reports, readers should contact MHC.

Users should keep in mind that these reports are now two decades or more old. The information they contain, including assessments of existing knowledge, planning recommendations, understanding of local development, and bibliographic references all date to the time they were written. In some cases, information on certain topics was not completed. No attempt has been made to update this information.

Electronic text was not available for digital capture, and as a result most of the reports have been scanned as PDF files. While all have been processed with optical character recognition, there will inevitably be some character recognition errors.

The activity that is the subject of the MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report has been financed in part with Federal funds from the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. However, the contents and opinions do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Department of the Interior. This program receives Federal financial assistance for identification and protection of historic properties. Under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and the Age Discrimination Act of 1975, as amended, the U.S. Department of the Interior prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, disability or age in its federally assisted programs. If you believe you have been discriminated against in any program, activity or facility as described above, or if you desire further information please write to: Office of Equal Opportunity, National Park Service, 1849 C Street, N.W., Washington, D.C., 20240.



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MHC RECONNAISSANCE SURVEY REPORT

DATE: 1984

COMMUNITY: Chilmark

I. TOPOGRAPHY

The town of Chilmark is located on the island of Martha's Vineyard lying between 70° 50' and 70° 25' longitude and 41° 95' and 41° 30' latitude. The island covers approximately 249 square kilometers and is covered by hilly upland with a maximum elevation of 92 meters, averaging 59 meters; and coastal plain with elevations sloping gently southwest from about 29 meters to sea level. Chilmark is located in the southwestern portion of the island bounded by Gay Head to the southwest, Vineyard Sound to the north and west, West Tisbury to the east and north, and the Atlantic Ocean to the south. Major physical features in the town include Chilmark Pond, Tisbury Great Pond, Menemsha Pond, Squibnocket Pond, and the Tiasquin River.

The uplands in the town are within the bounds of the Nantucket Moraine, a hilly and rocky area covering the north and western portion of the town. The moraine is composed largely of coarse or medium sand and boulders of varying size (Latimer 1925:10). In general, soils are sandy and not stratified. The southern and western areas of the town are within an outwash plain deposit. Outwash areas are sandier and stratified. Drainage is generally subsurface, although some streams, brooks, and ponds are present. Elevations average 150 feet or less along the moraine and 50 feet or less along the coast and along the outwash plain. The highest elevations on the island (approximately 811 feet, 92 meters) are located in the southwestern portion of the township. Upland areas often contain oak/maple vegetation zones. Coastal areas and outwash plain areas contain oak/pine and dune vegetation zones.

II. POLITICAL BOUNDARIES

The manorial demense of "Tisbury Manor" was established in 1671, under New York jurisdiction, and included Chilmark, Chickemoo, Nomans Land, the Elizabeth Islands, and the native reservation at Gay Head (established 1642). This territory was incorporated as the town of Chilmark in 1714. Chickemoo region was annexed to Tisbury in 1736. Western boundary with the Gay Head reservation was laid out in 1855. The Elizabeth Islands separated as the town of Gosnold in 1864.

III. HISTORIC OVERVIEW

Chilmark is a residential and summer resort community at the western end of Martha's Vineyard, with many coastal native sites likely. The locality was the last settled of the three original Martha's Vineyard towns, with unusual early status as the manorial demense of Tisbury Manor, established in 1671, with all residents

subject to the lord of the Manor. First meetinghouse was built in 1701, with southern site at Abel Hill. Extensive sheep raising dominated 18th and early 19th century agricultural settlement, with several local mill sites. Meetinghouse location was shifted north to central interior in 1786, but 19th century agricultural decline led to eventual abandonment, and shift of civic center west to Mill Brook Methodist focus. Small, historic fishing center persists at Menemsha. Dispersed 18th and 19th century farmsteads survive, primarily along South Road, with agricultural landscapes intact along Middle Road. Early summer estates survive on South Road at Nashaquitsa. Historic and modern summer home development has been most extensive along the south coast, but future growth may threaten surviving interior rural landscapes.

IV. CONTACT PERIOD (1500-1620)

A. Transportation Routes

Little direct information is present regarding exact locations for Native paths or trails in the Chilmark area. One native trail is reported in the southern portion of town in the general area of the Old South Road. The trail reportedly extended in an east/west direction on the north side of Chilmark Pond and was said to connect the Takemmy and Nashowakemmuck (roughly Chilmark and West Tisbury) sachemship (tribal/village) areas. This trail and a conjectured trail along the northern coastline may also have connected with the Gay Head area to the west as well as other island areas to the east. Interior trails may have spurred from major coastal trails. Coastal water travel may also have occurred.

B. Population

Little direct information is present on which systematic estimates of Native American populations during the Contact period can be made. Furthermore, when estimates are given they are often contradictory with considerable variation. For example, Ritchie (1969:3) estimates the Wampanoag population on Martha's Vineyard in 1600 A.D. at 1,500 individuals. Yet, in 1642 another author estimates the native population at 3,000 individuals (Collections of the Mass. Historical Society Vol. III, p.92). Estimates of native population are further complicated by the fact that the plague of 1616-17 undoubtedly drastically altered existing populations and areas of settlement. Thus, it appears likely that native populations for the entire island were probably more in the range of 1,500 individuals than 3,000, at least during the late Contact period.

Chilmark originally included the Gay Head and Gosnold area until the mid 19th century, when bounds were officially established between the towns. However, this discussion is limited to the present limits of Chilmark unless otherwise specified.

Substantial native populations likely existed in the Chilmark area throughout the Contact period until their probable decline during

the 1616-17 plague. Much of Chilmark was within the political sphere of sagamore or sachem of Aguinuh, or Gay Head, one of the four major seats of authority on Martha's Vineyard during the Contact period. Thus, sizable native populations probably existed in the area. Furthermore, the southern areas of the township contain numerous locales reported as favored areas for native settlement. These areas include coastal ponds such as Menemsha, Chilmark, and Great Tisbury Pond. Accordingly, population may have been concentrated in these areas. The size of the Indian population in the Chilmark area obtained in the Provincial census of 1765 provides an insight into the importance of this area to local natives. That census reported 188 natives, including 72 males and 116 females. These figures represent a larger native population than any other town on the island with the exception of the Gay Head peninsula.

C. Settlement Pattern

European settlements did not exist in Chilmark or on Martha's Vineyard during this period. However, some contact between Native Americans and Europeans in the Martha's Vineyard area undoubtedly took place as European explorers, traders and fishermen frequented the area from early in the 16th century, long before settlement. Most noticeable were Gosnold's voyages through the islands off the Cape and his settlement at Cuttyhunk in 1602.

Native Americans had settled the Chilmark area for some time prior to European contact. Late Woodland period sites, particularly possible shell middens of this period, and known artifact listings with general Chilmark provenience, exhibit a site locational preference for coastal areas, particularly on necks and coves along coastal ponds. The Menemsha, Squibnocket Pond, and Peares Point areas have known site concentrations. Additional sites should be present in interior areas also.

No evidence exists at present to identify specific Contact period sites in Chilmark. However, it seems probable and it is expected that they did exist. Chilmark was originally known by its Algonquian name, Nashowakemmuck, which bordered the Aguinuh, or Gay Head, area. This area was reportedly ruled by one of the four more powerful sachems on Martha's Vineyard at this time. The area was important to Native Americans during this period. A native presence in Chilmark is further attested to by the fact that as early as 1657 Thomas Mayhew made his first attempts at purchasing land from natives within the present limits of the town. Native place names also provide clues to the extent which they settled and/or used the Chilmark area. For example, Menemsha and Sashaquitsa ponds, as well as Quenames Cove and Tiasquam River all derive their names from Algonquian roots. Native place names also corroborate the importance of coastal and wetland areas to native populations.

Thus, while specific Contact period village sites are unknown for the Chilmark area, Late Woodland period site locations, general

artifact finds for the town, the extensive presence of native place names, and the fact that early settlement land purchases had to be made from local natives all point to the fact that Contact period sites should exist. Native American settlement for the Chilmark area during this period should follow regional and island trends for settlement preference in coastal areas along ponds, estuaries, and rivers. Inland sites should also be present, although not to the extent of coastal sites.

D. Subsistence Pattern

European settlements were not present on Martha's Vineyard during the Contact period. Thus, any transient Europeans in the Chilmark area probably followed subsistence patterns similar to native inhabitants in the area. While some food was undoubtedly carried with early explorers, traders, and fishermen, the bulk of their subsistence was probably secured through hunting, fishing, and the gathering of wild plants and shellfish, and the trade, stealing, or purchase of agricultural products (corn, beans, etc.) from the local natives.

Native American subsistence in the Chilmark and Martha's Vineyard area was probably similar to that practiced in other areas on mainland Cape Cod. The combined use of wild and domesticated food resources formed the basis of the subsistence system. It is unknown at present exactly when agriculture, or more specifically, horticulture, was introduced into the Cape and islands area. However, on Martha's Vineyard, carbonized corn kernels were found at two sites: the Peterson site in the town of Chilmark, and the Hornblower II site in Gay Head (Ritchie 1969). At the Hornblower II site, carbonized corn kernels were C14 dated to A.D. 1160 \pm 80 years (Ritchie 1969:52), placing corn agriculture well within the Late Woodland period. Thus, some form of agriculture may have been practiced on Martha's Vineyard for some time prior to the Contact period. Furthermore, by the Contact period, sufficient quantities of corn, beans, etc. were being produced for storage and at times for sale or trade to English settlers. Shellfishing, fishing, and hunting were also important subsistence pursuits. On Martha's Vineyard, virtually all of the existing Algonquian place names and suspected village areas are located along the coast, particularly in estuarine locations near extensive shellfish beds and anadromous fish runs.

In the Chilmark area, several estuaries contain mixed and concentrated shellfish populations of quahog, bay scallop, and soft shell clam. Mussels and oysters may also have been available in significant quantities. Areas in Chilmark containing shellfish populations include portions of the Tisbury Great Pond area, Menemsha Pond, and Nashaquitsa Pond. Alewives are present in Menemsha Pond and Tisbury Great Pond.

In addition, other species of marine life were also available in the Chilmark area. Saltwater fish such as striped bass, bluefish, swordfish, porgie, tautog, eels, mackerel, flounder, codfish,

haddock, and others were present in coastal and estuarine areas. Lobster, crabs, snails, and possibly various species of terrapins were present. Sea mammals such as whales and seals would also have been available in coastal areas. In freshwater ponds, trout, perch, bass, and pickerel were present.

The wetlands and forested areas of Martha's Vineyard and Chilmark provided numerous species of mammals and birds for hunting. The heath-hen, or pinnated grouse, was available in upland areas with numerous species of ducks and geese available in coastal locations. Several mammals were also available which today are not necessarily present. They included: deer, bear, lynx, fox, otters, beaver, rabbit, raccoon, and others.

Numerous types of flora were also present and available for subsistence. These included beechnuts, walnuts, acorns, sassafras, grapes, strawberries, raspberries, gooseberries, huckleberries, and others.

V. PLANTATION PERIOD (1620-1675)

A. Transportation Routes

European and native travelers in the Chilmark area during this period apparently used established native trails of earlier periods, as no roads were yet developed. Water travel may also have occurred.

B. Population

Native American population in the Chilmark area most likely declined during the Plantation period from pre-plague Contact period highs. Population concentrations were still probably located in southern coastal areas.

No known European population was present within the present bounds of Chilmark prior to ca. 1673, when a few Europeans resided in the town. However, substantial settlement did not occur until the beginning of the Colonial period during the last quarter of the 17th century.

C. Settlement Pattern

Native American settlement of the Chilmark area during the Plantation period probably followed similar trends of coastal settlement noted for the Contact period. However, settlement density was in decline, particularly after the 1616-17 plague. No known native sites of this period are reported, although land purchases were made by Europeans from the natives in the area prior to white settlement (ca. 1672).

Chilmark was the last of the three original towns of Martha's Vineyard to be settled. Banks (1911:26) has suggested that John Mayhew first settled the Quanaimes area around 1672 or 1673.

Prior to this date, two or three families of tenants may have been living in the Chilmark area. Also, however, no deeds or records of their occupancy or ownership exists. The charter for the settlement of Chilmark was granted for the Mayhew family in 1671 under the English Manor system. The nature of this system made it difficult to determine land owners from tenants and actual residents. Accordingly, the conditions of early settlement are difficult to determine. However, it is safe to say that by the end of the Plantation period (1675), limited settlement of only a few families had occurred in the southern areas of town near Great Tisbury and Chilmark ponds and possibly the Lagoon Pond area.

D. Economic Base

Native American populations in the Chilmark area probably continued the use of wild and domesticated food resources as a subsistence base, much the same as they had during the Contact and possibly Late Woodland periods. Little specific information is present regarding these activities, but hunting, fishing, and the gathering of shellfish and floral resources combined with some form of corn agriculture were preserved.

European settlers in the Chilmark area probably hunted, fished, and gathered much the same as native residents also did in that area. However, agriculture and husbandry were of much greater importance. Hay and "turkey wheat" or Indian corn were major crops to the early settlers. Rye, oats, and some barley were also probably grown. Salt grass and meadow grass were highly valued for cattle. Domesticated animals were introduced into the town from first settlement. Sheep were the primary form of livestock in addition to cattle, horses, hogs, goats, fowl, and probably oxen.

No mills or other industries were in operation in Chilmark during this period.

VI. COLONIAL PERIOD (1675-1775)

A. Transportation Routes

Native trails undoubtedly continued to be used. The Takemmy to Nashowakemmuck native trail was laid out as the South Road in 1704 reportedly as a continuation of the Mill path or schoolhouse path from Tisbury. This roadway was extended as settlement grew. In 1748 the Menemsha Road was laid out from Menemsha Pond to the common (south) road.

B. Population

Native American population likely continued its decline throughout the Colonial period to a total of 188 persons in 1765. Native population concentrations likely continued in the southern areas of town.

While Europeans were first present in Chilmark during the late Plantation period, it was the Colonial period which first witnessed actual population growth. By 1700, approximately 73 persons are reported in the town. Chilmark's population is reported to have increased more rapidly than other towns on Martha's Vineyard during the 18th century. In 1757, an "alarm list" (military list) lists 91 males, possibly representing 454 persons (91 x 5) (Banks 1911:6) by this date. By the 1765 census, 663 persons are reported. In 1776, 769 persons are listed, or one-quarter of the island's population.

C. Settlement Pattern

That Native Americans were living in Chilmark in 1765 there is no doubt. In that year, the Provincial Census listed 188 natives residing in the town. However, where, how, and under what conditions these people lived at present remains a mystery. Native residents in the area probably lived in coastal areas following settlement trends established for some time. The Menemsha and Lagoon Pond areas as well as Chilmark and Tisbury Great Pond areas are likely areas of settlement.

European settlement was slow in Chilmark prior to 1700. After that date settlement escalated in the southern areas of town in the vicinity of the South Pond, particularly north of Chilmark Pond and East of Menemsha Pond. In 1714, Chilmark was made a township including the island of Nomans Land.

D. Economic Base

Native American inhabitants in the Chilmark area probably continued hunting, fishing, and gathering wild food sources much the same as they did during earlier periods. Some form of limited agriculture was also probably pursued.

As European settlement progressed, hunting and fishing were still pursued. However, agriculture and husbandry were the main economic interests of the Colonial period settlers in the same way they were for earlier Plantation period settlers.

Industrial development also began in the Colonial period. By 1743, bog iron ore mining had begun (Banks 1911:68). Tanneries were in operation near Peaked Hill by 1726. Mills were also important. Prior to 1694, a fulling mill was in operation north of the South Road along Fulling Mill Brook. Between 1696 and 1700, a grist mill was established on New Mill River by Benjamin Skitte. A grist mill was also established on Roaring Brook before 1728.

Several licensed innkeepers or tavern keepers were present in Chilmark during the Colonial period. However, it is likely that some of these licenses covered the selling of liquor rather than the running of inns. At least fourteen persons were licensed from 1715 to 1777.

E. Architecture

Residential: Surviving buildings from this period are center chimney double-pile houses. The best known are 1 1/2 stories in height; the Hancock-Mitchell Home (at Quansoo) began as a three-bay house and was expanded to five. Hillman-Goff (Tea Lane) is a three-bay gambrel; Vincent-Clark (in east) is a four-bay house, and Hillman-Smith a five-bay house. There are also examples of 2 1/2-story houses, primarily of five bays.

Institutional: The first meetinghouse had been constructed by 1701, probably on Abel's Hill, of unknown appearance. A second house was constructed nearby on South Road in 1723. It was 40 feet in length, 35 feet in width, 20 feet stud with 12 floor pews and four front gallery pews. Although town meetings discussed constructing a schoolhouse nearby, it appears none was built. Plans were for 20 x 16 feet or 17 x 44 feet, with six-foot stud height.

VII. FEDERAL PERIOD (1775-1830)

A. Transportation Routes

The South Road, extending west to Mill Brook, remained the primary highway. A secondary road to Paint Mill Brook on the north coast extended on Meetinghouse Road-Tea Lane.

B. Population

Chilmark reached its peak population of 800 in 1800. In 1765 the population, then numbering 663, included 188 Indians, most of whom may have been resident in what is now Gay Head. By 1830, Chilmark's population had fallen to 691.

With expanding population, the town's institutions multiplied. The town was divided into school districts early to facilitate access. A second denomination, the Methodist, slowly gained converts after the visits by itinerants stationed at Holmes Hole (Vineyard Haven) in 1797-98, establishing a class in 1810. Town Baptists worshipped in Tisbury.

C. Settlement Pattern

Dispersed agricultural settlement continued. In 1780, most houses were located along South Road east of Fulling Brook, and near the meetinghouse center at Abel Hill. Small clusters developed in the southwest at Nashaquitsa Pond, and in the northwest at Menemsha, where a windmill was also located. In 1786, a new meetinghouse was located to the north, at the Tabor House Road/Middle Road intersection. In 1827, the old Edgartown Methodist Church was purchased and relocated on Middle Road west of Tea Lane in the east. A small hamlet had developed at Squibnocket in the west. Some seasonal fishing settlement was likely occurring on Nomans Land Island.

D. Economic Base

The raising of sheep was Chilmark's principal industry. Prior to Gray's Raid in the 1770s, there were said to be 20,000 head of sheep in Chilmark. By 1832, there were 7,000 head. Freeman, writing in 1807, wrote that the wool was "principally purchased by persons who come for it from Connecticut," although by 1832 it was also sold in Westport, New Bedford, and parts of Barnstable County. Some of the wool was also manufactured in Chilmark, and by 1790 a carding machine and fulling mill had been established which produced 4,000 yards of woollen cloth. Freeman also reported five waterpowered grist mills ("very small, and grind only two or three bushels of corn in a day").

Eighteenth-century bog-iron deposits continued to be worked as late as 1812, shipped across the sound to the forges of Plymouth and Bristol counties.

E. Architecture

Residential: The primary house type surviving from this period is the story-and-a-half interior chimney double-pile house. Most are five bays in width. A notable example is now used as the town's public library in the village. Occasionally lateral ells are added to the side. Two four-bay examples survive, as does a very wide house with double interior chimneys. They are located on the town's primary route, South Road.

Institutional: The town built its third meetinghouse on then Tea Lane (now Middle Road). Little about its appearance is known, but it had a spireless exterior stair tower and three galleries on its interior. The Methodists moved the former Edgartown meetinghouse to the corner of Meetinghouse and Middle Roads in 1827; its size was 80 x 40 feet.

VIII. EARLY INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1830-1870)

A. Transportation Routes

Middle Road east from Chilmark Center was officially laid out in 1845, and North Road east from Menemsha was laid out in 1849, although earlier roads along these routes almost certainly existed. In 1860, the County Road (South Road) was extended to Gay Head Light through the southwest past Nashaquitsa. This road was improved in 1870.

B. Population

Smith Mayhew, writing in 1831, wrote that the town

contains about 700 inhabitants: of this population upwards of fifty seamen are actually employed in whaling voyages, some in merchant voyages, and some a fishing; consequently our male inhabitants are spread in most all parts of the world.

Between 1830 and 1870, Chilmark's population continued to decline, reaching 476 by the latter date. In 1855, 13 of the total 676 claimed Ireland as their native land.

With the drop in population, institutions in the town stabilized. The Methodists became an independent society in 1833. The district school system was formalized in three areas. With disestablishment, a town hall was constructed. The Congregational Society waned, disappearing by period's end.

C. Settlement Pattern

Although the civic focus (with two churches, the town hall, and the post office after 1865) remained in the east, Squibnocket Village in the southwest developed as the main local settlement center, with residential development along South Road west of Menemsha Cross Road. The established Congregational meetinghouse center persisted, with the old church (?) used as a town house, and a new edifice relocated nearby to the south of Middle Road in 1842. In 1843, a new Methodist Church was built opposite the old one on Middle Road to the east. Small-scale mid-19th century industrial activity located in the north, with a paint mill on Paint Mill Brook, and brick kilns on Roaring Brook. Residential growth continued at Menemsha in the northwest. Addition of farmsteads continued along South Road, but with population decline, abandonment of dispersed agricultural settlement occurred. Seasonal occupancy by fishermen continued on Nomans Land Island, particularly on the west and north shores.

D. Economic Base

Mayhew wrote in 1831 that "large quantities of white clay are already found in this town, and some iron ore; and several kinds of paints have occasionally been made from ores." White clay was sent to Boston, Salem, and Taunton. At the outlet of Roaring Brook, a brickyard was established by 1831, selling its product on the island as well as in New Bedford.

In 1850, Hiram and Francis Nye, from Falmouth, established a paint mill for grinding colors out of the clay deposits near the shore. In 1865, the business produced 20 tons of red and yellow "carpet paint" and employed eight men.

Farming remained dominant throughout the period. Of the 265 farms on the Vineyard in 1850, Chilmark, with 96 had the largest number, followed by Tisbury (90) and Edgartown (79). Chilmark produced nearly half of the island's 23,147 pounds of butter, and almost six times the 710 pounds of cheese produced by Tisbury and Edgartown. Chilmark's wool production was also more than double that of Tisbury's, her nearest competitor.

E. Architecture

Residential: Story-and-a-half houses continued to be built during the early years of the period, of both three and five bays. The stud length is extended for more second floor height. The gable front form was introduced, however, and its three-bay, 2 1/2-story type is the most frequently appearing house in the town, about a dozen surviving; two have lateral ells. One house is four bays in width, and another is five bays and 2 1/2 stories. The Greek Revival ornament on all these houses is confined to the door surrounds. Later in the period, three-bay houses of both 1 1/2 and 2 1/2 stories were built with Italianate detailing. In spite of the presence of a brickyard, no houses were constructed of this material. Several barns from poorly fired bricks are known, one surviving converted to a house south of the Middle Road west of Meetinghouse Road. Nearly square in plan, their sides measured 30 to 35 feet, and had gable roofs with segmental arched doors in the longer sides.

Institutional: The Congregationalists built their fourth meetinghouse 20 rods south of the third near Middle Road in 1842; its appearance is unknown and it was dismantled in 1875. The Methodists built a new meetinghouse on the north side of the Middle Road in 1843; its gable front has four doric columns supporting its pediment, and a square tower with steeple and a pair of doors with a single window between. By 1863, the town had three schools. In the village, the school had two entries and center window in the gable end with a bell tower and is an exceptional survival; on the North Road, a three-bay gable fronted story-and-a-half structure with center entry may be a converted schoolhouse. The community's town hall of unknown appearance was located on Middle Road near the Congregational church early in the period.

Industrial: The brickyard included a brick, two-story, gable roofed firing area with stack, gabled frame warehouse, and long wharf.

IX. LATE INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1870-1915)

A. Transportation Routes

The established 19th century roads remained in use.

B. Population

After the separation of Gay Head and Gosnold, Chilmark's population continued to decline. Between 1875 and 1915, the town's population fell from 508 to 288. A small number of Portuguese (12 in 1915) made up most of the town's foreign-born population in the latter decades of the period. Nomansland in this period maintained a small permanent colony of fishermen, though probably never more than 4-5 families year round. In the spring and fall, however, the island's population expanded to almost a hundred

fishermen for the codfishing, mostly from Chilmark, Gay Head, and the North Shore (Huntington, p. 65).

C. Settlement Pattern

With continued population decline, little settlement development took place, and abandonment continued. The Congregational Meetinghouse was torn down in 1875. Squibnocket (now Chilmark Center) remained the settlement focus. A new town hall was built here in 1897. In 1915, the Methodist Episcopal Church and parsonage were moved to a site north of the town hall on the Menemsha Cross Road.

D. Economic Base

With the exhaustion of wood in the 1870s, the brick yard on Roaring Brook moved its operations to Gay Head. Farming remained Chilmark's dominant livelihood. In 1905, Chilmark farms produced more hay than any other town on the island.

The codfishing on Nomansland attracted almost a hundred fishermen for the spring and fall seasons, while smaller amounts of lobstering also were undertaken in the summer months.

E. Architecture

Residential: As population dwindled during the period, few new dwellings were constructed. Exceptions are located at Nashaquitza, where the magnificent views attracted a number of tourists led by the Blackwells in the 1860s. These later built substantial Queen Anne houses. Additional building activity occurred at Menemsha, primarily in the form of 1 1/2-story dwellings, quite small, as seasonal fishing shacks. In 1906 with the cutting of the new channel, the area became more important and shacks were moved from Lobsterville in Gay Head, some on Creek Hill converted to year-round use.

Institutional: As the village concentrated further west at Beetlebing Corner, the town built its second hall there in 1897. The building is 2 1/2-stories high, gable front, shingled, with pilaster ornamentation. The former building was moved and reused as a barn. Later, in 1919, the Methodist meetinghouse was relocated nearby.

X. EARLY MODERN PERIOD (1915-1940)

A. Transportation Routes

By the early 1930s, the road from West Tisbury through Chilmark Center to Gay Head had been paved (South Road), as was North Road from North Tisbury to Menemsha. Menemsha Cross Road in the west was also improved.

B. Population

Chilmark's population continued to decline, from 288 in 1915 to 226 in 1940. This trend continued until 1950 (pop. 183) when the post-war growth of the island began to effect Chilmark. By 1980, the number of year-round residents stood at 489.

C. Settlement Pattern

Some residential additions were made at Menemsha Village. Elsewhere, small summer resorts were developed at Nashaquitsa Cliffs in the southwest, and south of Abel Hill at Chilmark Pond.

D. Economic Base

With the introduction of gasoline powered engines in fishing boats, the cod fishermen no longer needed to be so near the actual fishing grounds. Lobsterville, and later Menemsha became their new base of operations. Later, as the price of codfish declined, it diminished there as well.

On the land, small-scale farming continued to be the rule, though some summer residences were established on the north and south coasts.

E. Architecture

Residential: More small dwellings were constructed at Menemsha, primarily story-and-a-half with porches, but also bungalows and a single two-story, pyramidal roofed house. Much waterfront property there was destroyed in the hurricane of 1938.

Institutional: With the establishment of the Coast Guard Station, a 2 1/2-story, five bay Colonial Revival structure with a cupola was moved from its former location in Gosnold.

XI. SURVEY OBSERVATIONS

There is no inventory for the town of Chilmark.

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