

# MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report

## GOSNOLD

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: Gosnold

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## I. TOPOGRAPHY

Gosnold, or the Elizabeth Islands, lies off the southwestern corner of Cape Cod. The township forms a chain of a dozen islands of varying sizes running westward from the mainland of Cape Cod at Woods Hole, between Buzzard's Bay and the Vineyard Sound. The islands bear the following names: Nonamesset, Uncatena, Monohansett, Naushon, Weepecket, Pasque, Nashawena, Penekese, Gull, Egg, and Cuttyhunk.

Topographically, the islands are dominated by the Buzzard's Bay or Falmouth Moraine which forms them. The landscape is characterized by numerous hills and hollows often referred to as a knob and kettle landscape. Most soils are rocky, although sandy loams are also present. In general, lowlands are the more fertile areas. Many of the larger islands contained some areas of fertile agricultural land. However, the islands have traditionally been best suited for grazing, particularly sheep. Drainage is predominantly subsurface, although most of the larger islands contain ponds, swamps, and small streams. Most of the larger islands average 100 feet or less in elevation, an exception being Cuttyhunk (154 feet), Nashawena (151 feet), Pasque (118 feet), and Naushon (136 feet). By the mid 19th century, most of the islands were limited to shrub vegetation. Eventually, secondary growth oak/pine and oak/maple growth was present with some dune vegetation.

## II. POLITICAL BOUNDARIES

The Elizabeth Islands were included in lands granted to Martha's Vineyard to the Mayhew family in 1641, and they were included in the manorial demense of "Tisbury Manor," established in 1671, while Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket were under New York jurisdiction. When Tisbury Manor was incorporated as the town of Chilmark in 1714, the Elizabeth Islands were included. The islanders attempted to affect independence from Chilmark and annexation to Dartmouth in 1788, but their bid was unsuccessful. A second effort at separation led to the incorporation of the islands as the otwn of Gosnold in 1864.

## III. HISTORIC OVERVIEW

Gosnold is a sparsely populated town, largely occupied by resort estates, made up of the dozen islands of the Elizabeth Island archipelago, located southwest of Woods Hole in Falmouth and northwest of Martha's Vineyard, between Buzzards Bay and Vineyard Sound. Seasonal native presence through the 17th century is highly probable. The islands were the site of early European explorations, with the site of the 1602 Gosnold landing and temporary settlement probably on Cuttyhunk Island. Mid-17th

century Mayhew family ownership was followed by inclusion in the Tisbury Manor estate, later the town of Chilmark on Martha's Vineyard. By the early 18th century, sale of the islands to various private owners had occurred. The removal of local timber resources was followed by use for extensive sheep and cattle grazing, which on some islands continued into the 20th century. By the early 18th century, Naushon Island had been established as a private, resort estate with deer park and game preserve. Tarpaulin Cove, also at Naushon Island, with its 1759 lighthouse, served as an important harbor. The area reportedly served as a staging ground for coastal privateering. During the Revolution, the islands were a frontier outpost for the colonists. They were also subjected to raids by the British navy, which used them as a rendezvous point during both the Revolution and the War of 1812. A government lighthouse was located on Cuttyhunk Island in 1822, and the islands continued to serve as an important gateway for maritime traffic into Buzzards Bay and Vineyard Sound. Early 19th century fishing and extensive livestock grazing was followed by seasonal resort development, focused on striped-bass fishing activities of the Cuttyhunk Club and the Pasque Island Club. Following incorporation in 1864, Cuttyhunk Village developed as the primary local settlement focus and civic center. Penikese Island was the site of the short-lived (1873) Anderson School of Natural History, and was subsequently (1907) the location of the state hospital for lepers. With the exception of Cuttyhunk and Penikese (now a State Wildlife Refuge), the islands remain in exclusive private ownership.

#### IV. CONTACT PERIOD (1500-1620)

##### A. Transportation Routes

No information is present regarding native paths or trails during the Contact period. The chain of about a dozen islands range from a few acres to several thousand acres in size. Thus, trails probably followed the outlines of the islands along the coast. Inter island travel by water also must have existed.

##### C. Population

Little information is present on which concrete estimates of native populations on Gosnold can be made. In fact, some doubt exists as to whether or not permanent native populations existed at all. Some authors feel the islands may have been used seasonally for fishing and were never inhabited year round. Some natives were present in the Elizabeth Islands, or Gosnold, during the Contact period; Gosnold witnessed them in his 1602 voyage. However, how many were present and how long they stayed is unknown. Major populations appear unlikely.

##### C. Settlement Pattern

No known native settlements are present for the Contact period in Gosnold or the Elizabeth Islands. Short-term seasonal (or shorter) encampments are probable, particularly on Naushon Island, the largest of the group. Beyond the names for the islands in the

Gosnold group, the general lack of Algonquian place names is a further indication of the lack of long-term interests (settlements) by Native Americans in the islands. The natives and the islands of the Gosnold group were reported to be within the political sphere of sachems in the Buzzard's Bay area rather than those of Martha's Vineyard.

Gosnold visited the Elizabeth Islands in 1602, making a landing and short-term settlement on Cuttyhunk Island.

#### D. Subsistence Patterns

Permanent settlement of the Gosnold area islands may not have taken place by natives at all on a substantial scale and not by Europeans until the late 18th century. Thus, subsistence by both white and native travelers to the islands may have been through hunting and fishing and the gathering of shellfish and wild plants. Should elongated settlement by natives have been much, it was more probably at Kataymuck or Naushon Island. In this instance, some form of corn agriculture may have been practiced. However, hunting, but primarily fishing, was probably the major subsistence focus on the islands.

Hunting in the Elizabeth Islands was probably restricted to the larger islands and primarily focused on deer and smaller mammals. Shellfishing was probably pursued, but not on the same scale as that on the mainland or the islands. Today, quahaugs are the major shellfish resource. Soft shell clams, bay scallop, oyster, and mussel may also have been available at times.

Alewives are not presently known on any of the islands in the Gosnold group. However, other marine species of fish were available, such as striped bass, bluefish, swordfish, porgie, tautoag, eels, mackerel, flounder, cod, haddock, and others. Lobsters, crabs, and snails were also present. Sea mammals such as whales and seals would also have been available at certain times of the year. Limited freshwater fishing may also have taken place, but on a small scale due to restricted resources.

### V. PLANTATION PERIOD (1620-1675)

#### A. Transportation Routes

No information exists regarding native paths or trails over that noted for the Contact period. Coastal island trails and inter-island travel by water appears likely. Gosnold's attempted trading station on Elizabeth's Isle (ca. 1602) was to rely on the natives "island hopping" to bring goods for trading.

#### B. Population

Little additional information exists regarding native or European population estimates for Gosnold over that discussed for the Contact period. Banks (1911:5) notes that the area was probably unsettled either by whites or natives during most of the first half of the 17th century. Banks (1911:7) cites Mayhew as stating

that in 1671 there were fifteen families of natives at Elizabeth Isles, of which seven were praying families. However, it is unknown whether these families were permanently residing or living there for a short duration.

### C. Settlement Pattern

No European or native settlements are known for this period. Europeans had not settled the Gosnold area after the short-term 1602 settlement of Cuttyhunk Island. It is unknown whether or not native populations lived in the islands year round or were seasonal visitors. Potential settlements (encampments) may eventually be found in coastal areas, particularly along coves, inlets, and pondside locations.

### D. Economic Base

No known European settlement during the period. Native American settlement was limited; possibly of a seasonal nature between islands and mainland. Native subsistence practices probably did not differ from the earlier Contact period. Hunting and fishing were practiced with a possible emphasis on fishing. Corn agriculture may have been practiced, but on a small scale and may have been restricted to the larger islands, particularly Naushon Island.

## VI. COLONIAL PERIOD (1675-1775)

### A. Transportation Routes

No new information is present regarding native or European trails, paths, or ways over that stated for the Contact and Plantation periods. Limited settlement at the end of the Colonial period probably resulted in some new pathways linking residences. However, coastal paths and travel by water were probably the extent of transportation networks.

### B. Population

Little evidence exists regarding native or European population estimates for Gosnold over the previous Contact and Plantation periods. By 1761, about 20 families were present, possibly representing 80 to 90 persons in 1777 (Banks 1911:3). In 1727 a native preacher, Daniel Shokkau, was reportedly preaching to a few families on Naushon Island, indicating there may have been natives on the island at that time.

### C. Settlement Pattern

While many of the lands in the Elizabeth Islands were first sold or divided in the mid 17th century, ca. 1666, it was not until the beginning of the Colonial period during the last quarter of the 17th century that real settlement was begun. Specific dates of settlement are, however, difficult to ascertain since lands were often owned but not always settled by landowners. In 1691

political jurisdiction was transferred from New York to Massachusetts.

The largest island of the group, Naushon Island, was also known at various times as Kataymuck, Tarpolin Cove, and Elizabeth's Island. Lands on this island were originally divided or purchased in 1666, but probably not settled until some time after that date. Settlement was to some extent developed by 1698 since records exist that the island was being used as a type of wealthy vacation or sporting estate with the stocking of deer, moose, and wild turkeys by that date. The importance of game animals continued, for in 1766 laws were passed protecting the island against poachers. The Tarpaulin Cove area was the locus for most of the settlement on Naushon Island, and most of Gosnold during the periods. A lighthouse was constructed here as early as 1759 as well as several taverns or inns also by that date. Tarpaulin Cove was apparently a popular stopping over point for vessels involved in the coastwise trade. In 1754 the town voted funds for a school, probably in Naushon Island which apparently was not built until some time later. In 1776 cannon were mounted at Tarpaulin Cove as part of the Sea-Coast Defense establishment.

Other larger islands in the Gosnold group were also settled during the late 17th and early 18th century. By 1690-1700 Cuttyhunk probably had one or two families. Pasque Island was first owned during the Plantation period, although not settled until ca. 1700 or later. Other islands such as Nummamessett, the easternmost of the group, were not settled until ca. 1767.

Most settlement on the Elizabeth Islands or Gosnold was probably along coastal areas or a short distance from the coast. Coastal settlement was particularly feasible since the largest island is only about two miles wide, making penetration of interior areas easy from coastal areas. Settlements were probably focused along coastal formations such as coves, inlets, etc., much the same as the settlement at Tarpaulin Cove on Naushon Island. Settlers probably settled Gosnold for simple residential purposes (e.g., vacations) and some farming.

#### D. Economic Base

While some hunting was still pursued into the Colonial period, its importance as a subsistence base was rapidly declining. Hunting was, however, gaining importance as a sport, particularly on Naushon Island, where deer, moose, and turkey were stocked as early as 1698. Fishing was important for Gosnold residents, a trend which would carry over into the 20th century.

Farming was pursued by several of Gosnold's residents, but little if any information exists regarding what was farmed and where during the early settlement. Husbandry was also important, particularly sheep and cattle, as attested to by accounts for losses of sheep and beef filed by island residents as a result of British raiding during the Revolutionary War, ca. 1775.

Taverns or inns were also important. At least six public houses or inns were located in Gosnold during the Colonial period, possibly all of them on or around Tarpaulin Cove or Naushon Island. This area served as a convenient "stopping over" point for vessels engaged in the New England coastal trade and fisheries.

#### E. Architecture

### VII. FEDERAL PERIOD (1775-1830)

#### A. Transportation Routes

Little roadway development occurred on any of the Elizabeth Islands, although the development of paths and trails may have been greatest in the northeast part of Naushon Island. In 1828, bridges were built here to connect Naushon with Uncatena Island and Nonamesset Island. Tarpaulin Cove on Naushon, with its mid-18th century lighthouse, remained the main harbor. Its proximity to the sea lanes made it a popular rendezvous point for pirates and privateers, as well as for British warships during the Revolution and the War of 1812. In 1816 the federal government built a new lighthouse at the south end of Tarpaulin Cove, and in 1822 it built a lighthouse at the southwest end of Cuttyhunk, which with the lighthouse at Gay Head (1799) marked the entrance to Vineyard Sound. On Naushon, wharves were probably in place at the Tarpaulin Cove lighthouse and tavern, and in 1803 a wharf was located at a harbor (probably Hadley Harbor) in the northeast.

#### B. Population

Population of the Elizabeth Islands about 100 through Federal period, according to Banks. "Nearly 20 families" in 1761. In 1790, population of four inhabited islands reported as: Naushon, 59; Pasque, 21; Cuttyhunk, 13; and Nashawena, 10.

#### C. Settlement Pattern

Only eighteen dwellings were reported on all the Elizabeth Islands in 1807, and for the most part the islands, denuded of their forest growth, continued to be used for sheep grazing. The exception was Naushon, where development of the Bowdoin family estate continued with construction of a mansion house in 1810 and forest preserves were maintained as a deer park. Salt works were built on nearby Uncatena Island to the north. A tavern remained in service at Tarpaulin Cove, and the federal government built a granite lighthouse here in 1816. A handful of buildings, essentially for shepherd families, dotted the other islands (Cuttyhunk, Nashawena, Pasque, and Penikese) in the early 19th century.

## D. Economic Base

Farming and fishing economy almost exclusively. Most of the islands owned by individual absentee owners as country estates ("Mansion House" on Naushon built 1810) and tenanted by small farmers or fishermen. In the Federal period, the raising of sheep became the principal business of these isolated islands. The lack of shelter meant that sheep produced heavy fleeces. By 1831 the islands may have had about 3500 sheep (based on Chilmark's total of 7016, and its decline to 3506 after Gosnold's incorporation). Much of this activity may have been on Naushon, which in 1817 had 2,000 sheep. That island was also "highly regarded for" butter and cheese. Salt works on Nonamesset. Freeman reported in 1807 that lobsters, scarce at Martha's Vineyard, were "caught in great abundance at all the Elizabeth Islands." Light established at Tarpaulin Cove, 1817.

## E. Architecture

### VIII. EARLY INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1830-1870)

#### A. Transportation Routes

Paths and trails continued to be used on the islands as part of extensive sheep grazing movements, but it is unlikely that any more formal road development took place. The Massachusetts Humane Society located a station at Nashawena, at the west end of that island's South Bluffs. No notable harbor developments appear to have occurred during the period. In 1836, several wharves were located on Naushon, including one at Kettle Cove, three at Tarpaulin Cove, and one at Hadley Harbor.

#### B. Population

No figures available until incorporation as a town in 1864, when the new town reported 108 persons. Number of residents probably remained fairly constant throughout period. Number of foreign-born negligible.

#### C. Settlement Pattern

Little new development occurred on the islands, which increasingly came under the control of a few wealthy families or groups. Naushon Island continued to be a Bowdoin family estate until 1842. By 1836, a trotting course was in place in the north, nine houses were scattered over the island, and walls divided the island into separate pasture areas. Salt storehouses were located on nearby Uncatena and Nonamesset Islands, and Uncatena had 1,500 feet of saltworks. In 1842, Naushon was sold to the Forbes and Swan families, and by 1856 the Forbes family controlled the entire island. In 1867, Penikese Island was sold to John Anderson, a New York tobacco merchant. Between 1866 and 1869, Pasque Island was bought up by the Pasque Island Club, a group of New York and Philadelphia businessmen who established a sport fishing colony there. At Cuttyhunk, a sport fishing club was established in 1864. The same year, the islands achieved independence from Chilmark, and were incorporated as the town of Gosnold.



#### D. Economic Base

No identified change in economic activity. When New Bedford and Fairhaven had almost 400 whale ships, Cuttyhunk's business chiefly to pilot ships into and out of New Bedford harbor. Islands began to attract summer residents in larger numbers beginning in the 1850s. John M. Forbes (1813-1898), the new "Master of Naushon," among the most prominent. Summer residents responsible for agitation for separation from Chilmark, 1863. Fishing clubs established on Cuttyhunk and Pasque in the 1860s dominated activity of both islands for remainder of century (Cuttyhunk Club, 1864; Pasque Island Club, 1866).

In 1865 the number of sheep in Gosnold reached 3928, higher than any other town in the study unit, and, at 310 sheep per square mile, higher than Nantucket or the Vineyard in their best years.

#### E. Architecture

### IX. LATE INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1870-1915)

#### A. Transportation Routes

The greatest amount of trail and path development by period's end was on the Forbes family island of Naushon. A government lifesaving station was established on Cuttyhunk Harbor near Canapisit Channel in 1890. The state built a stone wharf on Penikese Island ca. 1907 with the location there of the leper colony. By 1897, weekly mailboats served Cuttyhunk from New Bedford, weather permitting. During the summer, biweekly boats served the sport-fishing colony at Pasque Island.

#### B. Population

With new status as incorporated town, vasculating tenant population climbs from 99 (1870) to 155 in 1915. About one third of this number were of Cuttyhunk. The islands reached their peak population in 1900 with 164 residents. In 1915 28% of the resident population were foreign born. No single group predominated, six persons from Nova Scotia being the largest nationality represented.

Gosnold saw a 57% population increase over the period, but it remained the least population town in the study unit. In 1875, its foreign-born population (11 individuals) made up 10% of the total. By 1905, the foreign-born percentage had risen to 37%, primarily Swedes, Portuguese West Islanders, and English, as well as a half-dozen other nationalities. Although employment opportunities increased during the period, they remained extremely limited. In 1875, 35% of the male workforce were employed as mariners, many of them as pilots for ships entering Buzzards Bay. Agriculture engaged 23%. In 1905, 22% remained employed in transportation, 21% engaged in agriculture, 16% were classified as laborers, and 16% were fishermen. In addition, 13% were government employees, working at the town's lighthouses and lifesaving stations. Seasonal visitation increased, including the members of the Cuttyhunk and Pasque Island striped-bass fishing

clubs, and the students and instructors of the Andeson School of Natural History on Penikese Island. At period's end, the town's population included the patients at the small leper colony established by the state on Penikese Island.

### C. Settlement Pattern

While sheep grazing continued, new development on the islands was primarily resort-oriented. The exception was Penikese Island, on which two very different institutions were established during the period. Cuttyhunk became the main local settlement focus, and a small hamlet developed here south of Cuttyhunk Pond. The Cuttyhunk Club donated a building for use as a Methodist Church (ca. 1880), and a schoolhouse was located nearby. A government lifesaving station was built at the eastern end of the island in 1890. In 1903 a memorial tower was located in the west near the reputed site of Gosnold's 1602 landing. By 1915, stores and summer hotels were operating on the island.

To the north of Cuttyhunk, the Anderson School of Natural History, under the direction of the famous naturalist, Louis Agassiz, opened on Penikese Island in 1873. A new dormitory building was erected for summer students, but after one session Agassiz died, and the project fell to ruin. Anderson sold the island in 1883, and it returned to use as a sheep and turkey grazing area and a fishing outpost. In 1907, the state bought the island and established a leper colony there. Four cottages were built on the west side of the island, and an administration/hospital building was located to the east. A small cemetery was located in the north. To the east of Cuttyhunk, Nashawena Island continued as a sheep grazing territory. It came under the ownership of the Forbes family in 1905, and a few summer cottages were subsequently built here. Pasque Island remained under the domain of the striped bass fishing club through the period. A large clubhouse and numerous other buildings were located in the north by Robinson's Hole. By 1894, the islands contained 48 dwellings in total.

### D. Economic Base

Tenant farming and fishing remains the primary occupation of the year-round residents. Five farms reported 1885 and 3,770 sheep. Gazetteer that year reports large proportion engaged in fisheries; two thirds of the annual catch are porgies. Lobster business the principal business of the islands. The raising of sheep in Gosnold remained important as late as 1905. In that year the state agricultural census reported 2309 sheep on the islands -- more sheep than in any other town in Massachusetts.

Island of Penakese given by its owner, New York tobacco merchant John Anderson, to Louis Agassiz (1807-1873) for a summer school of natural history. Agassiz's idea, in the year of his death, was for a summer school -- then unheard of -- where teachers should be trained to see nature and teach others how to see it. Agassiz taught only one summer, dying in December of the same year. His son attempted to run the school for one more summer, but the school did not reopen after 1874. Cuttyhunk Club presents Church to town, 1880.

#### E. Architecture

#### X. EARLY MODERN PERIOD (1915-1940)

#### A. Transportation Routes

Seasonal boat service to the Pasque Island fishing colony continued until the Club was disbanded in 1923. Seasonal boat service also continued to Cuttyhunk during the summer months, with less frequent runs in the winter. Little island road development occurred.

#### B. Population

Population decline after 1915 as several islands reverted to natural state. By 1940 resident count was 136 and falling.

Gosnold lost 12% of its population over the period. In 1915, the town's foreign-born population stood at 28%, of which 30% were Canadians. By 1940, the foreign-born percentage had declined to 13%. Employment opportunities remained limited in 1915. Half of the town's workforce was engaged in fishing or agriculture, while 17% were employed in public service.

#### C. Settlement Pattern

Cuttyhunk continued to be the main local center. A library and town hall were added near the church and schoolhouse. By period's end, a dozen buildings clustered near the wharf at Cuttyhunk Pond, and two dozen more concentrated near the institutional complex on the hill to the south. On Penikese, the leper colony was disbanded ca. 1920 and the island was transferred to the state Department of Health. Four years later it became the property of the Division of Fisheries and Game. In 1925 the leper colony buildings were burned and the foundations dynamited. In 1939, the last caretakers left the island. The Pasque Island Club was disbanded in 1923. The hurricane of 1938 destroyed several buildings of the former fishing colony. The next year this island also became part of the Forbes family holdings.

## D. Economic Base

Fishing remains important occupation. The 1915 Lobster catch, valued at \$8,750, is the second highest reported catch of any town in the study unit, after Gay Head. William Wood (1858-1926), founder of American Woolen Company, purchased Cuttyhunk Club 1921 for use as summer residence. After unsuccessful attempt to buy the whole island, Wood became instrumental in introducing sewerage, town water, telephone, and harbor improvements.

## E. Architecture

### XI. SURVEY OBSERVATIONS

### XII. SOURCES

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