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Form 504

U. S. COAST AND GEODETIC SURVEY

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

DESCRIPTIVE REPORT

Type of Survey Topographic

Field No. 2388 Office No. 2389 2390

LOCALITY

State Massachusetts

General locality Martha's

Locality Vineyard

1894-98

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CHIEF OF PARTY

W. C. Hodgkins

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U. S. COAST AND GEODETIC SURVEY.

H. S. Pritchett, Superintendent.

State: Mass.

DESCRIPTIVE REPORT.

Topographic Sheet No. 2390
" 2388, 2389 2391

LOCALITY:

Martha's Vineyard

1897-98

CHIEF OF PARTY:

W. C. Hodgkins

Descriptive Report

to accompany Topographic Sheet 2390, of part of the island of Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts, surveyed in 1897 and 1898 and also covering Sheets 2388, 2389, and 2391 of adjoining parts of the same island.

The island of Martha's Vineyard is peculiar in the respect that within a very limited area it exhibits widely differing characteristics.

The northern part of the island is composed of a range of low hills of drift formation, elaborately molded by erosion, underlaid in many places by extensive deposits of variously colored clay and in great part wooded.

The southern portion consists of an extensive sandy plain, which however has a pretty regular slope from the base of the hills to the sea, covered with a low, dense growth of scrub oak.

This forms a tangled wilderness which can be penetrated only along the narrow roads or wagon trails which run through it in almost all directions.

Further west the hills reach to the south shore of the island and are only partly wooded.

These hills are generally thickly covered by large numbers of boulders of every size.
Still further west lies Gay Head, the western point of Martha's Vineyard and indeed almost a separate island, the intervening stretch of low land being broken by several large ponds.
Gay Head is an irregular mass of drift topped by numerous hillocks between which are small ponds and marshes. On both the southwestern and northeastern borders of this land mass are broad strips of sand beach, which are full of small sand dunes.
The small island called Nomans Land lies about three miles S.W. of the southern point of Martha's Vineyard (Squibnocket Point.)
It is less than two miles long from east to west and about one mile in greatest breadth.
It is of drift formation and everywhere, except on a small part of its northern side, presents to the sea steep cliffs of clay and gravel from 10 to 80 feet high, the boulders from the continual erosion by the sea lining the shores.
The western end of Martha's Vineyard terminates in a lofty cliff of parti-colored

clay, Gay Head proper, which is of very striking appearance from the great variety of colors shown by the various strata of clay.
The north shore of the island has a number of other high cliffs caused by the gradual undermining of the drift hills, and the boulders thus set free remain on the shore often forming dangerous reefs, like the celebrated "Devil's Bridge" off Gay Head, while the finer material is carried away by the current.
The south shore of the island is formed by a sand beach which is very regular in its sweep and which like a dam forms a number of ponds from what would appear to have been once arms of the sea.
The recession of the shore of the island, which appears to be nearly universal owing to continual wear, is probably more rapid on the south coast than elsewhere on account of its greater exposure to the full force of heavy seas.
The prevailing forest tree is the oak though other trees are found in considerable numbers. On the "plains" the scrub oak grows from 4 to 20 feet high while on the hills trees are

found which reach a height of from 50 to 75 ft. About three fourths of the surface is wooded and the larger part of the remainder is grass land.

The only town of any size within the limits of this work is Vineyard Haven, North Tisbury (or Middletown) and West Tisbury being only small villages of which the latter is the larger.

Vineyard Haven derives its prosperity chiefly from its summer visitors, though to some extent from the frequent use of its harbor as a refuge for coasting vessels.

From one hundred to two hundred sail may often be seen at anchor in bad weather.

The roads are generally sandy, but the so-called "State Road", a macadamized highway which is intended to eventually traverse the island, from Edgartown to Gay Head, is an excellent road, with few heavy grades.

There are no railroads, but an electric tramway connects Vineyard Haven with Cottage City. Cars are run only in the summer, however.

Fences are mostly commonly of stone, but often of wood or wire.

The principal change to be noted since the date of the old survey is the growth of Vineyard Haven, formerly called Holmes Hole, together with the building of numerous cottages for summer residents.

At the same time, the agricultural interests have retrograded and abandoned farm-houses are to be seen in all parts of the island.

Attempts have been made to utilize the extensive clay deposits for making brick, pottery, etc., but apparently these ventures have not been profitable.

The island is gradually becoming a great summer home for visitors from the main land, with which there is daily communication by steamer.

W. C. Hodgkins
Chief of Party