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## **“This Was Then” series by Chris Baer in the *Martha's Vineyard Times***

Photographs and text capture notable events at different Island locations.

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### **Early Immigrants:**

- “This Was Then: The Boston House”

<https://www.mvtimes.com/2017/01/17/this-was-then-the-boston-house/>

An Armenian immigrant, Krikor Barmakian, bought the Cottage City House (a summer boarding house and dining room built in the late 1870s) on Circuit Avenue in the early 1920s. He repurposed it as a successful ice cream parlor, then a café and hotel (The Boston House). During this time, the Boston House advertised as “an American and Chinese Restaurant and Cafeteria” that specialized in homemade pastry. A neighborhood fire in December 1938 destroyed The Boston House and other nearby buildings. Krikor, with the help of friends, rebuilt his hotel and quickly recovered from his losses by serving liquor to World War II servicemen.

- “This Was Then: Immigrants”

<https://www.mvtimes.com/2017/01/31/this-was-then-immigrants/>

This text about the predominance of immigrants in the Oak Bluffs population includes a dozen or more passport photographs. In 1905 more than a quarter of OB residents were foreign-born (mostly Portuguese-speaking from the Azores and Cape Verde).

- “This Was Then: The Japanese Stores”

<https://www.mvtimes.com/2016/11/10/this-was-then-the-japanese-stores/>

In the late 1870s, Circuit Avenue had its first “Japanese store.” Here one could buy Japanese lanterns, fireworks, porcelain, bronze gongs, silk fans, dolls and kimonos. These businesses were typically owned and run by American owners and had no Japanese employees. In 1907 there were two Syrian immigrants selling Turkish rugs on Circuit. At this time two additional stores on Circuit Ave. were owned and run by Japanese families. Internment during World War II severed the Vineyard’s ties with its Japanese merchants.

- “This Was Then: Ole, Frank, and Manny”

<https://www.mvtimes.com/2019/07/10/ole-frank-manny/>

A paragraph is devoted to the one in five Vineyarders who were foreign-born in 1915. Most of these individuals spoke Portuguese and lived on the outskirts of Oak Bluffs. Frank Terra, shown as part of a State Road building gang in 1912, immigrated to the U.S. in 1907. He also worked as a fisherman and as the keeper at the Oak Bluffs town dump. Manuel Jesus Perry poses to the right of Frank in a photo. His last name is a common Americanization of the Azorean surname “Pereira.”

#### **Festivals, Activities & Celebrations:**

- “This Was Then: Baseball”

<https://www.mvtimes.com/2018/08/22/this-was-then-baseball/>

The Martha’s Vineyard Herald (the Cottage City newspaper) had a baseball team that played at Ocean Park in the 1870s and ‘80s until it lost popularity to games played at Waban Park. Pick-up games by amateurs augmented professional baseball games in the 1900s and ‘10s (“The Cottage Citys” and the “Cottage City nine”).

- “This Was Then: The Cottage City Carnival”

<https://www.mvtimes.com/2019/05/15/cottage-city-carnival-1882-2/>

Grand Illumination in the 1870s and ‘80s was a huge celebration known as Cottage City Carnival. It included races around Ocean Park, swimming contests, tennis matches, and whaleboat races. Professional athletes performed stunts and people gathered for a greased pig race. Popular bands and an opera company performed in town parks. At twilight, houses throughout town were decorated with as many as 600 Chinese and Japanese lanterns. Around 8pm, a torchlit procession of brass bands, fire brigades, and decorated carriages paraded through two miles of Oak Bluffs streets. This procession ended at Ocean Park with an impressive fireworks display. In all the excitement and traffic, individual members of the public sustained serious injuries.

- “This Was Then: Straw Rides”

<https://www.mvtimes.com/2018/09/26/this-was-then-straw-rides/>

In the 1880s and 90s, straw wagon rides were a popular late night amusement of teens. The Pleasure Seekers' Club of Cottage City was one organization that hosted straw rides in 1887. A married female chaperone or two typically oversaw the raucous party of singers, instrumentalists, and dating couples who flew over roads on moonlit nights.

- "This Was Then: Summer Toboggans, Casino, North Bluffs Flying Horses"

<https://www.mvtimes.com/2017/07/06/summer-toboggans-casino-north-bluff-flying-horses/>

Details about location and function of many recreational buildings in Cottage City, 1880s and '90s.

- "This Was Then: Vineyard Haven Brass Band"

<https://www.mvtimes.com/2018/08/08/vineyard-haven-brass-band/>

A 16-piece band of young men stand at the corner of Circuit and Kennebec Avenues. The young musicians stand in front of a building that became the Cavert Tea Room run by two sisters who summered on the Vineyard.

- "This Was Then: Whaleboat Races"

<https://www.mvtimes.com/2018/10/10/this-was-then-whaleboat-races/>

As whaling dwindled, men began competing in whaleboat races. These became an annual tradition in 1875 and drew crowds of onlookers to Cottage City. The tradition faded out in the early 1890s.

#### **Local businesses:**

- "This Was Then: Blind Nathan"

<https://www.mvtimes.com/2015/04/08/this-was-then-blind-nathan/>

In front of Waban Park around 1890, two tricyclists stop in the vicinity of "Blind Nathan" Athearn. "Blind Nathan" sold candy, popcorn, chewing gum, and chocolates from large baskets. As he aged, he sold his wares from a stool in front of Perry's cigar store.

- "This Was Then: Darling's"

<https://www.mvtimes.com/2016/04/27/this-was-then-darlings/>

This store was a staple of Circuit Ave for much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It sold salt water taffy, popcorn, potato chips, peanuts, fudge, mints, Vermont caramels, and maple candies. The owner wintered in northern Vermont where he was the biggest stockholder in the largest wholesale maple sugar company in North America. In 1924, Carroll Darling purchased the Eagle Theater at the bottom of Circuit Ave.

- "This Was Then: Fred James"

<https://www.mvtimes.com/2015/07/01/this-was-then-fred-james/>

This photograph shows Charles "Fred" James sharing drinks with a friend in front of Tivoli on Circuit Avenue. He was one of few surviving Wampanoag from Christiantown and was often seen about town at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Mr. James drove a large horse-drawn wagon and owned a Cottage City livery stable.

- "This Was Then: Harding's Clothing Store"

<https://www.mvtimes.com/2017/06/05/hardings-clothing-store/>

A store front photo of a Circuit Ave. business that sold dry goods, clothing, and Queen Quality shoes from the 1870s to 1917. Mr. Harding's daughter took over the business in 1917 and added toys and children's items to the stock.

- "This Was Then: Harry Horton"

<https://www.mvtimes.com/2017/11/28/this-was-then-harry-horton/>

When the electric trolleys between Oak Bluffs and Vineyard Haven stopped running around 1918, automobile taxis provided service to travelers. Then, from the early 1920s through the 1930s, Harry Horton ran a bus line for summer down-Island commuters. The Oak Bluffs Depot, situated on the corner of Circuit Ave. extension at Farland Square, had a waiting room and a bus left from here on the hour.

- "This Was Then: Leonard's Motor Service"

<https://www.mvtimes.com/2016/08/30/leonards-motor-service/>

"Lake Avenue Garage" was bought by an Island school principal when he left education in 1921. Renamed "Leonard's Motor Service and Sport Shoppe," Alpha Leonard ran the business for 45 years and had a popular penny candy counter.

- "This Was Then: The Magnolia"

<https://www.mvtimes.com/2014/08/20/magnolia/>

The Magnolia restaurant stood at the foot of Circuit Avenue across from the Island Theater, the Vineyard's first modern movie theater. In the late 1800's, the Magnolia building housed Macy's, an Asian-themed souvenir shop.

- "This Was Then: Norton's Blacksmith Shop"

<https://www.mvtimes.com/2018/04/18/nortons-blacksmith-shop/>

Beginning in the 1890s, William Norton provided blacksmithing services to the Oak Bluffs community. The store was established immediately outside of the campground on Sunset Lake. In the 1910s, Norton moved his business to Lake Avenue.

- "This Was Then: Pearson's Drug Store"

[https://www.mvtimes.com/2016/08/02/this\\_was\\_then\\_pearsons\\_drug\\_store/](https://www.mvtimes.com/2016/08/02/this_was_then_pearsons_drug_store/)

Druggist William H. Pearson moved to Circuit Avenue, OB, after extensive experience operating stores in Lowell and Dorchester. From the mid 1920s through the early 1930s, Pearson created a popular drug store best remembered for its soda fountain and variety of tasty candies. Into the 1970s, a succession of pharmacists sold medicines, chocolates, cigars, film, sunglasses, beach toys, etc. out of this building.

- "This Was Then: Old Island Cooking"

<https://www.mvtimes.com/2016/12/28/old-island-cooking/>

This article includes landscape views of The New Hospital and highlights of "the Island Cook Book, published by the Herald Printing Co. of Circuit Avenue to raise funds for the new facility.

- "This Was Then: Professor Gough"

<https://www.mvtimes.com/2015/11/24/this-was-then-professor-gough/>

Bicycling reached its height of popularity in the 1890s. This photograph of an Oak Bluffs Bike Shop shows cyclist Gough (or “Goff”). This African-American man was one of the Island’s first linemen. He strung wires from electrical poles and had an interracial marriage.

- “This Was Then: The Pumping Station”

<https://www.mvtimes.com/2014/11/12/this-was-then-4/>

In the 1890s, a group of local entrepreneurs, wealthy summer residents, and professionals worked through the Cottage City Water Company to build the pumping station at the head of the Lagoon. Still active today, the Lagoon Pond Well might be amongst the oldest pumping stations in MA.

- “This Was Then: Studley’s Store”

<https://www.mvtimes.com/2017/06/14/this-was-then-studleys-store/>

An interior view of Clem Studley’s grocery store that opened around 1910 at the upper end of Circuit Ave. By 1930, it was a hardware store.

- “This Was Then: Walk Your Horses”

<https://www.mvtimes.com/2014/11/05/walk-horses/>

A photograph from around 1920 shows the Oak Bluffs steamship office and ferry pier. A large sign reads “WALK YOUR HORSES.” In 1922 there were 681 cars on the Island. By 1936 this number had jumped to 6,000.

- “This Was Then: Williston’s Pier

<https://www.mvtimes.com/2014/10/15/willistons-pier/>

This 1920 photograph of the Oak Bluffs harbor bears little resemblance to today’s wharf and businesses. Even the low, white ship that is tied to the end of the pier dates back to early efforts to save the lives of shipwrecked sailors, a task eventually subsumed by the US Coast Guard.

#### **Railroad & Political ties:**

- “This Was Then: The Engine “Active””

<https://www.mvtimes.com/2014/07/02/engine-active/>

The train “Active” is shown leaving the Oak Bluffs wharf on its way to deliver tourists to Katama. According to one reporter, “the locomotive... makes a tremendous amount of noise, wasting a great deal of steam as it snorts and puts.” From 1874 until 1895, “the little railroad demon” drowned out the sounds of steamers which “often come and go without sound of bell or whistle.

- “This Was Then: Mayor Blood”

<https://www.mvtimes.com/2018/09/12/this-was-then-mayor-blood/>

From its inception, Oak Bluffs had close ties with several mainland communities. These included Brooklyn, NY and Fitchburg, MA. Hiram Albion Blood, mayor of Fitchburg from 1875-1877, pursued both civic and commercial interests in Oak Bluffs. He built himself an impressive cottage and promoted railway travel to the Vineyard.

**Schooling & Professional Institutes:**

- “This Was Then: Professional Development”

<https://www.mvtimes.com/2015/12/30/this-was-then-professional-development/>

In the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Martha’s Vineyard Summer Institute offered continuing education classes to more than 700 teachers who travelled from most states in the country. The campus included dormitories, a dining hall, and Bartlett’s Art School.

- “This Was Then: Professor Miller’s Mill”

<https://www.mvtimes.com/2017/01/28/professor-millers-mill/>

Portrait painter Leslie Miller came to the Island in the 1870s to teach at the Martha’s Vineyard Summer Institute. In 1889 Professor Miller bought one of the oldest surviving houses in Oak Bluffs (dating to the 1740s). It was in a part of Eastville not yet connected to town water pipes. Professor Miller’s son helped to design a windmill that drew well water for indoor use.

- “This Was Then: ‘Rich Devils’”

<https://www.mvtimes.com/2018/07/25/this-was-then-rich-devils/>

From 1908 until around 1922, the Treat Preparatory School served wealthy boys in the Eastville section of Oak Bluffs. The school offered many outdoor pursuits and three hours a day of academic instruction. From May through October, students attended the Vineyard campus. Other months of the year the Treat School was based in Helenwood, Tennessee

**Tragedy strikes—manmade or nature made:****Beached**

- “This Was Then: The Augusta”

<https://www.mvtimes.com/2017/03/02/this-was-then-the-augusta/>

A powerful hurricane in 1924 caused the shipping steamer, Augusta, to veer off its Boston to NY route. It was beached at Eastville. The Coast Guard’s cutter Acusnet eventually freed the minimally damaged Augusta.

**Brawls**

- “This Was Then: Razors, shotguns, and brass knuckles

<https://www.mvtimes.com/2019/07/24/razors-shotguns-brass-knuckles/>

There is a long history of public aggression on the Island. Encounters in Oak Bluffs included a tar and feathering in 1874, a dance hall fight in 1900 with razor and baseball bat, a feud between friends in 1937, and a gang fight between teens outside the bowling alley in 1958.

- “This Was Then: Wild Bikers”

<https://www.mvtimes.com/2020/03/03/this-was-then-wild-bikers/>

In 1887, the MA division of the League of American Wheelmen held their annual meet in Oak Bluffs. It included a ball, dance, baseball game, tours, and a parade. In 1896 the League attracted some unruly roadsters. An additional police force prevented the destruction of property and indecent acts.

**Disease**

- “This was Then: The Artificial Pond”

<https://www.mvtimes.com/2017/03/14/this-was-then-the-artificial-pond/>

Oak Bluffs’ parks were laid out along with the town in the 1860s and ‘70s. A Boston Globe writer described Ocean Park as “a smooth-shaved lawn, intersected with concrete walks, having a picturesque artificial pond in the center, which is bordered with tastefully arranged flower beds.” Generations of children enjoyed the pond variously named “the Wading Pool,” “the Boat Pool,” “the Children’s Pool,” or “the Lake.” It was a place to sail toy boats and ride bikes. During years when the town spent less to maintain the pool, children avoided wading in the stagnant water and catching leeches or polio.

- “This Was Then: Bad Beef”

<https://www.mvtimes.com/2018/12/26/this-was-then-bad-beef/>

Frank Chase, a dairy farmer in Oak Bluffs, served as the Vineyard’s official livestock inspector in 1909. He called upon the state’s Cattle Bureau in Boston to assist with an outbreak of bovine tuberculosis. Bovine TB could be passed to people who drank unpasteurized milk from a sick cow. Local dairy farmers lost many of their cattle to this outbreak and engaged in a laborious system of barn disinfection. Against the wishes of local farmers and the steamship director, sick herd were shipped and sent by rail to a slaughtering plant in Somerville. Local inspector Frank Chase expressed alarm and anger that the diseased bovine meat would be transported so many miles and sold for human consumption.

- “This Was Then: The Hospital”

<https://www.mvtimes.com/2015/12/09/this-was-then-the-hospital/>

In 1922, the Martha’s Vineyard Hospital opened on Eastville Avenue in the former home of Capt. Hiram and Charlotte Daggett. The article goes on to talk about the earliest public hospitals on Martha’s Vineyard that opened to inoculate persons against smallpox in Colonial times.

**Fire**

- “This Was Then: Antique Photos of Martha’s Vineyard”

<https://www.mvtimes.com/2014/07/23/antique-photos-marthas-vineyard/>

A crowd of cyclists gathers in front of the Casino during the 1880s or 1890s. The Casino was built to be a roller skating rink and was later altered to include a stage and scenery. It served as a popular convention hall until it burned to the ground in September 1892.

- “This Was Then: An explosion in Cottage City”

<https://www.mvtimes.com/2018/08/15/explosion-cottage-city/>

The Cottage City Gas Co. was formed in 1885 and provided light and cooking fuel during the summer months. The Uncas Avenue plant continued to operate even when the company changed names. On a late May day in 1921, the Cape and Vineyard Electric Co. started preparing the plant for the new season. A large flame and loud noise occurred when the gas tank exploded. The Island House and a half dozen other homes across town suffered smaller explosions. Gas service ended in Oak Bluffs with these explosions and residents began using kerosene.

**Foul play**

- “This Was Then: 100 Years Ago Tivoli Girl”

<https://www.mvtimes.com/2016/04/06/100-years-ago-tivoli-girl/>

Photographs and news reports capture the interior of the Tivoli Dance Hall and the six-piece band. The bulk of the article discusses the fate of a live-in “nurse girl” who accompanied her employers to their summer home in Oak Bluffs. Her body showed up floating in about two feet of water at Farm Pond.

- “This Was Then: Missing Persons”

<https://www.mvtimes.com/2019/07/17/this-was-then-missing-persons/>

In November 1937, the body of an approximately 40-year-old woman washed up on the beach south of downtown OB near Harthaven. Costly dental work suggested that the missing person might be a socialite. Eventually initials on the wedding ring indicated the missing person was Ellen Shackelfod. The most likely cause of death was suicide by drowning.

- “This Was Then: The Pawnee House”

<https://www.mvtimes.com/2016/09/14/this-was-then-the-pawnee-house/>

The four-story Pawnee House on Circuit Avenue accommodated up to 200 guests and was second only to the Sea View Hotel. On several occasions in the 1800s, the Pawnee House was loosely associated with murder.

### **Technology**

- “This Was Then: Going Up!”

<https://www.mvtimes.com/2017/10/20/this-was-then-going-up/>

The first passenger elevator on the Island was powered by steam and served guests at the Sea View Hotel. The Cornell & Mayhew grocery store in Cottage City also had a hand-cranked elevator that broke a link in its chain and fell 20 feet instantly killing a worker.

- “This Was Then: Speed”

<https://www.mvtimes.com/2017/11/21/this-was-then-speed/>

Incidents that led to speed limits for vehicles not horse-powered and resulting controversy.

- “This Was Then: Tricycle girl vs. the runaway”

<https://www.mvtimes.com/2018/08/01/tricycle-girl-vs-runaway/>

The paved roads of Oak Bluffs made it especially suitable for bicyclists and tricyclists in the 1880s and ‘90s. All this traffic exposed children to traffic accidents. Runaway horses also posed a menace to pedestrian traffic. One at least one occasion a Tricycle Girl was chased by runaway horses attached to a hack.

### **Visitors, Beachgoing & Bathhouses:**

#### **Lodgings**

- “This Was Then: Baxter’s Saloon”

<https://www.mvtimes.com/2017/04/11/this-was-then-baxters-saloon/>

This photograph shows a band posing on the second floor balcony of Baxter House, a 75-guest hotel on Circuit Avenue. A sign on the front of this 1868 hotel advertises T. Baxter’s Saloon, likely referring to an ice cream parlor in this age of Prohibition. Baxter House and other hotels joined forces to hire brass bands from off-Island to play throughout town during the summer months.



- “This Was Then: Central House”

<https://www.mvtimes.com/2014/08/13/this-was-then-3/>

This imposing building – the Central House – was once a popular summer boarding house. It had 60 guest rooms, a large dining room, and an attached bakery. The Central House was the largest commercial building on Camp Meeting Association property and one of the oldest hotels in town. President Ulysses S. Grant ate at this dining room during his summer visit of 1874.

- “This Was Then: Kennebec”

<https://www.mvtimes.com/2018/09/19/this-was-then-kennebec/>

A half of a stereo card shows Park Avenue in OB looking north towards a massive roller-skating rink (the Casino). This summertime scene from the 1880s captures a row of cottages built as seasonal rentals and local businesses that took in lodgers.

- “This Was Then: The Naumkeag”

<https://www.mvtimes.com/2016/06/22/this-was-then-the-naumkeag/>

Opened in 1886 about two blocks from Ocean Park, the Hotel Naumkeag was among the largest and most expensive hotels in Cottage City. It advertised “electric bells and gas in all the rooms” as well as a large dining room that held dance “hops” for guests and their friends.

#### **Visitors & activities**

- “This Was Then: On bathing, bells, and birthday suits”

<https://www.mvtimes.com/2018/07/09/bathing-bells-birthday-suits/>

People-watching was as popular as water sports on Cottage City beaches. Fashions tested notions of propriety. Most Vineyard youth never learned to swim in spite of their proximity to the ocean.

- “This Was Then: Skipping the bathhouse”

<https://www.mvtimes.com/2018/06/20/this-was-then-skipping-the-bathhouse/>

Eleven o’clock in the morning was the peak period for bathing on the OB bluffs. The crowd was about equally divided between bathers and those watching in amusement. In 1894, skipping use of the bathhouse and wearing bathing suits around town was considered in poor taste.

- “This Was Then: Cottage City Snoozes”

<https://www.mvtimes.com/2016/07/11/cottage-city-snoozes/>

A photograph of people sitting upon a Cottage porch and the central figure relaxing in a hammock. A Boston Globe reporter in 1890 remarked on the chief preoccupations of resort goers -- “eat, sleep, and smoke.”

- “This Was Then: Drinking, Smoking, Lodging, and Fish”

<https://www.mvtimes.com/2015/06/03/this-was-then-drinking-smoking-lodging-and-fish/>

This photograph captures a quiet moment on Circuit Avenue in the late 1880s or early 1890s. Two high-wheeled bicycles stand propped in front of Cottage City House, a summer hotel. Squeezed behind a barber pole is the Globe Fish Market.

The most prominent business is G.D. Dows & Co., a branch store of a Boston bottling company which pioneered carbonated drinks.

- “This Was Then: The Hydroplane”

<https://www.mvtimes.com/2015/06/24/this-was-then-the-hydroplane/>

Account of the landing of a Curtiss NC-3 hydroplane in July 1919 at the Wesley pier. Myron Brown, an East Chop summer resident, stayed overnight with the two other crew members at the Wesley House.

- “This Was Then: The Neptune Club”

<https://www.mvtimes.com/2016/01/13/this-was-then-the-neptune-club/>

The Neptune Club, a yachting club of wealthy businessmen, pose on the steps of their hotel in Oak Bluffs. From 1860s through the 1880s, 40 or 50 members of this group cruised up the coast and stopped at resorts from Norwalk to Nantucket. Cottage City was a favorite destination, where the club might stay a week or more during the summer.

- “This Was Then: The Pagoda in Oak Bluffs”

<https://www.mvtimes.com/2014/09/03/pagoda-oak-bluffs/>

A wooden boulevard once stretched along Sea View Avenue from the wharf to Waban Park. Halfway along this “plank walk” was a octagonal pavilion built in the early 1870s. It served summertime refreshments to tourists who wanted to see-and-be-seen.

