

Country Editor: Henry Beetle Hough and the Vineyard Gazette

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When ordinary people die, remaining behind are gravestone epigraphs, photographs, and obituary notices pasted in family scrapbooks. Henry Beetle Hough, however, was not an ordinary man. A true New Englander, Hough loved writing as much as he loved the island called Martha's Vineyard. His passion for nature and his work to save it are the legacy he left behind. Journalism was in his blood: his father published a New Bedford newspaper and Hough followed in his footsteps, becoming a publisher and author of many books.

Hough's love for Martha's Vineyard (made famous as the location of the movie *Jaws*) began when his family summered on the unspoiled island's quaint beauty, among the island's natural citizens and the old whaling families' seafaring trade. When Henry was a child, "three- and four-masted schooners still sailed by laden with lumber and fat green fishing trawlers and sword fishing boats" and hailed from island harbors.

At the summerhouse named Fish Hook, "week-ends meant family clambakes on the beach, hoisting the American flag on the knoll near the house, and excursions to the big rock at Indian Hill, reputedly the site of an Indian dancing field." The view from atop the rock encompassed both sides of the island seeing "rocky vineyard shores and wild, dramatic boulders strewn with stones that rumble when the ocean breaks over them... melting into stretches of golden sand where sandpipers scurry, plovers nest in the dunes."

When the boys were not fishing for scup, hauling in lobster pots for dinner, swimming in refreshing ocean waters, making sand castles, picking blueberries and huckleberries for homemade jams, or playing scrub baseball, they were engrossed in reading in the Fish Hook library. As "they roasted corn and potatoes in the living room fireplace their father read to them. *Robinson Crusoe* was among Henry's favorites."

In 1920 when Henry married his wife Betty, they received as a wedding present from Henry's father the eight-decades-old newspaper, the *Vineyard Gazette*. The Houghs dedicated their lives to the newspaper's publication and to the island.

The author of this biography has written thirteen previous books and is a former managing editor of the *Vineyard Gazette*. This new volume offers tales of New England history, stories of Henry's New Bedford birthplace and his life on Martha's Vineyard, and legends of Norsemen landing on the island 1,000 years ago.

Hough was educated at Columbia University, survived the Great Depression as well as World Wars I and II, and died in 1985 at the age of eighty-nine. In the *Vineyard Gazette*, he published highlights of world events alongside the local tidbits that only a country newspaper could cover.

The Houghs used their newspaper's influence to stop the growth for profit threatening to erode the natural beauty of Martha's Vineyard. As mainland commercialism spread, developers looked at prime waterfront property for vacation homes and high-rise hotels. Hough spearheaded his writing campaign to save the island. Being a conservationist and naturalist, he essentially deposited valuable property in land trusts. He and his brother donated their inherited Fish

Hook land, consisting of “a hundred acres of trees, a brook, a swamp, a deep ravine, a bog, a peat hole where ducks found refuge and almost a quarter of a mile of shore. Today it is a part of the Cedar Tree Wildlife Sanctuary.” Hough said, “No matter what change, there is a substance that remains that should be preserved for the future to live over again in its own way.”

In 1978 when McDonald's wanted to open their “5,110th restaurant” on the island, “Henry, even at eighty-two, was eager to wage another war, referred to this battle as the *Down with McDonald's cause*.” Henry thought nothing of asking his neighbors, including the locals as well as Hollywood's island celebrities, to help. When he knocked on the doors of actress Mia Farrow; performers Beverly Sills, James Taylor, and Carly Simon; cartoonist Jules Feiffer; and novelists William Stryon and Robert Crichton, they all agreed to fight the battle that was “likened to the fight between David and Goliath.” When it was over and the “Golden Arches” were not planted on island soil, Yankee Hough described his fellow islander's standoff as “Akin to the spirit of the Boston Tea Party.”

As the ocean winds blow and the ferry comes in, new people visit the island and bask in its beauty as Henry once did, walking on the same sandy beaches, climbing the rose-covered dunes, following the nature trails, and listening to the birds. However, no one loved this small place off the coast of New England more than Henry, and in this book, filled with history and inside information about small-town publishing and land preservation, Henry's gifts live on in perpetuity.

NANCY FLINN LUDWIN (October 4, 2006)

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