

Quotes from Ogden & Others on Early Forests and their Change

“Character and Composition of the Vineyard Woodlands

By no stretch of the imagination can any of these woodlands be called "forests". It is true that there are some very good woodlands which, in the absence of further disturbance, will probably develop into true forests in time. These "good woodlands" are restricted to the protected valleys and slopes of the moraine that forms the northwest coast of Martha's Vineyard." Pg. 24. (Ogden 1958)

“There can be little doubt that the species composition of the pre-colonial forests was much the same as today. That the forests were larger and probably somewhat richer in species abundance seems equally probable, although the evidence is less specific on this point. Data gleaned from early historical records indicate that large timber trees were the rule, rather than the exception, and that many of the early homes and fishing vessels were constructed of native wood (Banks, 1911).

There is very good evidence to support the inference suggested by Brereton's account that there were no forests of white pine on the island. All of the early homes which were constructed of native wood have hand-hewn oak beams and rafters. It seems unlikely that the colonists would have preferred so hard a wood had softer woods, such as pine or cedar, been available. Another indication that there must have been sizeable trees in the Vineyard forests is the record of a whaling ship 135 feet long, of 65 tons burden, that was constructed of Vineyard timber. Although the keel was not a single log, for the practice of splicing keels for added strength was initiated early in the ship-building trade, there are no oaks on the Vineyard today which approach the dimensions required for this construction." Pg. 32. (Ogden 1958)

“Vineyard cabinetmakers were highly skilled and were quick to take advantage of the variety of hardwoods found on the island. Pieces of furniture still survive made of native Walnut (*Juglans nigra*) as well as hickory (*Carya* spp.). Some of these articles, notably chair and pew seats, as well as wainscoting and paneling, require stock from trees not less than 30 and even 42 inches in diameter.” (Ogden 1958)

“Even in the best modern woodlands, referred to earlier in this paper* there are stone fences running through the woods.” Pg. 33. (Ogden 1958)

“The fact that beech and gum are similarly distributed in the modern Vineyard woodlands suggested that the area around the Airport bog may well have supported a pre-Colonial forest similar in composition to the "young forests" now found only in restricted and protected sites in the valleys along the north shore of the island. This lends some support to the concept of a mesic forest covering much more of the island in pre-Colonial times than at present.” Pg. 61. (Ogden 1958)

“From the studies reported in this paper, the follow-generalizations can be drawn:

- 1) The present vegetation is entirely secondary and the modern woodlands are in various stages of re-forestation following clear-cutting.
- 2) The early colonists found richer and more varied forests, with trees substantially larger than any now found in the area.
- 3) The dependence of the early colonists upon the forests for timber and fuel resulted in the depletion of seed sources and the disappearance of tree species which could not withstand repeated cutting and burning.
- 4) There is evidence of an early consciousness of the importance of woodlands, and attempts at a form of tree-farming. These efforts, however, would not spare those trees which could not stand repeated cutting, or which were especially prized for their wood.
- 5) From early historical documents it seems apparent that neither white pine nor chestnut were conspicuous members of the pre-colonial forests.
- 6) From pollen data, it seems probable that ash, basswood, and tulip trees were absent from the pre-colonial forests, or if present, were exceedingly rare.

- 7) The pollen evidence from Martha's Vineyard indicates at least two episodes of major forest disturbance in postglacial time. It is probable that at least one of these episodes may have been due to forest clearance and land occupation by early Indian inhabitants." Pg. 75 & 76. (Ogden 1958)

Colonial Settlement 17th C

Witness Tree Data: Tisbury (36): RO – 50%; WO – 31%; H – 8%; PP – 6%; Edgartown (32): RO – 22%, WO – 44%, PP – 28%, H – 3%. Ave: RO-36%, WO-37%,PP-17%, H-6% (no beech)

“...the woods of this island were full of high timbered Oaks...(and) in the thickest part of these woods, you may see a furlong or more round about...” PO: “At least some portions, if not all, of the Vineyard were covered with a high canopied mature forest when the colonists arrived”.

“...the pre-colonial forests of Martha’s Vineyard did not contain any different trees than are now found on the island, but rather, that the present “better woodlands” now found in only in restricted sites in a small part of the island, were once more widespread”. (*Ogden 1961*)

“Thus a relatively scarce native community type—modified somewhat with the addition of several introduced taxa became considerably more widespread because of human disturbance.” (Dunwiddie 1990)