

Development History

Chilmark, 1776

It was not until 1714 that Chilmark, by petition to the General Court of Massachusetts, was incorporated as a town. For forty years prior to that time, it had the unusual legal status of a "manor" in the ownership of Thomas Mayhew and his grandson Matthew.

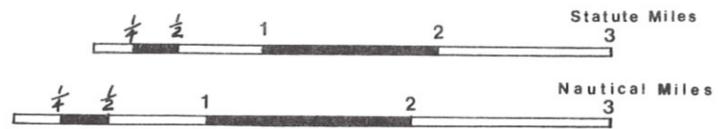
Thomas Mayhew, a merchant of Watertown, Massachusetts, had purchased Martha's Vineyard, along with the Elizabeth Islands and Nantucket, from grantees of the King of England in 1641. The following year his son Thomas, with a small group, established the first English settlement on the Island at Edgartown. Sometime prior to 1680 John Mayhew, a grandson of the elder Thomas, built his house in Quenames and became the first English settler of what is now Chilmark.

The Mayhew family were ardent missionaries. Several spoke the Indian language, and they had excellent relationships with the Indian population. Although Thomas Mayhew owned the English rights to the land, he also purchased the Indian rights from the presiding sachems of the different sections. It was three purchases of Indian rights that comprised the "Manor of Tisbury" (later Chilmark) which was granted to Mayhew in 1671 by the English governor of New York, at the same time that he allowed incorporation of the towns of Edgartown and Tisbury (now West Tisbury).

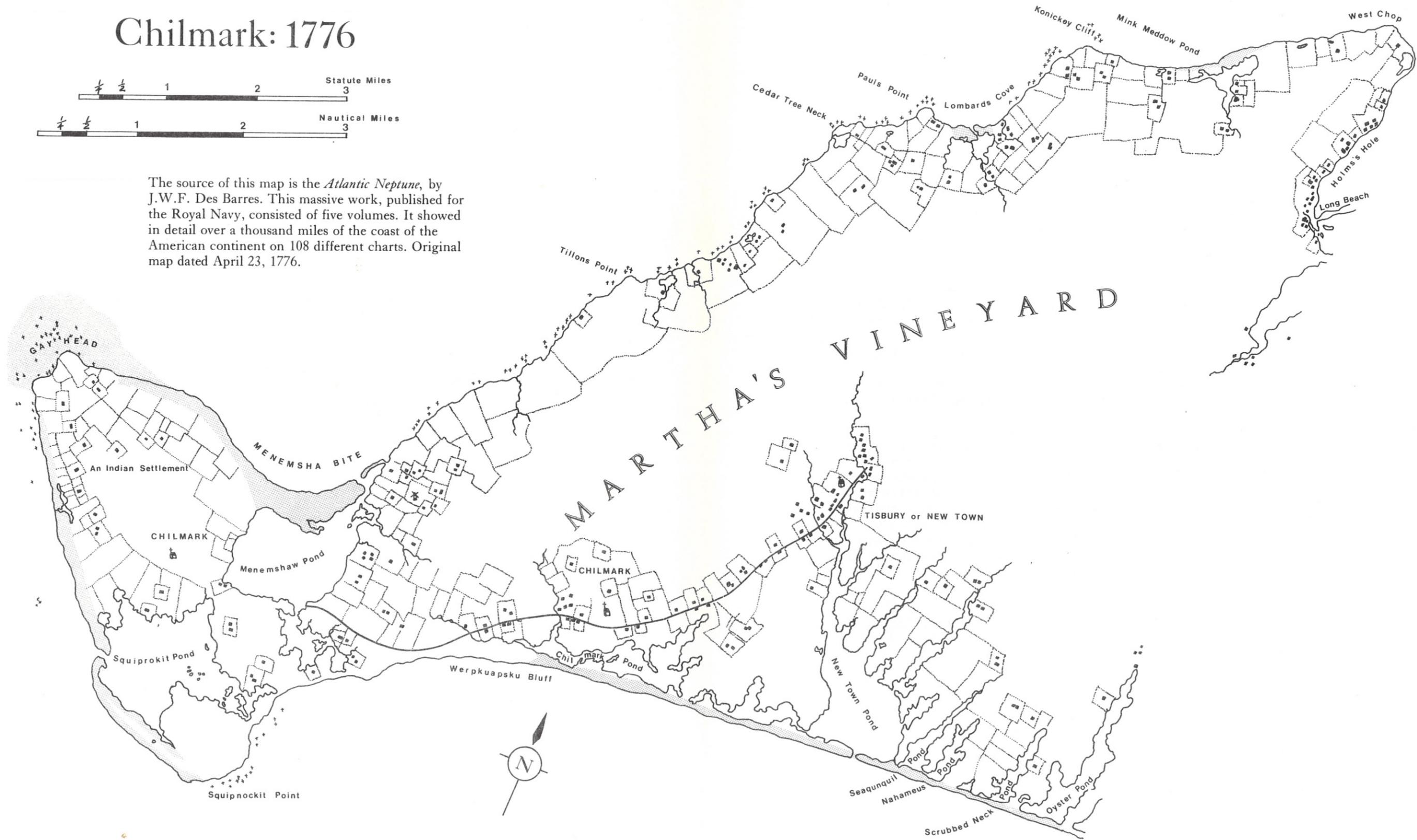
The Mayhews subsequently sold lots in the "Manor" to settlers and, according to Banks' History of Martha's Vineyard, a few land speculators. By 1700 there were 73 persons in Chilmark, and in 1776 the population was 769.

An indication of the prosperity of Chilmark at the time of the American Revolution is reflected in the number of sheep taken by the British General Grey, who commandeered livestock for British troops. Chilmark lost 5,000 of the 10,000 sheep taken from the Island during Grey's Raid.

Chilmark: 1776



The source of this map is the *Atlantic Neptune*, by J.W.F. Des Barres. This massive work, published for the Royal Navy, consisted of five volumes. It showed in detail over a thousand miles of the coast of the American continent on 108 different charts. Original map dated April 23, 1776.



Chilmark, 1852

The 1850 Chilmark town census, taken by Richard L. Pease of Edgartown, provides a good historical account of the town at that time:

"Chilmark was a land of working and subsistence farms...at least 96 farms in total. Almost all of the town was cleared, consisting of fields, meadow and pasture lands, all separated from one another by stone walls, and in the southern portion of town by split rail fences. There were a few and only a few woodlots. (Most people heated with peat, a few with coal, some with driftwood found on the beaches.) By far the largest two occupations within the town were farmers and mariners who made up 112 and 103 individuals respectively. (Together, these two occupations made up 81% of the labour force within the town.)"

In 1850 Chilmark's farms collectively had: 61 oxen, 92 horses, 154 swine, 247 cows, 543 other cattle, and 5,514 sheep. In that same year these farms collectively produced: "some wheat and orchard products, 305 bushels of barley, 518 bushels of rye, 1,714 bushels of oats, 2,723 bushels of potatoes, 4,458 bushels of corn, 4,170 pounds of cheese, 10,010 pounds of butter, and 946 tons of cultivated English hay (salt marsh hay not included)."

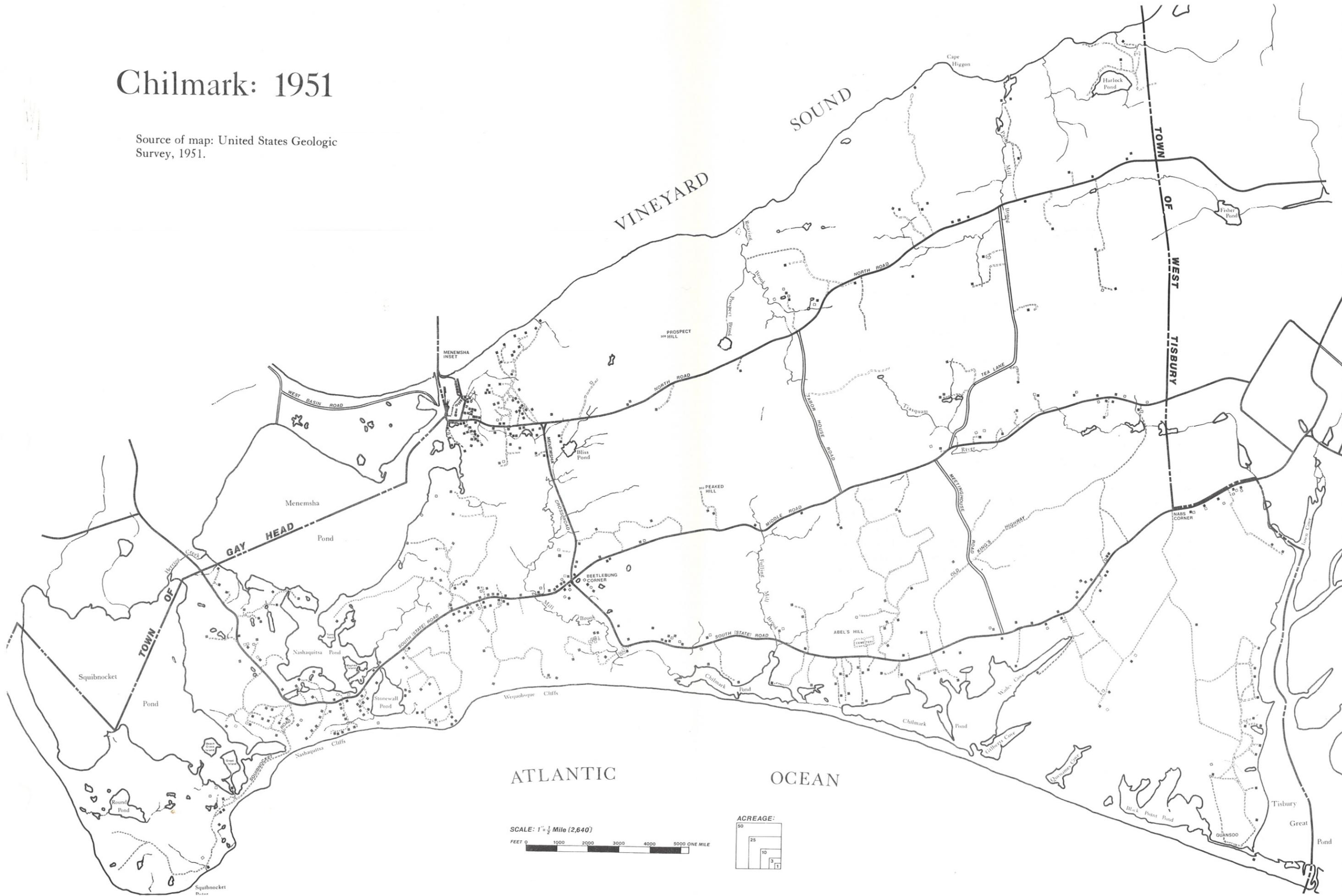
Chilmark, 1951

After 1800 and until after World War II Chilmark had an irregular but steady decline in population. The establishment of Gay Head and Gosnold (the Elizabeth Islands) in 1855 and 1864 as towns separate from Chilmark accounts for some of its population losses. The census showed Chilmark's population to be 747 in 1850, and 324 in 1900. In 1930 it was 252 and in 1950 it was 183.

The census figures do not reflect the summer population. The trickle of summer visitors who had "discovered" Chilmark in the last days of the nineteenth century had begun to grow in the first half of the twentieth century. While the number of year-round residents declined, the number of houses increased, indicating the arrival of the new settlers, the summer residents. In 1850, with a population of 747, there were only 117 houses. Eighty years later in 1930 the number of houses had increased by 75 to 192 with a population of 252. Twenty years after that, in 1950, the number of houses had increased to 320, with a year-round population of only 183, reflecting the increasing growth of the summer community.

Chilmark: 1951

Source of map: United States Geologic Survey, 1951.



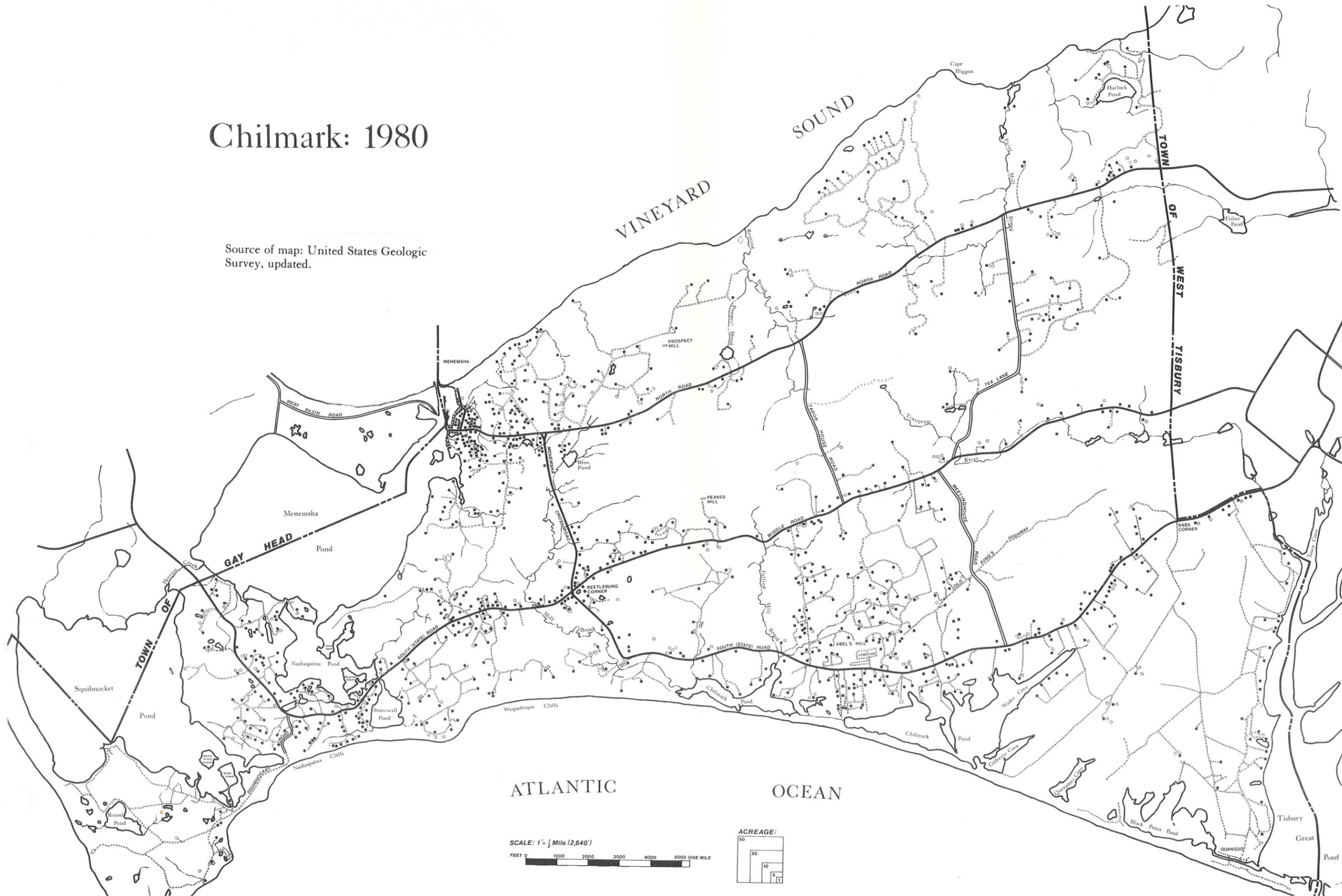
Chilmark, 1980

Late in the 1940's electricity had come to all of Chilmark. In the next thirty years new expressways from Boston, New York, and Connecticut cut hours off travel time to Martha's Vineyard. Commencing in the late 1960's widespread media coverage brought the Island for the first time to the attention of the entire world. Land speculators began to arrive. Publicity seemed to breed more publicity and innumerable travel articles on Martha's Vineyard began to appear in newspapers and magazines. The Steamship Authority has undertaken nationwide advertising to bring more and more visitors here. In the past 10 years commercialization and summer congestion in the down-Island towns have increased dramatically. Pressure for land and houses increases every year throughout the Island.

The Federal Census shows an increase in Chilmark's year-round population from 183 in 1950 to 489 in 1980. The number of houses increased in the same period from 320 to 831.

Chilmark: 1980

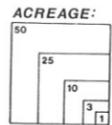
Source of map: United States Geologic Survey, updated.



ATLANTIC OCEAN

SCALE: 1" = 1/2 Mile (2,640')

FEET 0 1000 2000 3000 4000 5000 ONE MILE



Chilmark, 1984

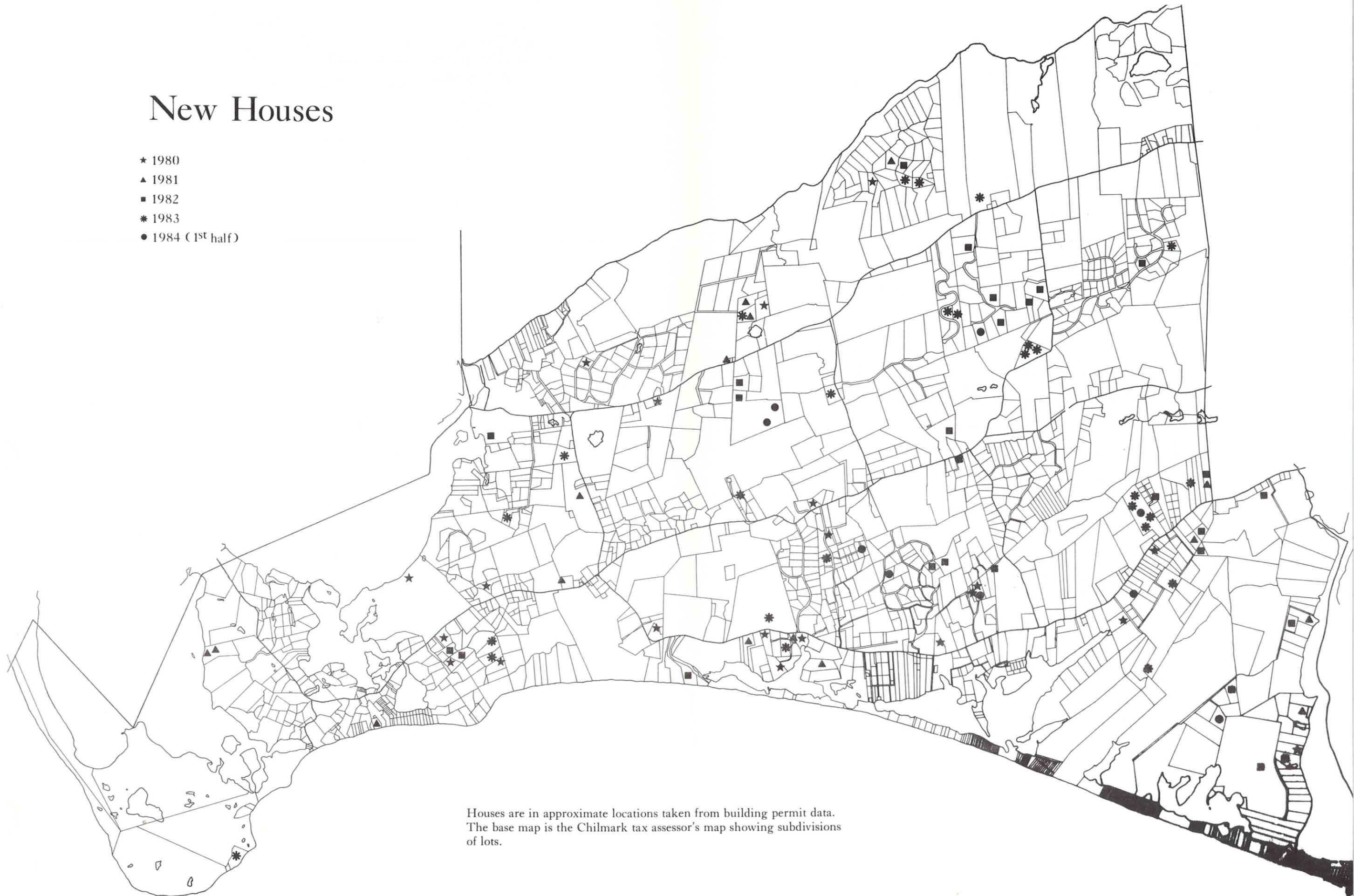
The accompanying map, taken from building permit records, shows the approximate locations of properties where new houses were started from January 1980 until June 1984. The number of new houses started during this 4½-year period was 117, bringing the total number of houses in town to 948. The map shows a dispersal of new houses throughout the town, a pattern generally referred to as "suburban sprawl." At the present time land prices have reached heights never before imagined possible and the size of new houses is becoming increasingly large. But in spite of all the pressures of development, much of the essential quality of Chilmark has changed little through the years. Former sheep pastures have grown up with trees and brush and while some views have been lost, vegetation hides much of the recent development. The town still remains a place of outstanding natural beauty where life is informal and unpretentious.

A random selection of statistics may provide some idea of the town in 1984.

Number of lots on tax roll:	2,326
Number of year-round residents:	499
Assessed value of real estate:	\$180,826,130.00
Number of registered voters:	560
Number of houses:	948
Number of police:	3 year-round, 3 summer
Number of Highway Department employees:	1
Number of Town Hall staff:	1 full-time, 4 part-time
Number of Chilmark students in Vineyard Schools:	84
Number of beach stickers:	Lucy Vincent 1049
	Squibnocket 689
Beach stickers to inns and guest houses:	750
Number of Fence Viewers:	3

New Houses

- ★ 1980
- ▲ 1981
- 1982
- * 1983
- 1984 (1st half)



Houses are in approximate locations taken from building permit data.
The base map is the Chilmark tax assessor's map showing subdivisions
of lots.