BRANT SHOOTING

THOMAS MARTINDALE.

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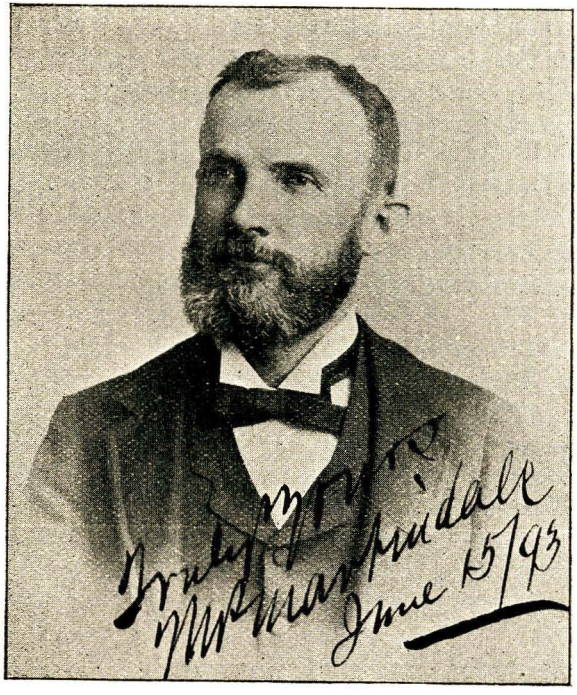

Truly yours
Marshfield
June 15/93

THE STORY of a week's shooting on Monomoy Island, Cape Cod, Mass., a week of storms, rain, snow, hail, sleet, thunder with vivid lightning, and extreme cold, and yet in spite of the exposure—twice a day wading one thousand yards to our shooting boxes (guided by ten one hundred yard stakes) when we couldn't see from one stake to the next for the fog or sleeting snow; sitting in the box at times over our knees in water and the waves slapping down the backs of our necks over the boxes, with the thermometer almost down to freezing. Despite all these adverse circumstances, it was a week never to be forgotten, a week full of adventure and novelty; lots of ozone, a superabundance of sleep and rest, with plenty of sea food for sustenance (superbly prepared); a week that was a total blank as far as news of the outside world was concerned. No letters, no newspapers, no telegrams to disturb or distract the attention. For once business and shop were relegated out of sight and hearing, politics fared little better, but song, story and jest held high carnival. "Dull care" was banished on our arrival, and his woeful face was never permitted to enter the joyous portals of the old club house while we held possession. For one week at least he was a stranger and a pilgrim, with no abiding place on the sands of Monomoy Island or the waters thereof.

PLYMOUTH, MASS.
CAPE COD.

BRANT SHOOTING.

EXCELLENT SPORT ON THE COAST OF NEW ENGLAND.

MONOMOY ISLAND, Mass., April 7.

"HELLO! there's branters," said a native of Cape Cod, as we left the little mixed freight and passenger train at Chatham, Mass., on the morning of April 4. "There be nine on 'em," he said, as we were counted up by his mental arithmetic; and he was right. There were nine of us, with guns, woolen clothes, rubber clothes, canvas clothes, oil clothes, with leather boots, rubber boots, rubber hats, with crates of onions, boxes of loaded shells, cases of canned goods, mysterious looking "stun jugs" and "sich."

Nine of us from Boston, Worcester, Quincy, Dorchester, Florida and Philadelphia, all drawn together by the Freemasonry of sport, and the shibboleth was "Brant." The day before I left Philadelphia I told a prominent Market Street merchant that I was going shooting for a short time. He asked what I was going to shoot at time this o' year. "Brant," I replied.

"Well," he said, "when I was a boy I used to shoot squirrels with a rifle, and got so that I could shoot them back of the head every time." (How far back he didn't say.)

"Well," I answered, "brant are much harder to shoot than squirrels, for they run faster than rabbits and are much bigger." "Well, I declare," he said, and then relapsed into silence, perfectly satisfied that he knew all about it.

WARY AND SUSPICIOUS.

For the information of this Market Street merchant I will say that the brant is a small goose, and at this time of year is on his way Northward, merrily helped along by hundreds of guns belching forth No. 3 to No. 1 shot from all sorts of innocent looking shoot-

ing boxes, surrounded with decoys, both artificial and natural. The brant is here in countless numbers.

It is surely a strange bird; wary, suspicious, swift of wing, plump and fat, with beautiful plumage and graceful form. For ages it has bothered the greatest of natural scientists to know its breeding habitat, the late Professor Spencer Baird having worried himself more than any other savant over this undiscovered territory. No living man, it is said, has ever seen the nest or an egg of the brant, and no matter how far explorers have forced their way Northward, the brant has always been seen winging on still further North. Therefore the guides out here (some of whom have grown gray in the pursuit of "brantin'") claim that there surely must be an open Polar Sea where the weather is warm enough to hatch out their eggs, and where food is plenty and nutritious, for they come down in the fall of the year fat and sleek as a pullet. The young birds come South strong of wing and as cunning as a fox.

Monomoy Island lies off the mainland in the ocean a few miles from Chatham, Mass. Between the island and the mainland the succulent sea grass waves gracefully to the gentle swell of the tide or the fierce "Northeaster," which has been blowing a gale since we arrived.

SEA GRASS AS FOOD.

Sea grass is the natural food of the "brant." The stretch of sheltered water here is large enough to leave the birds plenty of room to move around in swinging columns without coming within range of the sink boxes, and it is only when the tides and winds are favorable that the birds are brought within the line of danger. The "Monomoy Branting Club" (the only one, I believe, on the continent) has a couple of comfortable houses built on a bluff or sand dune, with artistically constructed sink boxes placed at the most favorable points and a large stock of wooden decoys. Live brant with clipped wings help to lure their brethren into danger with as much apparent satisfaction and enjoyment as the setter dog has in flushing grouse or quail. The club is formed mostly of Eastern gentlemen, all, of course, enthusiasts in sporting, and the number is limited to twenty, each member being entitled to invite one guest. Four members only are permitted to be here at one

time, and, as the shooting lasts five weeks, each set with their guests have one week's fun. At dinner in the little hotel at Chatham we met the party who had preceeded us, returning to the "Hub" with seventy-four "brant," bronzed cheeks and ravenous appetites.

Four guides are engaged by the club. They are men who thoroughly know the habits of the birds, understand the tides and currents, handling boats, and know how to shoot besides.

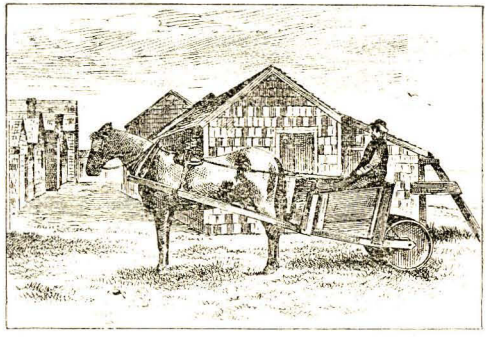
FASCINATING WORK.

One of them has been continuously at the business of "guidin'" for thirty-one years, during all that time only missing two days—one when he had to go to a funeral and the other when he had to go to court. The care of family, the tender offices of friends, the seductions of courtship, the excitement of the play or the circus have no allurement for these weather-beaten, blue-eyed and kindly men when once the branting season opens. During the rest of the year they earn a comfortable but precarious living by fishing and wrecking. They watch the shifting sands, the gloomy fogs, the blinding snow storms with earnest solicitude, for this is truly a dangerous place for the unwary mariner. Close by the island lies the wreck of the yacht Alva, which all the wealth of its owner, Mr. Vanderbilt, could not save. Right on the beach lies the keel, the ribs and spars of the good ship Altamah, while her cargo of lumber is strewn on the beach for a long distance, the drifting sand now covering it up as with a winding sheet. This vessel struck the wreck of the Alva, opening a huge rent in her bow, and the lashing surf did the rest. During the winter the fine steamer Cottage City, from Portland, Me., to New York, struck in about fourteen feet of water. She held fast until after thousands of boxes of merchandise were thrown overboard, when, with the aid of a tug and a high tide, she was gotten off, and without rudder or sternpost was towed to New York.

NOT TRADES LEAGUE MEN.

Our friends, the guides, lament the fact that most of the jettisoned cargo floated out to sea, but with the balance, which was weighty enough to sink, they have been engaged for some weeks in grappling and bringing to the surface and shore, out of fifteen

feet of water. Of course, some odd lots have been brought up. Among them was a case of 2500 little boxes of split leaden bullets for fish line sinkers and several cases of white, flinty rock, consigned to a Trenton pottery, which the wreckers are much out of heart about, because of their weight and also because no one down here can tell whether they are worth the freight to Trenton or not. These wreckers, branters and fishermen live an apparently happy, contented life, undisturbed by the fluctuations in Reading or New England stocks, oblivious of the latest Eastern fashions, totally unconcerned as to whether the hoop skirt comes in or goes out. They do not even seem to care whether the Public Building Commission is abolished or the telephone rates reduced, or whether the silver act is repealed or a special session is called, but they do care if favoring tide and howling gusts bring plenty of brant to the decoys, for that cheers their hearts, warms their imaginations and fills their pockets with "coin of the realm."



OVERSAND EXPRESS.

TALES OF THE WRECKERS.

LIFE AMONG THE BRAVE MEN OF CAPE COD—A NERVY ISLANDER.

ON the barren and inhospitable sand dune of four miles long by one-quarter of a mile broad, which formerly was laid down on the old charts as "Malabar" Island, but now, from some reason that I could not find out, is called Monomoy Island, a number of professional wreckers ply their risky, exciting and speculative calling. I have always associated, in my mind, wreckers with pirates, thinking that the terms were synonymous. On the contrary, I have found that the wrecker is a man who risks his very existence to save property, both of vessel, cargo and human life; that in the pursuit of his calling he shows rare bravery, great nerve, hardihood of no common character, shrewd wisdom and cunning in disposing of his "flotsam and jetsam" and a knowledge of law relating to maritime affairs that often outwits the keenest Cape Cod barrister.

For a week I have been with four of these rugged sea dogs, all of them now long past the half century mark (one of them being 70 years of age), and yet when the winds are fierce, the fogs dense, the snows blinding, they are one and all on the "qui vive" for the signals of distress from some unfortunate coaster, or steamer or full rigged ship. To-day I have walked for miles along the beach, threading my way over and among a cargo of Southern hard pine lumber of over two hundred thousand feet, which is piled high and dry on the sand from the wreck of the Altamaha, a Scotch vessel, built forty-five years ago. This lumber was sold a few days since for $2.75 and $2.25 per thousand feet, as it lies, and men are now at work removing the coverlid of sand from it, measuring and marking it. Then the purchaser will have his hands full in getting it to Boston to market, the question being whether he will reap any

profit from it or not, or rather how much will he lose on the purchase.

WHERE THE ALVA WAS LOST.

Close by the island lies the wreck of Mr. Vanderbilt's famous yacht Alva, whose walnut fixtures and trimmings are even yet coming daily to shore. A contractor is now, and has been for some time, at work endeavoring to blow her to pieces and removing the obstruction, the Government having awarded him the contract for about $9000, only half the amount the next lowest bidder asked for doing the same work. The contractor brought a little steamer down from Brooklyn (that is so slow that this morning as she was under full steam I mistook her for a stationary light ship), and when the tide ebbs the lowest he is able to get about half an hour's work at the wreck each day, as then she lies in fourteen feet of water. It is thought he will not make a fortune out of the job.

The owners of the valuable steamer Cottage City, which came ashore here, the vessel and cargo valued at $130,000, sent the captain of the life-saving crew at this station, who had given vital assistance to the vessel in getting her off the shoals after she had jettisoned a large portion of her cargo, the munificent sum of $5 for each man of his crew. The captain promptly returned the donation, with the assertion that he himself could easily afford to give his crew that much without seriously hurting his bank account; but the owners of a small coaler that was helped off by the same crew promptly sent the men $25 each, which was a distinction with a difference.

Since I arrived here a vessel of 500 tons burden has gone to the bad on the Handkerchief Shoals, which are a few miles from the island. A fleet of small craft is daily making visits to the wreck, buying and laying in a generous supply of coal for the winter's fires of the residents of Harwich, Dennis and Chatham at varying prices of from $1 per ton to a lump price for what the dory, sloop, cat boat or yacht can hold.

Some time since a vessel showed signals of distress off the island in a moderate storm. The daring wreckers were soon aboard of her, and found the captain, with his wife and children, anxious to be taken off. She had five and a half feet of water in the hold. The captain was half owner. She was well insured, and he did

not care what became of her so that she was beached and the crew, himself and family taken off in safety. The wreckers, together with the life-saving service, manned the three pumps, got her under way and into the calm waters of the bay, where she was sold by the underwriters, the wreckers' share of the "treasure trove" being about $40 per man.

HAD SCUTTLED THE VESSEL.

Another vessel was abandoned here some years ago which, when the wreck was broken up, was found to have two huge plugs in her side below the water line, which showed conclusively that the captain, in order to reap the insurance, had deliberately filled her with water. Then, finding she was sinking too fast, he had driven the plugs home so as to enable the crew to get ashore without danger.

One of the narrators of these "tales of shipwreck" waddles along with one leg bent out from him like a drawn bow. He has had it broken three times, and now, while it will bear his "heft," as he calls it, he can carry little more than that without severe physical distress. The first time it was broken was aboard a shipwrecked vessel that he had agreed to stay by—all alone—while a tug towed her into a haven of rest. The wind was blowing a gale. The hawser being drawn so tight as to have little or no "bight," he had become fearful that the strain might part it from fraying by rubbing on the sides of the "eye" through which it passed, and while he was examining it the iron plating of the "eye" snapped—crumbled like an egg shell—under the strain, one of the pieces striking him on his leg below the knee, breaking it in three places. He was just able to signal the tug, which was soon alongside. A consultation between the injured man and the captain resulted in the latter taking him into Hyannis, Mass., where he was driven to the station in time to take a train for New Bedford, which in those days was the nearest place where he could or did expect to find efficient surgical aid.

The railroad service at that time was primitive, the time slow, the track rough as a corduroy road to the crippled wrecker, and the journey in the cars alone lasted just eight hours, during which time he had to hold his knee tightly with his hands all the while the nerve-trying, excruciating journey continued. The doctor who set

it complimented him on his wonderful exhibition of pluck and grit, kept him in bed eight weeks and sent him home with the "best bad leg," as he expressed it, of any he had ever seen. In these days of anæsthetics and improved railroad facilities such a trip would be of rare occurrence.

THE OLD CUSTOM OF BUNDLING.

Among the quaint customs that I find engrafted here on the Cape, but which, like the rest, is slowly vanishing before the march of the newspaper, the telegraph, the telephone and the railroad, is the old Scottish custom of "bundling."

I was at first incredulous that this custom still existed or had ever had a foothold on this continent, but I soon found indubitable proof of it. "Bundling" is a method of courtship that from motives of economy, saving light and fire, is and was practiced to a great extent in Scotland, although it is fast dying out there, as the stern necessity for economy becomes lessened by increased comforts and prosperity.

A CAPE COD LIGHTHOUSE.

QUAINT CAPE COD FOLKS.

EVIDENCES ON EVERY HAND OF THEIR STRUGGLE FOR EXISTENCE.

ON my journey down here, via the Old Colony Railroad, I was much impressed by the evidences on every hand of the bitter struggle the sturdy Cape Cod people have to wage at all times to provide for the rude shelter and homely fare which their existence demands in these barren stretches of sand dunes, pine forests and cranberry bogs. We can, without any trouble, read in their faces the story of scanty crops, grown on poor soil; of continued exposure to wind and weather in the pursuit of the finny tribe that swim in the numerous bays and channels as well as in the dangerous regions of the "Grand Banks" and Block Island, or in the laborious and patience-trying business of raising cranberries.

The Old Colony Railroad, whose stock is held largely by the natives of Cape Cod, and who look upon this road as the great railroad of the world, has a time-honored custom of giving a free ticket to Boston and return to its stockholders on the Cape to attend its annual meeting in Boston. A man owning one share has this privilege in common with his more wealthy neighbor. Therefore, if a Cape Codder has five shares you may rest assured that the shares will be entered singly for each member of his family, so that all five of them may make the annual tour to the "Hub." Of course, this was always a great day, and the great crowd required the whole equipment of the road to promptly handle it with safety and dispatch.

Now there are grave stories told that as the control of the road has changed this great free excursion is to be done away with, and there are loud murmurings of discontent among the people at the abolition of this old-time custom. Rare stories of the poverty of

Cape Codders are told, these few lines being suggestive and to the point:

> There was a young lady of Truro
> That wanted a mahogany bureau;
> Her papa said, "Great God!
> All the men of Cape Cod
> Couldn't pay for a mahogany bureau."

THE BRANT AS WEATHER PROPHETS.

As our particular object here was to shoot "brant," we were gladdened by a sight yesterday that will long stay in the memory as a wonderful instance of the instinct and wisdom of migrating seafowl. For days strong Nor'easters have blown fiercely, accompanied by snow, sleet, rain, thunder and lightning, and the brant could have made but little headway had they tried to proceed on their journey Northwards. But they did not try. They knew better than "Old Probs" what the weather was going to be. Yesterday afternoon there was a lull in the storm and a fog set in, and the brant congregated in long columns, flapping their wings and making the most deafening outcries. Our guides said: "The birds are preparing to start. The weather will settle by morning," but after the fog came a furious gale, with vivid flashes of lightning, loud peals of thunder and down pouring of rain, which lasted all night, and for once our confidence in the brant's wisdom and judgment was shaken. But lo and behold, this morning the sun arose bright and warm, with a Southwest wind, and up and away the brant were flying Northward. First a series of swooping circles, rising higher and higher in the air, a pause and off they go by the thousands, in flocks of from three to five hundred, carefully marshaled and efficiently led by some old gander, who will not allow his companions to rest from their flight until the Bay of Fundy or Prince Edward's Island is reached.

BRANT IN THEIR DREAMS.

This afternoon, no doubt, other flocks equally as large will reach here from the South, stopping to rest and to feed before they again resume their journey to their mysterious and unknown nesting place. As the one conversation, the one aim of the "nine on us" is brant, we have become saturated with the theme, and we think

brant, dream brant, talk brant and shoot brant. One of the party has been worked upon so much by the excitement that at the card table—for there's a pack down here—he will throw down his hand and wildly exclaim: "I want to shoot a brant!" In bed he will toss wearily from side to side as the others sit and watch him, and he will moan, "I want to shoot a brant." After a while a little tiny snore is heard, then a faint murmur, "I want to shoot"—another louder snore and a whisper—"a brant," and then he is gone to the land of pleasant dreams, banging the birds right and left, in fancy jumping out of the sink box and retrieving them from the swift-flowing tide, wearily carrying them back to the shanty, past ten one hundred yard stakes—one thousand yards of deep wading, and only to awake to the cruel truth that it's but a dream. But we are all getting our share of the shooting, and even our brant enthusiast will soon have enough to quiet his excited and heated imagination.

CAPE COD COOKING.

The cooking at the club house on Monomoy Island deserves a warm word of tribute. There are two chefs—Sam Josephs and Frank Rogers—who revel in producing dishes peculiar to the Cape and Island that are at once enticing, nourishing and appetizing. Some of their productions defy my faint power to depict, but I will long cherish the recollections of their huge bowl of delicious stewed scallops, their quahog stews, quahog pies, quahog fritters, clam chowders, steamed clams, broiled clams, fresh boiled cod, fish balls with the accompaniment of thin slices of raw Bermuda onions, fresh cucumbers, the finest of butter, Java coffee and water that made my heart thump when I tasted it to think of how long, oh, how long it will be before a Philadelphian can hope to see his city supplied with such sparkling aqua pura! Now, to this magnificent bill of fare, please add ravenous appetites in one and all of us from our open air exercise, and what wonder then that when we turn into our bunks sweet sleep, sleep without bromides, sleep without hop pillows at once embraces us, and in spite of the poundings of the surf at our very doors, the thunder and the storm, we awake not until Alonzo, the guide, says: "Gentlemen, gentlemen, the tide's a-flowin' in," and everybody gets up.

EMBARKATION OF THE PILGRIMS.

THE BRANT A WARY BIRD.

THE HARDSHIPS OF GUNNING OFF SHORE AT MONOMOY ISLAND.

A MAN must be a sportsman of the most enthusiastic type, with a good constitution, plenty of patience, ability to withstand cold, wet and exposure, as well as a fair shot, to be successful in brant shooting, the birds are so very wary, so seldom are deceived, keeping nearly always out of the range of the heaviest charges of powder and shot, that it is sport attended with many disappointments, a great deal of waiting, and when the excitement of a shot is obtained it is all over as quick as a flash, and you wonder how it all happened. Let me describe how it is done.

During the early spring the guides have sunk boxes large enough to hold three men, either out on the bay in shallow water, piling up around them hundreds of wheelbarrowfuls of sand at low tide (covering the same and neatly fastening it down with a sail cloth, so that the rushing tides cannot carry it away) to represent a sand bar, or out on the jutting points of land in the bay, always using plenty of sand, behind which the gunners are to sit with bowed heads, but with watchful eyes and ears. Out in front of these boxes wooden decoys are fixed on a framework like the letter V, five on each frame, all strung together, so that they turn with the tide and wind, and look natural enough to deceive the oldest gander in the flock.

Then two gunners with the guide wend their way to the boxes when the tide is flowing in, the gunners encased in hip rubber boots, two or three pairs of stockings, a heavy suit, flannel shirts, sweaters, overcoats, and lastly an oilskin suit, if the weather be rough. The gunners get in the boxes, arrange their pipes, their shells, bail the water out, while the guide takes from a basket a pair of brant with clipped wings that he deftly harnesses together like a span of

horses. The yokes, made with leathern thongs, are on their feet instead of their necks. They are allowed to swim or wade out quite a distance, being secured by a cord, which is kept on a reel in the sink box.

The particular offices these birds are to perform are (when the brant are flying or swimming any where near) to flap their wings and "honk" their wild relatives into danger among the decoys; and it is amazing how intelligent they are in their work; how they get away out of range when the wild birds are being covered by the deadly breach-loader, and how they chatter to themselves with quiet satisfaction when the battery has been unmasked and the fallen birds retrieved. When all is ready the guide gets into the box, and then the trials of endurance, patience and expectancy begin. There is no lack of birds in sight—thousands of them—and their cries at times is deafening, but they keep provokingly far enough off to make you feel as if your head must never again be raised. You soon get cramped, numb with cold, with the wind, and maybe rain, or snow or sleet blowing and pelting in your face, but you must not get up.

Once I sat for over five hours in a box, with rain, snow and sleet driving in my teeth, and occasionally the water from the high tide washing over my back and down my neck, but five birds finally came up like a flash within range, flying down the wind with the speed of a carrier pigeon. We got a shot apiece, and three are left behind, while the other two are soon miles away, and then our long wait and exposure is all forgotten. We say: "How did those two birds get away?" I'll bet they're crippled!" Watch them!" "They're going down!" "No, they're not!" "Yes, they are!" and so on, but the birds are not ours, that is a sure thing. So you never know when out of the haze, or the clear sky, like a meteor from behind you, or straight on, a bunch of birds may come, deceived by your pair of live "honkers" and your bunch of wooden shams. Or again, a flock may be feeding and unconsciously drifting with the inflowing tide towards your box, occasionally giving a quick, suspicious look, swimming back a little, then onward again, and, of course, to raise the tip of your hat above the brim of the sand bank or to get up to stretch yourself is tantamount to a speedy departure of the "mysterious bird of the North." Therefore it is the man who can stand this sort of work the best

who is likely to make the biggest bag. But a great deal depends upon the wind as well, for if the currents of air should be blowing off shore there is not much chance of successful shooting, as the wind keeps drifting them away from the decoys, while they are feeding, and if any should get shot and drop down at long range, they are apt to get out of reach before they can be retrieved.

We were seven days on Monomoy Island, and we had a fierce Nor'easter blowing nearly the whole time, so that what success we had, which was thirty-six brant, was solely attributable to lots of patience and perseverance against hard conditions.

But the sport compels you to be out in the open air, to inhale the ozone and the ocean breezes. Your appetite, oh! your appetite; you've found it, and such a discovery! You can eat anything and digest it, too. And you feel that with your trusty gun, your enticing decoys, your hidden retreats, that you are a match for this grand bird.

> "Nor on the surges of the boundless air,
> Though borne triumphant, are they safe; the gun,
> Glanc'd just, and sudden, from the gunner's eye,
> O'ertakes their sounding pinions; and again,
> Immediate brings them from the towering wing,
> Dead to the ground; or drives them wide dispersed,
> Wounded and wheeling various, down the wind."

This season the brant arrived in great numbers at Monomoy as early as February, but finding their natural food—the eel grass—sealed in ice, they were forced to wing their way backwards, and they made many fruitless attempts to get a chance at their feeding grounds, always being repulsed by cold weather incident to the lateness of the season, and forcing them to make compulsory trips of hundreds of miles to the Southward before they could obtain their sustenance, but they are grand "flyers," and a few hundred miles of flight is only like a morning walk for them, for they don't seem to worry the least bit about it; but as soon as the ice was melted and the succulent eel grass was exposed to view, then they arrived in countless numbers. Some say that between the 5th and 10th of April more birds were seen at the Island than ever was seen before at one time. But the wrecks and wreckage on the Island drew all manner of sail boats to the scene to get coal and lumber,

the birds were therefore continually disturbed in their feeding. They were occasionally fired on at long range from these sail boats, which harassed and frightened them, keeping them for hours on the move, which, together with unfavorable winds and storms, reduced the total bag for the season to 197 brant. This was the result of the work of seven weekly parties, aggregating fifty-seven sportsmen, and an average of 28 to each party, and, as my party bagged 36, we have no reason to complain. Of the 197 killed, 103 were young birds and 94 old birds. This proportion of young birds ought to have made the shooting better, as the young birds (in the language of the president of the club, Mr. W. Hapgood) "are less wary, more social and more easily decoyed, and will carry off less lead than the tough old birds, and then it often happens that the elders are led by unsuspicious youth into places of danger where it would be impossible to coax them when separated, therefore the presence of so many juvenile visitors is always a joy to the heart of the sportsman."

THOMAS MARTINDALE.

Minnesota
Historical Society