

Put your information in The Independent

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters must be received **by noon Tuesday** for publication in that week's paper. Letters may be handwritten, typed or emailed to don@nantucketindependent.com. Be sure to include an address and phone number. All letters are printed at the editor's discretion and may be edited.

CALENDAR

The calendar section includes free listings and photos of island events. Email your event listing to Gene Mahon, events@nantucketindependent.com. Fax: 508-228-4858. Listings and photos for consideration must be received **by 5 p.m. Friday**.

ENGAGEMENTS & WEDDING ANNOUNCEMENTS

Provide either your own pre-written announcement or fill out one of our forms and we will write it for you. Announcements and photos are printed free of charge. Forms are available at The Independent, and may be faxed or emailed. Call 508.228.1654, or email sharon@nantucketindependent.com. Announcements and photos must be received **by 5 p.m. Friday**.

BIRTHS AND FIRST BIRTHDAYS

Provide us with your child's name, date of birth, name of parents, siblings and grandparents. You may submit a photo or drop by the office anytime during normal business hours and we will take the photo for you. Must be received **by 5 p.m. Friday**. Email: don@nantucketindependent.com

OBITUARIES

Provide either your own pre-written obituary or fill out one of our forms and we will write it for you. Obituaries and photos are printed free of charge. Forms are available at The Independent, and may be faxed or emailed. Call 508.228.1654, or email sharon@nantucketindependent.com. Obituaries and photos must be received **by 5 p.m. Monday**.

ADVERTISING

For rates and information about advertising in The Independent or one of our special publications: Gennifer Costanzo or Hadley St. John Dutra, 508.228.1654, gennifer@nantucketindependent.com hadley@nantucketindependent.com.

NEWS

Direct news tips, information and questions to: Don Costanzo, Editor, 508.228.1654, don@nantucketindependent.com.

ARTS

Direct arts-related information and questions to: Don Costanzo, Editor, 508.228.1654, don@nantucketindependent.com.

SPORTS

Direct sports-related information and questions to: Steve Sheppard, Sports Editor, 508.228.1654, shep@nantucketindependent.com.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

Please direct orders and address changes to: Sharon Liburd or Dan Drake, 508.228.1654, sharon@nantucketindependent.com, drake@nantucketindependent.com

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THE LONG REACH OF SERENDIPITY

I have previously marveled at the broad scope of Google with its ability to connect people from around the world on subjects of common interest. For better or worse, these columns have elicited comments from as diverse places as Duplin County, North Carolina and Australia. The reason? It is their ability to obtain Google News Alerts on any subject of interest to them.

For the unfamiliar, if you so choose, Google will send you an email alert whenever a reference to, say, "Nantucket" appears in a news article — almost any news article, from anywhere. Thus, if there is an account of a Whalers' win in the off island media, the alert will pop up in your email. So too will an alert for an account of disaster befalling a cruise ship named *Nantucket* somewhere far away or for a piece about the Nantucket theme of some New York, suburban community's flower show which has been forced to the local newspaper.

As I write this Tuesday morning, the most recent item listed in a Google News search of "Nantucket" is a self-help piece from a Bulgarian, English-language Web site providing wedding photography tips from Nantucket photographer Mark Pommert. No doubt, an alert waits in my mailbox keyed off the word "Nantucket," used as an adjective to place the photographer.

Interesting? Yes, in a way. Newsworthy? Hardly. However, Google isn't going to pick and choose your news for you — at least not yet. You want "Nantucket," you get everything which mentions "Nantucket" — usually several times a day.

At times, this ability to pick up on tidbits of digitized information from almost anywhere can be disconcerting. I, for one, am not particularly happy knowing that someone in Arizona is reading over my shoulder and may well send me — in response to my invitation for comments, I presume, — a diatribe against immigrants and my intelligence, in response to a column on the subject (immigrants) as it relates to Nantucket.

Few would deny that that Google is also the ultimate search engine. The format of others may be preferable to some people, but at the end of the day, the breadth and depth of information that can be found through Google make it superior. Trial and error is still involved and flipping through 218,000 references to "bay scallops" to find what one is looking for can be frustrating. Nonetheless, Google is a great resource for, among others, lazy writers and harried fact checkers.

On another front, Google has become an incredible powerhouse in the world of advertising. Witness the current attempt by Microsoft to take over Yahoo, an obvious attempt by Gates & company to try to compete in the advertising arena on Google's level. Such is Google's growing success as the go-to place for letting your fingers do the walking, there are those who profess that the printed Yellow Pages will be out of business within the next three to five years.

At least one local real estate firm decided a few months ago to put almost all of its advertising dollar eggs in the Google basket as a test to see whether Google does a better job of getting to prospective home-buyers than print advertising. If the experiment works, the implications could be very...uh, interesting.

Why this paean to Google? And what does any of it have to do with Nantucket? In response, first, to the latter question, Google plays some role in most people's lives. In our case, it brings



BY DANIEL W. DRAKE
ASSOCIATE PUBLISHER

Nantucketers much closer to the rest of the world. It connects us in a way that has never before been possible. Is it good? I think so, because if, for no other reason, it broadens our minds and makes us think in ways we have never thought before.

And, after what arrived in the mail yesterday, the reason for the paean is simple.

Ironically, it was a clipping that came by snail mail, not a Google News Alert ("Nantucket" was not mentioned in the short article); a clipping from The Ann Arbor (Michigan) News of February 5, 2008 sent by a favorite uncle who knows and loves Nantucket.

In 2004, Google and the University of Michigan Library agreed to undertake digitizing the library's books — about seven and one-half million in all. In this way all of those volumes in the library's collection not subject to copyright could be available on-line to all comers and those which were subject to copyright would be posted in "teaser" form. Google has similar digitization agreements with the libraries of Harvard, Stanford and Oxford, as well as the New York Public Library. When these zillions of books are digitized and indexed (through Google, of course), the array of material available to researchers and casual searchers of fact anywhere in the world will be dazzling. There will no longer be a need to travel many miles to feed one's allergies to dusty, old books.

What was special about what the news contained in the clipping? It reported that the one millionth book (only 6.5 million more to go) from the University of Michigan's collection had been digitized and posted online as the result of the Google partnership.

The book? According to the report the one millionth book was "Maria Mitchell — Life, Letters and Journals" compiled by a sister, Phebe Mitchell Kendall, and published in Boston in 1896.

If you check it out, you will find, reproduced in its entirety online, a charming book briefly chronicling Mitchell's life growing up and as a young adult on Nantucket, and later at Vassar and beyond; as well as incorporating a large collection of her letters and journals. Unfortunately, the digitized photography incorporates the scars the book's pages received in the form of notes and underlinings put there by one or more library rats over the years. Ultimately, however, the scars do not spoil the read, which, so far, seems well worth pursuing. The link to the book is mdp.lib.umich.edu/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015033356646 — or try Google search "Michigan library digitize."

No doubt, copies of the book are held in the collections of the Nantucket Atheneum and the Maria Mitchell Association but may be under lock and key or, perhaps at this point, are full of mold and silverfish. At a time when at least two weighty biographies of Mitchell are on bookstore shelves, it is a pleasure to have access not only to an original source of information but one which utilizes Quaker simplicity in a way not reflected in the later biographies. Better still, on a whim, it can be read at one's desk with just a few keystrokes.

If the Maria Mitchell connection through Ann Arbor isn't serendipity, there is no such thing. Thank you, Google ...and Uncle Fritz. ■

The "Lighthouse Keeper" reflects the views of the author and does not necessarily represent the editorial position of The Nantucket Independent. Please send any ideas or comments to drake@nantucketindependent.com.