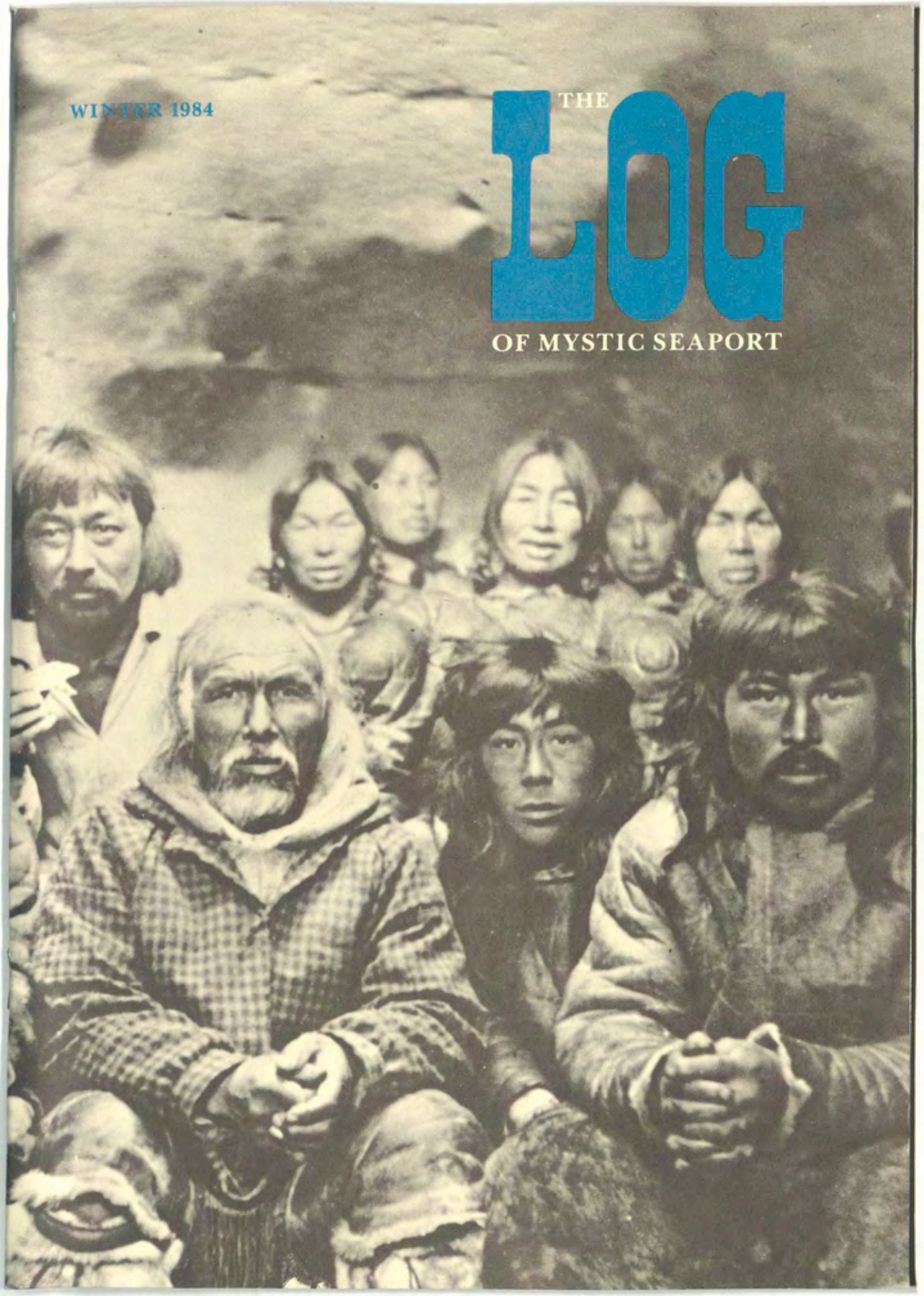


WINTER 1984

THE LOG OF MYSTIC SEAPORT

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The Log of Mystic Seaport (ISSN 0024-5828) is published quarterly by Mystic Seaport Museum, Mystic, Connecticut 06355. Subscriptions are by membership only, beginning at $20.00. Contributions of previously unpublished articles and pictures are welcome. Editorial guidelines are available from the Publications Department.

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The Log of Mystic Seaport is abstracted in *America: History and Life* and *Historical Abstracts.* It is also available in microform from University Microfilms International, Department F. A., Ann Arbor, Michigan 48106.

COVER: *Captain George Comer took this photograph inside an Eskimo igloo, ca. 1904. The man in the checked shirt, called "Harry" by the Americans, worked as a whaleman for Comer for twenty years.* (66.399.36)

BACK COVER: *"Plum Duff in Danger – Christmas Dinner at Sea," by Milton J. Burns, from* Harper's Weekly, *22 December 1883. A major exhibition of Burns's works will be displayed in the Seaport's R. J. Schaefer Building from May through the summer of 1984.* (83.110.1)

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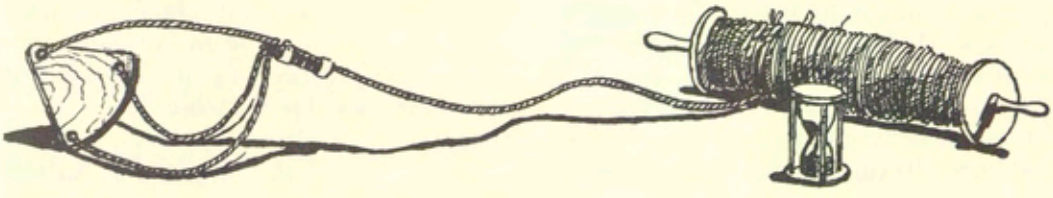
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SIGHTINGS



Visitors to the Seaport often ask staff members "where is the museum?," meaning where is the building filled with paintings, models, and glass cases full of objects? While we are truly an "outdoor museum," representing aspects of nineteenth-century New England maritime life at full scale, we are well aware that much of our story must be told in the protective environment of a traditional museum building. The Seaport first opened for visitors with one such building in 1931, and we have periodically expanded this formal component of the Museum's exhibits.

Until the dedication of the R. J. Schaefer Building in 1975, however, we had been frustrated by the lack of good, flexible, climate-controlled gallery space that could be devoted to changing exhibits. Since the opening of the Schaefer Building we have used it for more than twenty special exhibits. These have ranged from the inaugural exhibit of paintings by James E. Buttersworth, to "Arts of the Sailor," "Blue-Riband Liners," and photographs from the Everett Scholfield Collection.

We are particularly pleased when we can use the Schaefer Building to display the works of lesser-known marine artists, such as our presentation of the works of Rominer Lovewell in 1981. Last summer, through our Curatorial Department and with the help of several friends of the Museum who loaned important pieces, we brought together the first comprehensive exhibition of the work of the gifted marine watercolorist Frederic S. Cozzens. As a preview of a coming attraction, I would like to alert you to next summer's exhibit of works by Milton J. Burns. His views of fishing and yachting, like those of his celebrated contemporary Winslow Homer, were often used to illustrate *Harper's* and other popular magazines of the 1870-1920 period. Visitors to this exhibit will be treated to the first comprehensive exhibition of sketches, watercolors, and oils by this little-known but very accomplished artist.

Prior to the Burns exhibit, the Schaefer Building, with a newly refurbished interior, will be used to give visitors an opportunity to sample the wide range of materials the Museum collects. In "What's New," a recent acquisitions show, a wonderful selection of paintings, models, and other objects acquired by the Museum during the past five years will be exhibited. We are proud of the growing variety and depth of our collections which this exhibit will display. And we know that this view of significant as well as unusual objects will appeal to both members and first-time visitors.

Most of the objects in our collections have been donated to the Museum rather than purchased by it. We have been extremely fortunate over the years to have had such thoughtful, generous donors, some of whom have given the funds to enable the Seaport to acquire specific pieces to fill voids in the collections. Indeed, it is that generosity which has made the "What's New" exhibit possible.

There are still voids in our collections, however, and we hope that in coming years friends of the Museum can help fill them. For instance, although our painting collection is quite strong, it still lacks good examples of the work of some of America's most important marine painters: Robert Salmon, Fitz Hugh Lane, and John and James Bard.

The Seaport has become the remarkable museum it is today through the hard work and generosity of many people, each of whom has helped create and sustain an institution with collections of real national and international importance.

J. Revell Carr

"Old Moke" Afloat

Notes on the Minstrel Origins of the Banjo at Sea

ROBERT LLOYD WEBB

Sing, boys, sing and dance, for one day soon
We'll go no more a-roving by the light
of the moon!
And he up'd with his banjo and he plink
plonk played,
I'll go no more a-roving with you fair maid.[1]

When the Great International Fisheries Exhibition opened in London in 1883, the whaling industry of New England mounted a wonderfully complete exhibit of the harpoons, lances, bomb-guns, boat hooks, and other appliances that comprised the whalemen's "trade," and proudly displayed these objects alongside the fisheries gear from many nations. Squirreled in amongst the "miscellaneous" whaling items was a tiny banjo, just twenty inches in length, said to have been made and played aboard an American whaleship.

The body of this banjo was constructed from a tin can that originally had contained fruit or vegetables. The neck had been carved from hickory, with pine pegs to hold the three strings of "common wrapping twine," and these three strings had been waxed, perhaps to increase their longevity in the whale hunter's saltbrine environment. But the most striking feature of the banjo must have been its "head," that part normally fashioned of calfskin and stretched in the manner of a drumhead across the diameter and around the circumference of the "rim" or body of the instrument. This head, neither of calfskin, nor snakeskin, nor the tanned hide of a woodchuck or 'possum was, reportedly, the thin skin of a porpoise.[2] Modern scholars have questioned the suitability of this very thin membrane for such use; quite possibly, the material was in fact sharkskin, which would have better fit the bill. But whether of porpoise or shark, the maker utilized easily obtainable material in order to fashion a tool for entertaining his fellows in a closed-circle society upon the sea. The banjo was constructed from memory, and no reliance was placed upon factory-made parts or construction techniques. A catalog published concurrently with the Exhibition identified the banjo-maker as an unnamed Portuguese sailor belonging to the whaling schooner *Quickstep* of Provincetown. Quoting testimony given by the other crew, the author of the catalog wrote that "the manufacturer 'discoursed most excellent music' upon this rudely constructed instrument."[3]

In the insular existence of the deepwater sailor, music was often looked upon as a principal amusement, one of but a few pleasures available to the hard-pressed men at work before the mast. And yet, the constrictions of shipboard life and the lack of diversion affected the officers equally, and perhaps even more so. As the old adage proves true that it is lonely at the top, then surely there was none more alone in the nineteenth-century sailing ship than the master, who, by reason of his authority and responsibility, felt compelled to shun what-

Robert Webb is currently Research Associate at the Kendall Whaling Museum in Sharon, Massachusetts. A folklorist, musician, and maritime scholar, he has played Canadian and American folk music for twenty years, and has published extensively on the history of folk instruments.

ever comradeship might exist in the forecastle. Music on shipboard, however, seemed to provide a legitimate means of transcending hierarchical barriers, and both officers and men responded emotionally to it, whether played on a banjo, fiddle, or with some other combination of instruments and human voices. Under date of 4 December 1888, the master of a whaleship wrote:

> ...the 2nd mate has a violin and is making some pretty good music. Just now he is playing fishers hornpipe and does it well too. I am very glad to have some music to help while away the time. I shall have to stop writing untill [sic] he gets through playing for it is no use I can't think of anything at all.[4]

Loneliness and longing for home, especially in long-voyage whaleships, struck deeply into all hands. It was only for those who cursed the music as Devil's work that the banjo and its kin, played with varying degrees of skill in the cramped confines of a ship at sea, were a nuisance requiring forebearance. Woe betide the officer or foremast hand who refused a melody, for then a musical ship became a cacophony of sounds and furies from which there could be no escape!

> [7 January 1852]...went forward to night [sic]...found the fidler playing the fourth of July Evans keeping time with the bones, the blacksmith playing Juber on the banjo, Goss was playing Bonapart crossing the alps on the fife, and Kimble was whistling Yanke Dodle Do [sic]–the Portugues was singing a song of their own, and some of the rest was singing old Dan Tucker is come to town, came aft as far as the steerage found the fiddle there and accordian in full blast, one singing when I can read my title clear, another O Miss Lucy Neal–then went into the cabin and found the old man rattlin away at The Symnoscope the rest trying very hard to go to sleep, then laid down on a chest thought of the girl I left behind me fel [sic] asleep and dreamt of thunder.[5]

It is hardly possible to document the first arrival of banjos on shipboard. If the slaves shipped from African shores did not introduce their keepers to the "bandore" or "banjer"–and it is unlikely they would have, under the circumstances–it is at least clear that Yankee jack tars sailing the length of the African coastline had some opportunity to hear local instruments of the banjo family. J. Ross Browne's anecdotal account of voyaging, published in 1846 under the title *Etchings of a Whaling Cruise, with Notes of a Sojourn on the Island of Zanzibar,* documented the appearance of the banjo on that island in conjunction with both weddings and dances. In the bridal procession, Browne explained, the participants formed themselves into two lines, one on each side of the street. "The musicians," he wrote, "stood between these lines, and struck up their wild, singular airs on zoomaras (somewhat like our clarinets), bambooas, banjos, and drums, creating a most deafening din."[6]

But the banjo likely came aboard from shoreside contacts in America after 1800, probably as a result of the popularity of the minstrel show. The minstrel show developed from plantation entertainments; where owners allowed indentured blacks to have their music and dancing, these slaves built musical instruments whose designs were recalled from tribal traditions. Among the most common of these were stringed instruments, made from a hollowed gourd and strung with catgut or twine. The first banjos in America, then, were products from African memory, which varied considerably according to local custom. Many slave-made banjos had one, two, or three strings; others used as many as six. The gourds were cut flat across one side and the seeds and meat were scooped out. The size of the gourd determined the general configuration of the "banjer." When dry, some form of tanned animal skin was stretched over the open side and fastened down with tacks. A wooden neck was added, with simple wooden pegs to hold the strings, and a nail or similar attachment in the gourd to secure the strings at the other end. A small



Though offensive to us today, this black minstrel caricature is similar to thousands of others published for a wide audience during the nineteenth century. The nautical theme is atypical, but not unique. Lithograph published by A. Park, London, ca. 1840s. (Courtesy of Kendall Whaling Museum)

carved bridge, resting somewhere on the tight skin head, served to elevate the strings for plucking or strumming. Music could thus be made using nothing but the fruit of the earth that these black men and women were bound to work.

Gourd banjos were known through the South before 1800, and they were considered to be the "proper," that is, customary, instrument of the blacks. Thomas Jefferson said so in a famous discourse upon plantation life.[7] Other observers saw the banjo in use by blacks in free states. On the Ohio River near the town of Cincinnati, one night in 1806, an English journalist witnessed, and rather overdramatically described, a performance conducted with two banjos and an Indian nose-flute, or "lute."

> I entered the ball-room, which was filled with persons at cards, drinking, smoking, dancing etc. The *music* consisted of two bangies, played by negroes nearly in a state of nudity, and a lute, through which a Chickasaw breathed with much occasional exertion and violent gesticulations.[8]

The jubilant entertainments created by blacks attracted the interest of the plantation owners and their families, who were known to have visited slave quarters on a Saturday night in order to enjoy the singing and dancing. Undoubtedly these performances were captivating remnants of a peculiar and foreign culture. Much as on shipboard, melody and rhythm formed a common bond linking boss to workers, white to black, oppressor to oppressed. Slowly, but not too slowly, this music and dance reached northern states where there had been less exposure to black art; the bare shell of this novelty caught fire on the public stage, and a growing number of minstrel "troupes" assembled to compete for engagements. And since there were too few free blacks to supply this expanding market, it was left to the white "interpreters," their faces smeared with the ebony residue of burnt cork, to duplicate the patina, if not the whole fabric, of these plantation events. The minstrel show was born a sham, but its

popularity waxed as new shows were developed, new groups organized to perform them, and "songsters" and sheet music published. Then the minstrel troupes began to travel, from south to north, east to west, and their routes of conveyance were over wagon roads, upon the newly-expanded railroad system, and aboard the deepwater sailing ship at sea.

The popularity of the minstrel show can hardly be underestimated. In a self-aggrandizement thinly disguised as editorial copy in an 1855 edition of *Ballou's Pictorial Drawing-Room Companion,* it was said of "Charlie White, The Minstrel," that

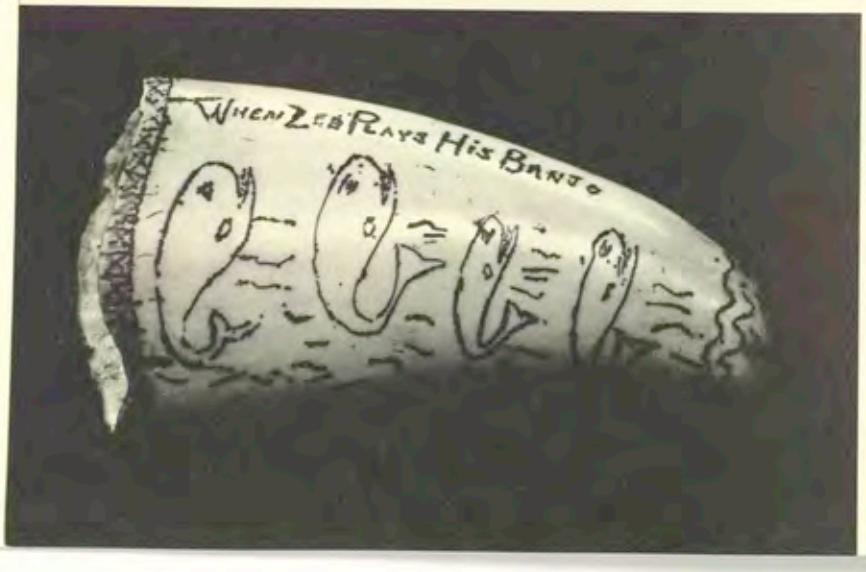
> Mr. White has striven with laudable exertions, and he has the proud satisfaction of knowing that these exertions have made that which was originally a mere ephemeral amusement, an institution, out of which has grown and will grow, a general love for music and the development of a taste at once refining and elevating in its character. As a means to a great end, the rage for negro minstrelsy is by no means to be disparaged or lightly spoken of. It is the only kind of music we have at all national in its origin and character.[9]

By 1855, then, the banjo had reached euphoric heights as a vehicle for the attainment of "refined" and "elevated" tastes. Popular interest, and a keen sense of merchandising, had established the cork-faced minstrel music as being "national in origin and character," which, except under the duress of slavery and for the fortuitous ease of plagiarism, it certainly was not. But white Americans in every corner of the young country were charmed by these happy-go-lucky promenades, and minstrelsy soon spread to other English-speaking countries, including England, Australia, and New Zealand. And of course, minstrels booking passage to London, Melbourne, or Wellington had only the sailing ship to get them there. At the minstrel theaters on shore, and in company with these travelling troubadours at sea, is most likely where the American sailor first encountered the banjo.

It can be said with certainty that if the banjo was not in the sailor's forecastle by the time of the California gold rush in 1849, it had certainly arrived in steerage. Members of the New England & California Trading & Mining Association en route around Cape Horn in the *Leonore* of Boston "formed a company of Sacramento Minstrels, banjo, tambourine, and fiddle, and . . . [sang] all the popular songs."[10] The bark *San Francisco* also carried a makeshift band of minstrels.

> Suddenly the rub-a-dub-dub of the Kettle drum, calling the roll, may be heard and various instruments of music appear from various parts of the ship as if by magic and the San Francisco Melodeon Band is in full operation. Yankee Doodle, Soldiers' Joy, Fisher's Hornpipe, Farmer's Boy, Auld Lang Syne until eight bells is heard, The din stops and all is quiet.[11]

Oscar Lewis, in his pioneering study of that sea-borne migration to California, wrote that "the ship that did not have on board a fiddle, a flute, or a banjo and a man reason-



The unidentified "Zeb" commemorated on this scrimshawed sperm whale tooth must have been a remarkable banjo player. (Courtesy of Whaling Museum Society, Cold Spring Harbor, New York)

ably proficient at playing it was counted unfortunate. . . ."[12]

When these gold-seekers arrived in San Francisco they undoubtedly heard similar music played by earlier arrivals. The first minstrel troupe in the city opened at the notorious Bella Union Hall on 22 October 1849.[13] Not long thereafter a local entertainer named Thomas W. Bree offered banjos for sale under his own name, although it is not clear whether he built these himself or had all or part shipped in from elsewhere. By 1855 it was relatively easy to buy a banjo; several provisioners had opened near the waterfront. Minstrelsy was ensconced in the taverns and dives of sailortown.

> From the twanging of guitar and scraping of violins, to clashing of cymbals and banging of drums, musical sounds of all kinds attracted the ear of the passerby; in the Aguila D'Oro a band of Ethiopian Serenaders beat their banjoes, rattled their "Bones" and shouted their melodies. . . .[14]

The minstrel music soon found its way elsewhere across the broad expanse of the Pacific Ocean. Richard Henry Dana, writing in his journal while in Hilo, Hawaii, in 1859, wrote that "The whaling captains' wives sing commonplace songs, negro melodies &c"[15] Even the native Hawaiians seemed to enjoy the tinkling sound of the banjo.

> A gentleman of our party, a Mr. C——, was a capital musician, and amongst other accomplishments, was admitted to be a perfect marvel upon the banjo. Indeed, a few months before, when all other resources had failed him, he had, California-like, turned this talent to some account, and in more than one Pacific town, had won golden opinions from all sorts of people. The dance [a *hula-hula*] concluded, the banjo . . . was, in obedience to his signal, handed in by his domestic, a mischevious urchin of some twelve summers. . . . The natives all are passionately fond of music, and as Mr. C. struck up a negro refrain, they at once ceased their chattering and, with the broadest of grins, gathered round him. But when he began to rattle forth the spirited Mississippi "Juba," introducing an occasional Hawaiian sentence, as for example:
>
> "A-ouri, mai-tai, Kai-ko
> Give us chaw tobacca,
> Hula-hula Tamaree
> Oh, don't you talk Kanaka.
> Hard times! Aloha!"
>
> their extravagant delight knew no bounds, and fairly rolling upon the floor "hard-times" was passed from mouth to mouth with shouts of approving laughter.[16]

By the time of the Civil War, the banjo had long since ceased to be unusual. Nor was it any longer a calabash gourd with a tacked-down skin head; it had been refined by northern banjo-makers as a wooden instrument. Both body and neck were now made of this material, improved in most cases by the addition of a metal hoop which helped to hold down the head, using a set of threaded metal "hooks" which, when tightened against similarly threaded "shoes" attached to the outside of the body, helped to keep the membrane taut. If the banjo was deficient in any way that might affect its adoption by sailors, it was in the unwanted absorption of moisture by the animal-skin head. This moisture caused the head to slacken off, with a consequent loss of proper tuning, and of quality of tone. Extremes of temperature also affected a skin head; a banjo player who tightened the hoop cinch-tight in some wet clime might discover, while unpacking in the tropics, that the head had split right down the middle, sending strings and other parts flying. Alternately, a tight head in dry weather would stretch to near-unplayability as the humidity rose. Substitutes were sought for the skins, but without success. Wood gave a soft sound, and wood suffered its own travelling maladies. Even metal was used; one banjo historian reported owning a small example of a "banjeaurine" which allegedly had been played on a Mississippi riverboat. It was fitted with a thin metal head, which solved the tension problem without necessarily addressing the question of superior



The famous Civil War photographer Mathew Brady captured a scene depicting a black banjo player among an otherwise all-white crew aboard the gunboat *Hunchback,* in the James River ca. 1864. This typical Civil War-era banjo is made of wood, with few metal parts. The skin head is, customarily, larger than those in use today. (Courtesy of National Archives, Washington, D.C.)

tone! The problem continued to plague both sailor banjo players and those on shore, for theater lights, steam heaters, even a humid spring rainfall, caused problems similar to those experienced by men at sea. Not until the development of the mylar plastic head in the 1950s was this problem effectively solved.

Nevertheless, the hook-and-shoe fastening method was superior to the old thumbtack system, and several banjo-makers began as early as the 1840s to sell such instruments to a waiting public. Many of these makers were situated in or near centers of maritime commerce, suggesting that at least a few sailors may have been able to buy a banjo, if they did not wish to construct one themselves. Among these early banjo-makers were Hercules McCord of St. Louis, Charles Morrell of San Francisco, and William Boucher of Baltimore. Boucher was a drum-maker who made a logical adaptation, for the construction techniques in the mid-nineteenth century were similar with respect to both banjos and drums.

Abraham Lincoln's Navy was not without its banjo players; at least three surviving photographs document the banjo aboard Union warships at this time. One, taken by the famous Mathew Brady, depicts a black musician aboard the U.S.S. *Hunchback.* Another Brady photograph shows a lone white banjo player seated among a hundred of his shipmates on the afterdeck of the gunboat *Mendota,* his oversize wood-and-metal banjo poised in his lap as if he is about to entertain. But the most remarkable of the three is an image of the ship's minstrel company aboard the U.S.S. *Wabash,* solemnly seated before a huge canvas backdrop bedecked with the ship's name and other decorations. The *Wabash* served with the blockade squadron, and its minstrel troupe apparently provided many hours of boredom-relieving entertainment to Union tars stuck "on station" to stop vessels attempting to reprovision the Confederacy.

"The flagship 'Wabash' became renowned throughout the fleet for her minstrels," a navy historian wrote later, "whose good music and amusing songs helped to pass many a long evening. On more than one occasion regular balls were given that, although not attended by the fair sex, did not lack in gaiety."[17] Certainly there were enough musicians to make some noise; two large banjos appear in the photograph among thirteen men variously equipped with guitar, fife, fiddle, and, presumably, stentorian voices.

The low comedy of the minstrel show and its vigorous renditions of "The Arkansaw Traveller" and "Turkey in the Straw" paled after the fighting of the Civil War. A new era had come along, and patrons of the theater were prepared to belong to a more mature culture that appeared to be sophisticated and cosmopolitan. Enthusiasm for plantation entertainment had necessarily lost its appeal, and the gentler operetta soon captivated the theater public. And though the banjo was welcomed in quartets and orchestras to play classical and popular music of the Victorian day, the rough-edged minstrel show quickly became passé. On shipboard, however, minstrelsy continued to flourish as a model for forecastle pastimes. Sailors at this time remained excluded from society on land, and the roughhouse humor of the minstrel show continued to appeal long after jaded urbanites had forgotten the importance of a great belly-laugh. So did the minstrel songster continue to entertain into the last quarter of the nineteenth century, on far away seas in the forecastles of aging whaleships like the *Japan*.

> What a grand and joyous time we had together, to be sure; assisted by quite a band of musical instruments, consisting of a violin, a concertina, a banjo, a triangle, and last, but not least, a set of bones, which were freely manipulated by a [black sailor] from the United States, who kept all hands in a roar of laughter, as he went through a series of strange antics.[18]

Among these whaleship crews, cast far and wide across the seven seas in search of the profits to be earned from hunting sea mammals, the minstrel show continued unabated in popularity. Helen C. Allen, daughter of a whaleship master, described another similar diversion to the one enjoyed on board the *Japan*, while her father's ship rode at anchor at the Comoro Islands:

> while we were in Johanna we would have five or six captains to supper, and then a crowd in the evening both fore and aft. There was always music, and frequently dancing...Of course I was not allowed to go forward beyond the quarterdeck, but there were plenty of jolly captains and officers. The music for the most part came from accordions, banjoes, and combs, with occasionally a violin.[19]

This lone white banjo player posed among his shipmates aboard the U.S. gunboat *Mendota*, in this detail from a photograph by Mathew Brady, ca. 1864. (Courtesy of National Archives, Washington, D.C.)





Gordon Grant sketched a group of sailors singing a forecastle song during the dogwatch. This view appeared in Joanna Colcord's *Songs of American Sailormen.* (Reproduced with permission of W. W. Norton & Co., Inc. Copyright 1938 by W. W. Norton & Co.; renewed 1966 by Boone County State Bank, Lebanon, Indiana, Executor for Author's estate)

Toward the close of the nineteenth century the shipboard "grand concert" became more commonplace, and to some extent replaced the old sailors' song-swap on the topgallant forecastle. These affairs, which usually included music, dance, and some form of theatrical presentation, were choreographed in advance, and a printed, or at least hand-drawn, programme was often available.

Banjos are listed among the musical instruments for sale to fishermen in this advertisement, which appeared in *Fishermen's Ballads and Songs of the Sea,* published by Procter Brothers at Gloucester, Massachusetts, in 1874.

The "Old Corner"

Is the Place for Fishermen

TO OBTAIN

Musical Instruments,



Comprising Accordeons, Violins, Concertinas, Banjos, Flutinas, Jews-harps, Fifes, Flutes, Drums, Bones, Triangles, Flageolets, &c. A full stock constantly on hand and selling at way down prices. Procter Bros.

When talented forecastle crews could communicate with each other and cooperate, they were capable of astoundingly well-orchestrated and elaborate concerts. The crew of the *Lucy Ann,* who played enough instruments to have a regular dance band, presented a "grand concert" to the sea gulls off the coast of Brazil. The evening was a mixture of chorus songs, traditional ballads, and instrumental performances.... The concert was an overwhelming success, according to the crew, but ended ignominiously:

> "Wound up by the mate telling us if we did not quit making such a damned noise he would heave a bucket of stinking water over us."[20]

Even the frigid weather north of the Arctic Circle could not dampen the crew's enthusiasm for any sort of got-up entertainment, and the lengths reached by some sailors in these icy localities is a tribute to the power of music to relieve boredom and fear. First in Hudson Bay, and later in the western Arctic Ocean, owners provisioned their ships to spend a winter locked in pack ice, all the better to be on the whaling grounds at spring thaw. On these ships, and ashore at the makeshift whalemen's villages, an entertainment closely resembling the American music hall was created. In September 1864, for example, the whaling crews who planned to winter over at Marble Island in Hudson Bay "commenced building a marble palace for a Theatrical Company, the building is thirty feet by forty-two, ten feet walls, to be built of marble, rather an expensive material, but we can afford it.... Shall have an Eolian [sic] band in connection with the Theatrical performances."[21]

The Marble Island Theatre, which George J. Parker of the bark *Orray Taft* described as "as fine a one ever was built in Hudson's Bay which is not saying much,"[22] opened for business on 17 October 1864. The premiere included a presentation by the "Hudson Bay minstrels" and a play whose title was peculiar: "The Mock Doctor." "Every part went off well," Parker reported.[23] The theater continued through the early part of the winter and Parker care-



The crew of the British Columbia sealing schooner *Vera*, ashore somewhere on the coast of Canada in 1907 for a picnic. Left to right, the instruments are mandolin, guitar, two fiddles, and banjo–just about the right assortment for parlor music of the day. The man in the bushes may be holding a fife or small flute. (Courtesy of Provincial Archives of British Columbia, PABC #42437)

fully reviewed each new production in his journal. Eventually, however, spring came along and the building was closed for the season in preference for the "grand dress balls" held weekly on board the bark *Ansel Gibbs*.

This concertizing and dancing continued over the years in Hudson Bay, and elsewhere where whalemen were forced to stop. On a cold January night just a few years later,

> some of the foremast hands gave a show on the *Isabella* especially for the captains and officers. We were invited to come early and avoid the rush. It was a stormy night outside with the wind blowing fierce at twenty-eight degrees below zero. There was considerable talent among the hands. One of them had made a drum out of a cheese-box. Another had made a banjo out of a deep tin pan and a walrus bladder. With those and a tin fife, we had *some* music![24]

In the far north the ingenious foremast hand aboard the *Isabella*, picking upon his homemade walrus-and-tin banjo, drew a wide circle across the sea to the Portuguese whaleman and his porpoise-head banjo in the schooner *Quickstep*. Around the world the banjo has always fascinated the sailor and landsman alike, so much so that they have often been moved to make one out of available materials, when the "store-bought" variety could not be procured. And the music that spawned this great interest, the minstrel show, continued well into the twentieth century as a source and theme for the banjo and its kin. Chanteyman-author Stan Hugill collected several square-rig work songs built around minstrel refrains, such as the "Banks of the Sacramento,"[25] and Hugill's beloved informant, Harding, "the Barbadian Barbarian," gave to him "The Old Moke Pickin' On The Banjo," which Hugill claims contains the "Irish-Negro combination found in many shanties of the [eighteen-] forties."

> Hooraw! What the hell's the row?
> We're all from the railroad–too-rer-loo,
> We're all from the railroad–too-rer-loo,
> Oooh! The ol' moke pickin' on de banjo![26]

Hugill also collected from Harding an unusual West Indian chantey which specifies a seven-string banjo, a type popular in

minstrel days but fallen into disfavor by 1900:

> This is the day we make our pay-day
> Dance, gal, gimme de banjo!
> Oh, that banjo, that seven-string banjo,
> Dance, gal, gimme de banjo![27]

Further documentation of the banjo's popularity in the twentieth-century forecastle exists in the marine art of Anton Otto Fischer, who painted a banjo player accompanying an accordion player and a guitarist in a late sailing ship. This banjo is of the new design, developed about 1907, and intended to be strummed upon with a flat pick of tortoise-shell or celluloid. It was this type of banjo, the "tango" or "tenor" banjo, that soon became the rage with the advent of popular jazz and the fabled "Charleston" dance of the 1920s. The tiny mandolin-banjo, which was nothing more than the eight-string mandolin neck attached to a round banjo body, also made its way to sea; an instrument of this type, reportedly carried aboard the whaling bark *Platina,* was sold at auction in 1981.[28]

But modern technology arrived on board in the 1920s, and with electrification came some diminution of interest in playing music, as opposed to listening to it, which marked the arrival of the era of specialization.

> Musical talent was not, however, the forte of the afterguard; but two or three could vamp and play the banjo and mandolin a bit, and Lieut. Rennick was handy with the flute. Still, the [player-] piano was a boon to all, as beside it stood a cabinet containing an excellent assortment of rolls of music. There was also, of course, a gramophone.[29]

It is gratifying to hear that, in the last twenty years, the ever-increasing interest in homemade music, both on land and at sea, and the layman's belief that he or she *can* make good music, has suppressed the need for player pianos in living rooms and ship's grand salons. Nor is there any doubt that the banjo has continued to serve an important duty, providing music to allay the fears and smooth the discomforts of our roughest passages. Whether by osmosis, acculturization, or simply out of habit, the banjo has managed to become "America's musical instrument."

NOTES

[1] Hamish MacLaren, *Sailor with Banjo: Entertainment in Rhyme and Song* (New York: Macmillan, 1930), p. 3.

[2] James Temple Brown, *The Whale Fi hery and Its Appliances,* Publication "E" of the Great International Fisheries Exhibition, London, 1883 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1883), p. 85. The porpoise-head banjo, given to the Smithsonian Institution by George O. Knowles and accessioned as #56872, remained for some time in that institution's holdings, but by the time of the 1961 inventory, it had gone missing; Scott Odell, *A Checklist of Banjos in the Collections of the Division of Musical Instruments, Smithsonian Institution* (photocopy, revised 1973).

[3] *Ibid.*

[4] Journal of the bark *Sea Ranger* of New Bedford, 4 December 1888, volume 262, Kendall Whaling Museum, Sharon, Massachusetts.

[5] Journal of the ship *Eliza Adams* of New Bedford, 7 January 1852, volume 319, Kendall Whaling Museum, Sharon, Massachusetts.

[6] J. Ross Browne, *Etchings of a Whaling Cruise, with Notes of a Sojourn on the Island of Zanzibar: To Which is Appended a Brief History of the Whale Fishery, Its Past and Present Condition* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1846), p. 400.

[7] Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia, Written in the Year 1781* (Paris, 1782, i.e. 1785), p. 257; quoted in Dena J. Epstein, "The Folk Banjo: A Documentary History," *Ethnomusicology* 19 (September 1975): 354. In a footnote, Jefferson wrote: "The instrument proper to them [plantation blacks] is the Banjar, which they brought hither from Africa."

[8] Thomas Ashe, *Travels in America Performed in the Year 1806* (London, 1809), pp. 90-91; quoted in Harry R. Stevens, "Folk Music on the Midwestern Frontier, 1788-1825," *Ohio State Archaeological and Historical Quarterly* 57 (April 1948): 134.

[9] "Charlie White, The Minstrel," *Ballou's Pictorial Drawing-Room Companion* 9 (1 December 1855): 240.

[10] Correspondence from one of the company, off Brazil; quoted in Octavius Thorndike Howe, *Argonauts of '49: History and Adventures of the Emigrant Companies from Massachusetts, 1849-1850* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1923), p. 58.

[11] "Journal of The Proceedings on board the barque San Francisco, Thomas Remmonds, Master, of and from Beverly for California," 16 October 1849; quoted in Howe, p. 94.

[12] Oscar Lewis, *Sea Routes to the Gold Fields: The Migration by Water to California in 1849-1852* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1949), p. 72.

[13]Cornel Lengyel, ed., *Music of the Gold Rush Era*, History of Music in San Francisco Series, vol. 1 (San Francisco: Works Progress Administration of California, 1939), p. 31.

[14]Owen Cochran Coy, *Gold Days* (Los Angeles: Powell Publishing, 1929), p. 280.

[15]Richard Henry Dana, *The Journal of Richard Henry Dana, Jr.*, ed. Robert F. Lucid (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968) 3: 882.

[16]"Life in Hawaii," *Putnam's Monthly Magazine* (July 1853): 21-22.

[17]Francis Trevelyan Miller, ed., *The Photographic History of the Civil War*, vol. 6, *The Navies* (1912; reprint ed., New York: Castle Books, 1957), p. 281.

[18]David Wilkinson, *Whaling in Many Seas and Cast Adrift in Siberia: with a Description of the Manners, Customs, and Heathen Ceremonies of Various Tribes of North-Eastern Siberia* (London: Henry J. Drane, n.d.), p. 70.

[19]Helen C. Allen, "When I Was Seven," manuscript 402A, pp. 30-31, Kendall Whaling Museum, Sharon, Massachusetts.

[20]Ellen R. Cohn, "Shipboard Music: A Report from American Whaling Journals," *Essay in Arts and Sciences* 10 (March 1982): 189.

[21]Journal of the bark *Orray Taft* of New Bedford, 2 October 1864, volume 276, Kendall Whaling Museum, Sharon, Massachusetts.

[22]*Ibid.*, 14 October 1864.

[23]*Ibid.*, 20 October 1864.

[24]Robert Ferguson, *Arctic Harpooner: A Voyage on the Schooner Abbie Bradford 1878-1879* (1938: reprint ed., Stanfordville, New York: Earl M. Coleman, 1979), p. 91.

[25]There is currently much contention regarding the "chicken-or-egg" origin of such songs as these. Some claim "Sacramento" as a minstrel tune later turned out for a sea chantey. Others argue that sailors made up the song during the trip around Cape Horn for California, and it later became a theatrical success.

[26]Stan Hugill, *Shanties from the Seven Seas: Shipboard Work-Songs and Songs Used as Work-Songs from the Great Days of Sail* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966), p. 340.

[27]*Ibid.*, p. 341.

[28]Sotheby Parke Bernet Inc., *The Barbara Johnson Whaling Collection, Part I* (New York: Sotheby Parke Bernet, 1981), lot no. 102.

[29]Herbert G. Ponting, *The Great White South: Being an Account of Experiences with Captain Scott's South Pole Expedition and of the Nature Life of the Antarctic* (London: Duckworth, 1921), p. 23.

Captain George Comer and the Arctic

FRED CALABRETTA

By any measure, Captain George Comer of East Haddam, Connecticut, was an extraordinary whaling master. He made fourteen voyages to the Arctic between 1875 and 1919, and twice survived shipwreck. His six whaling and trading voyages to Hudson Bay as master netted whale oil, baleen, and skins worth nearly a quarter of a million dollars.[1]

Born at Quebec in 1858, George Comer was the son of a sailor who was lost at sea. He moved with his mother to Hartford, and at age ten he was "placed out" with a family in East Haddam.

At seventeen Comer first went north as a greenhand aboard the New London bark *Nile*. He became an accomplished seaman and boatsteerer, apprenticing under such notable New London captains as John O. Spicer and Benjamin Rogers. His abilities did not go unnoticed, and he moved up through the shipboard hierarchy. Departing from the ports of New London, New Bedford, and Stonington, he sailed on whaling, sealing, and trading voyages from Hudson Bay to Antarctica. In 1895 he sailed for the first time as master of a vessel, the schooner *Era*. Although she was wrecked near Miquelon off Newfoundland on her passage north in 1906, and despite the bottom falling out of the market for baleen about 1910, nearly all of Comer's voyages were financially successful. Even after his whaling career ended in 1912, he remained a seaman. Between 1875 and 1919, only two years passed in which Comer did not spend time at sea.[2]

The most remarkable aspect of George Comer's story, however, is his record of accomplishments associated with the Arctic, and yet *outside* the realm of whaling. A study of his work in the Arctic, especially between the years 1893 and 1919, reveals an almost amazing array of skills, endeavors, and accomplishments. His efforts resulted in important contributions in the fields of anthropology, natural history, cartography, and exploration. In addition to extensive and carefully written records, Comer employed photography, archaeology, and even sound recording in his studies of the Arctic and its native people.

It is difficult to rank the various aspects of Comer's work in terms of their importance. Certainly most apparent, as reflected in several major museum collections, are the results of his studies of the Eskimos of the Hudson Bay region. Photography was one of the major tools employed by Comer in this work. Mystic Seaport's photographic collections include approximately 350 glass plate negatives, lantern slides, and original prints attributed to Comer. Several other museums have substantial collections of Comer photographic material as well.[3] A great number of these images, depicting the Eskimos and their way of life, have outstanding value as ethnographic documentation, which is not necessarily true of the more familiar Indian and Eskimo photographs of many of Comer's contemporaries.[4] The near-legendary Edward S. Curtis, for example, made extensive use of

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Captain Comer posed for this photograph about 1907, probably aboard the auxiliary schooner *A. T. Gifford*. (83.25.10)

props (often out of context) and did much cropping and retouching in the darkroom. Comer did not, and his Eskimo images are a genuine portrayal of their way of life during the period of his association with them.

A journal kept by Comer indicates that he was taking photographs in the Arctic as early as 1893.[5] Amateur photography was a relatively new phenomenon at this time, and Comer had his share of difficulties. On one occasion he had the *Era*'s cabin "full of natives" and was taking indoor "flash light pictures." He noted that "The first flash light I probably did not fix right as it came near taking the roof of the cabin off at least the report sounded loud enough to have done it."[6] Such a marvel of the civilized world must have provided the Eskimos present with an anxious moment. Inexperience was not the only factor which hampered Comer's photography. He also had to contend with the extremes of the Arctic environment. Cold temperatures often made it difficult or impossible to develop negatives, and a lack of sunlight, which was necessary to expose prints, was another limitation at certain times of the year. Still, Comer worked hard and often at making pictures. This is evident in his journals, which include dozens of references to photography. It is even more evident in the photographs themselves. Hundreds of them survive today as proof that, despite certain difficulties, he enjoyed considerable success with his camera, especially when taking pictures of what seems to have been his favorite subject: the Eskimos of Hudson Bay.

The detailed journals and notebooks kept by Comer are as significant and impressive as his photographs. In addition to valuable information pertaining to sealing, whaling, and life at sea in general, they are filled with references to Eskimo culture. His commitment in this area is clearly indicated in his journal entry for 11 November 1903, "I endeavor to write down all native customs and stories."[7] Though he could not have written down *all* native customs, he did record a wealth of information pertaining to the Eskimos. In addition to his daily journal entries, which often discussed Eskimos, he filled several complete notebooks with legends, customs, and notes on all aspects of Eskimo life.

Captain Comer was acquainted with Dr. Franz Boas, and this association had a major influence on Comer's written records and other work among the Eskimos. Boas ranks



The topsail schooner *Era*, leaving New Bedford in 1900. She was built at Boston in 1847, and Comer made eight voyages aboard her, five of them as master. The *Era* was lost on a reef near Miquelon Island, off the southern coast of Newfoundland, on 27 July 1906. Photo by George Comer. (63.1767.68)

as virtually the "founding father" of modern American anthropology. He is credited with training dozens of notable American anthropologists during a career that spanned more than half a century. In 1897 he instructed Comer on collecting and recording information about the Eskimos he would encounter on a forthcoming trip to the North. The relationship between these two men continued for a number of years. Comer's detailed written records, ranging from legends to birth statistics, undoubtedly reflect the influence of Boas. In addition, information supplied by Comer provided the basis for several important studies of Eskimos published by Boas. Comer himself wrote several articles about the Eskimos of the Hudson Bay region, and these were published in the *Bulletin of the American Geographical Society* and the *American Anthropologist*.[8]

At a time when American museums were eagerly sending people all over the world to procure ethnographic material, Comer served as an avid and capable collector of artifacts. Again in 1897, Boas requested that Comer collect Eskimo artifacts for the American Museum of Natural History during his impending visit to Hudson Bay. Boas provided him with an extensive list of desirable specimens, and Comer was to receive $250.00 for each complete collection upon his return. Comer provided the museum with this first group of artifacts, and continued to collect throughout his career. His success in this work is illustrated by the following excerpt from a 1907 bulletin of the Arctic Club of New York:

> The Museum of Natural History, New York City, has now probably the finest collection of Arctic exhibits in the world, . . . There is a valuable collection brought by Commander Peary, supplemented by a large amount of very valuable exhibits furnished by Captain George Comer, one of our members. As an ethnological exhibition of research among the Eskimos it is without peer.[9]

Comer obtained large numbers of objects from the Eskimos through purchase and trade, and he employed archeology as a means of obtaining older specimens. Many of his journal entries refer to collecting. For example, on 5 July 1905, "we are near



Port view of the *Era* in winter quarters at Cape Fullerton, Hudson Bay. Note the extensive snow banking around the vessel which was used as insulation and protection from the wind. Photo by George Comer. (63.1767.170)

where their [*sic*] are some old sod and bone houses built by the natives many years ago[.] got a number of articles of native make for the museum."[10] One collection assembled by Comer brought him $800.00. He had established an extremely lucrative part-time business, yet the Eskimos and their material goods were more than a source of easy profit to him. He maintained his sensitivity and respect for these people throughout his lifetime. On one occasion he took some implements which had been left as offerings at an Eskimo grave site. As a gesture of respect he left rifle cartridges, objects of great importance to a people who depended so much on hunting.[11] In addition to the American Museum of Natural History, other museums with collections of Eskimo artifacts obtained by Comer include the National Museum of Canada, the University of Pennsylvania Museum, and the Museum of Mankind in Berlin.

Comer also learned to communicate with the Eskimos in their own language, and may have spoken several different dialects. This was unusual among Americans and other whites in the Hudson Bay region, and it must have helped him greatly in his dealings with the Eskimos. The natives of the Hudson Bay area played an integral part in the whaling and trading ventures of Americans in that region, from the mid-nineteenth century until 1915. They were often more experienced and skilled as whalemen than were American crew members during this period, many of whom were "greenhands." They also hunted for the Americans, and the fresh meat and fish they provided did much to alleviate the problems of scurvy. Finally, the Eskimos brought in furs for sale and trade, and these commanded excellent prices in the United States and abroad. This was a lucrative business, and in the early years of the American/Hudson Bay fur trade they could be obtained in exchange for empty tin cans.[12] Although prices predictably increased, the fur takes of Comer and other whaling masters of the period yielded substantial sums for the owners of the vessels. This was a valuable supplement to the declining trade in whalebone and oil.

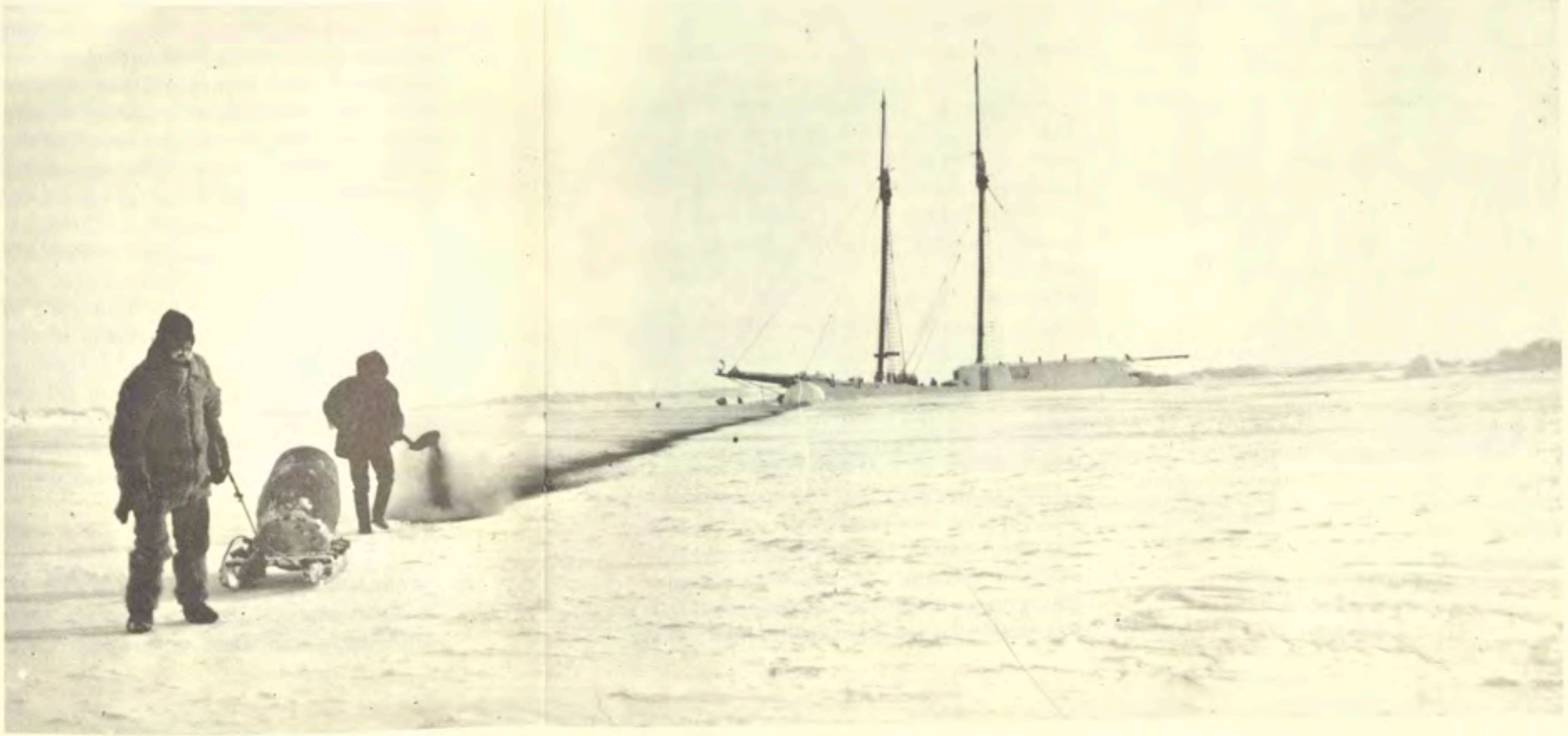
In addition to his photography, writing, and collecting, Comer employed several



This photograph of Comer and the crew of the *Era* was probably taken by Commander A. P. Low, ca. 1904. Comer appears in the back row, directly behind the child. (63.1767.242)

rather unique means of obtaining information about the Eskimos of the Hudson Bay region. He made hundreds of plaster cast "life masks" of Eskimo faces and hands. A staff member of the American Museum of Natural History had taught him this skill in 1900. Anthropologists at this time believed that the body proportions and dimensions of a people would reveal information about cultural origins and traits: thus the plaster casts. The making of the casts may have been less than a pleasant experience for the Eskimos, as indicated by Comer's reply to a newspaper reporter's question. The interviewer inquired as to whether the Eskimos ever objected to sitting for the casts. The Captain replied, "Oh! it wouldn't make any difference, we just grab 'em and slap on the plaster."[13] Comer added one final dimension to his Eskimo collections by bringing a graphophone north with him on several voyages. Not only did this provide a unique form of entertainment during the long Arctic winters, it was also used to record Eskimo songs and stories. These records, which still survive, represent pioneering work in the use of sound recording as a tool of ethnographic study.

Comer's keen sense of observation and knack for collecting characterized his work in the Hudson Bay region in the first two decades of the twentieth century. These skills were sharpened earlier in his career, in fact as early as 1885. In that year, Comer, sailing aboard the sealing schooner *Express* out of Stonington, Connecticut, made a collection of birds, eggs, and bird skins at South Georgia Island. Later, on another sealing voyage to the South Atlantic aboard the schooner *Francis Allyn* between 1887 and 1889, Comer continued this work. Two journals kept by him on this voyage include detailed accounts of the plant and animal life of the region.[14] One of these journals has a number of pages cut out. The missing pages were probably used to make specimen labels, as several such labels remain loose in the book. This was Comer's last trip to the Antarctic regions, and it was on this trip that he collected several specimens of a previously unknown bird. Two of the birds were kept alive on the return voyage, only to fall victim to cats at the home of Captain Joseph J. Fuller. Curators at the American Museum of Natural History were able to study specimens of the bird and pronounced it a previously undiscovered species. It was named *Porphyriornis Co-*



These *Era* crewmembers are spreading ashes on the ice in a trail leading from the vessel to the waters outside the harbor at Cape Fullerton. It was hoped that the ashes would work down through the ice and make it easier to free the vessel for spring whaling. This maneuver was unsuccessful and the five-foot-thick ice was cut primarily by hand. Photo by George Comer. (63.1767.37)

meri in honor of the man who had discovered it.[15]

In the Arctic, ice-bound waters and extreme temperatures prevented whaling activity for much of the year, and trading was a relatively simple matter which was transacted when Eskimos brought their furs to the ship. Comer took advantage of the long periods of business inactivity to pursue his other interests. He seems to have been an almost indefatigable collector of information and specimens. His studies encompassed nearly all aspects of the Arctic environment.

He kept careful records of the temperature, and of the thickness of the ice around the ship as the winter progressed. The flora and fauna of the Hudson Bay region also became subjects of his research. On at least one occasion, Comer travelled to Ottawa to advise a Canadian Government commission on the feasibility of domestication of caribou and musk-ox in areas around Hudson Bay.[16] He also provided the American Museum of Natural History, and other museums, with botanical and animal specimens from the Arctic. Comer's activity in this field seems to have been relatively extensive, and it was as profitable as his collecting of Eskimo artifacts.

In June 1903 Jerome Allen, a curator in the Department of Mammalogy and Ornithology at the American Museum of Natural History, wrote a letter to Comer which suggests the nature and financial rewards of this work.

Dear Captain Comer:–

Your letter of June 16th in reference to colecting specimens for us in the Hudson Bay region is just received. Director Bumpus has authorized the expenditure of $300.00 for specimens to be collected by you on your next trip to Hudson Bay. I have made the prices the same as those paid you before. The list of material wanted is as follows:

5 Wolverenes at $10.00 each	$50.00
Small seals–two species, 4 specimens of each, including both skin and skeleton, at $10.00 each	$80.00
4 Additional skins of each species at $5.00 each	$40.00
10 Additional skulls of each at 50 cents each	$10.00
15 Arctic Hares at $1.00 each	$15.00
Lemmings and Mice–three species, about 10 of each, at 50 cents each	$15.00
20 Ground squirrels at $1.00 each	$20.00
	$230.00

We should also like Caribou from Southampton Island–a series if they could be obtained. If you do not succeed in getting Caribou from Southampton Island please obtain for us a few more good heads, and a skeleton of an old male and an old female of the kind you got on your last trip.[17]

This letter would seem to foretell tragedy for an unfortunate group of Arctic animals, but it gives evidence of a profitable business, especially considering the value of the dollar in 1903, and the fact that Eskimos almost certainly obtained most of the specimens and received relatively inexpensive trade goods in return.

As if whaling, natural history, and Eskimo studies were not enough to occupy Captain Comer, he also developed a keen interest in Arctic exploration. He was associated with a number of important Arctic explorers and several major expeditions. This aspect of his career is perhaps not as widely known as his Eskimo work, but is no less significant.

On a whaling voyage to Hudson Bay aboard the bark *Nile* in 1875, George Comer, then a seventeen-year-old greenhand, kept his first journal. Its style is crude and quaint compared to later writing endeavors, but in it he has left us some early traces of his developing interest in the Arctic. On 29 October 1875, he mentions that he had read a book borrowed from the ship's library entitled *Explorations and Adventures in Siberia*.[18] This and similar books, as well as the very presence of the Hudson Bay environment, almost certainly had considerable influence on an impressionable young man with little worldly experience. It was on this voyage that Comer had his first



This photograph of an Eskimo "angakok" (shaman) was taken by Captain Comer onboard the *Era*. The elaborate parka, obtained by Comer, is presently in the collections of the American Museum of Natural History in New York. (66.339.68)

contact with Eskimos. He in fact traded with one of them for a "suit of skins."[19] Such experiences may have combined to instill in him a fascination that was shared worldwide. Throughout the nineteenth century, and perhaps culminating in the race for the North Pole in the early twentieth century, countless adventurers and common people alike were seized with a passion for Arctic exploration.

George Comer was apparently taken by this international obsession. The winter of 1904-05 found Comer's vessel, the topsail schooner *Era*, wintered at Cape Fullerton in Hudson Bay along with the steamer *Arctic*, representing the Canadian Government. In March of 1905, Captain Comer and Major Moodie of the Canadian Mounted Police argued, and attempted to out-manuever each other, for the privilege of sending dogs to Roald Amundsen. The Norwegian explorer was wintered further north aboard *Gjoa*, during the first year of a voyage that resulted in the first successful traverse of the Northwest Passage. Comer and Major Moodie compromised by sending six dogs apiece to Amundsen, who had specifically requested this form of assistance. Both men were obviously very anxious to make a contribution to this important expedition.[20]

Direct contributions to Arctic explorations can be credited to Comer; he did not merely assist others. He made several significant discoveries while navigating in Hudson Bay, especially in the vicinity of Southampton Island. Between 1907 and 1909, he did a thorough survey of this island. Combining this information with knowledge he had gained on previous voyages, he prepared a map of the island which was quite accurate, and in fact superior to any in existence at that time. As a result of this achievement Comer was awarded membership in the Geographical Society of Great Britain.

According to a newspaper clipping and letter among his personal papers, Comer was preparing to leave on an Arctic expedition in 1914, accompanied by Lincoln Ellsworth of New York, who was also financing the trip.[21] However, a letter from Ellsworth to Comer suggests that there were major problems in obtaining a suitable vessel. At that point in their careers, both men were extremely anxious to participate in a major Arctic expedition, but this

Eskimos, whaleboats, and whaling gear photographed by Comer at Cape Fullerton, during preparations for spring whaling. Most, if not all, of the Eskimo men in this photograph manned the boats and worked for Comer. (63.1767.228)





Comer's own caption for this photograph is "Eskimo Gals." This image, with its excellent costume detail, is a valuable source of ethnographic information, as are many of Comer's Eskimo photographs. (63.1767.235)

specific adventure never materialized. Ellsworth would become a noted explorer of the Arctic and Antarctic, in the company of Amundson and others. Comer would also find another expedition.

In 1915, the Captain went north as Ice Pilot aboard the *George B. Cluett,* which was being sent by the American Museum of Natural History to rescue members of the "Crocker-Land" expedition in Greenland. This party had gone north in 1912 to explore the region and to search for a body of land which Robert Peary believed he had seen on an earlier expedition. The leader of the "Crocker-Land" expedition was Donald B. MacMillan, who had been with Peary when he attained the North Pole. Beset by heavy ice, the *Cluett* was unable to reach the members of the expedition at Etah, in northern Greenland, and eventually left the region without accomplishing her mission. Comer, who had found his subsidiary position aboard the *Cluett* difficult to cope with, volunteered his services to MacMillan and remained behind with the explorers. During the next two and one-half years Comer worked with the MacMillan party, as well as a Danish expedition led by Peter Freuchen and Knud Rasmussen.

The writings of these explorers indicate



Comer photographed the *A. T. Gifford* in winter quarters. Her bowsprit has been decorated with caribou antlers. Comer was master of the *Gifford* for two lengthy voyages to Hudson Bay, 1907-'09 and 1910-'12. (66.339.79)

that Captain Comer was well known and greatly respected for his work in the Arctic. MacMillan remarks about Comer's positive attitude and his assistance:

> He was there, and why not make the best of it? His songs of of the sea, which we heard daily, and his experiences in the Strait of Magellan, at Desolation Island and at Hudson Bay, often but not too often narrated, were a never-failing source of entertainment. Physically strong, energetic, and willing, he proved of great help to me in many ways during the year. He insisted on being responsible for certain duties at Etah, such as keeping our big tank well supplied with ice for drinking and wash water; taking all meteorological observations during the day, tidal observations during the spring, and other similar duties. All the work I assigned to him was dismissed completely from my mind. I knew it would be done faithfully and well.[22]

Peter Freuchen states that Captain Comer was "a man with years of experience behind him and one of the finest gentlemen I ever met. He was not only the last whaling captain to ship out of Boston [sic], but also a scientist and collector of museum specimens." Freuchen also notes that he "had heard his [Comer's] name mentioned in admiration many times. He was well acquainted with the Hudson Bay Eskimos, and had lived at Southampton Island for many years [sic] making collections of great value.... Comer was a very strong character."[23]

In the first decade of this century, Captain Comer was a member of the Arctic Club, which had been founded by Peary. This organization was later absorbed by the Explorers Club, which included Comer as a lifetime member. These clubs were based in New York City, and their membership rolls included the names of many of the most important explorers, adventurers, and scientists of the period. Comer's memberships in these rather exclusive organizations give further evidence of the respect and recognition he had gained for his work in the North.

George A. Comer, the Captain's grandson, indicates that Captain Comer made frequent trips to New York to participate in the meetings and other activities of these organizations.[24] This is further substantiated by letters and other material among the Captain's papers. In April of 1915 Comer was in New York City to attend a

meeting of the Canadian Club, which was a man's social club. In the printed program of that meeting, Comer's name is placed second in a list of "Distinguished Guests," preceded only by Robert Peary.[25] Edward S. Curtis, who was present at the affair, is not even included in the list.

Not long after his return from the "Crocker-Land" expedition, Comer, sixty years old but anxious to serve, wangled a commission as lieutenant in the U.S. Navy. He served on several vessels during World War I, and one voyage resulted in his first, and only, trip to Europe. In France, Comer, ever the collector, obtained some "souvenirs" from German prisoners.

Following the war, there would be one additional Arctic adventure for Comer. With the financial support of several people, including Christian Leden, a German-born ethnologist and explorer, Comer sailed for Hudson Bay once again on 12 July 1919. He was accompanied by Leden onboard the auxiliary schooner *Finback*. The expedition set forth to establish trade, and to explore and study the region and its Eskimo inhabitants. The voyage seemed trouble-plagued almost from the time of its commencement. The journal kept by Comer on the voyage reflects all sorts of difficulties, and the fact that it is water stained is somewhat ominous.[26] Comer himself, was in very poor health during the voyage. The cumulative effects of many difficult years in the Arctic, and a continuing battle with diabetes, were apparently taking their toll. The vessel was in poor condition and the untrained crew was terribly inadequate. From the time of the vessel's departure, Comer was juggling positions and assignments in an effort to make the most of the crew's limited abilities. One of these reassignments left a man extremely dissatisfied, and he threatened Comer with a pistol he had smuggled onboard.[27] The man had to be overpowered, and Comer threw the pistol overboard. The trouble-ridden voyage continued until, on 27 August 1919, the *Finback* stranded on a reef near Cape Fullerton. The men managed to salvage the vessel's boats and many supplies, and eventually made it to a settlement further south. Difficulties continued and Comer didn't return to his East Haddam home until nearly two months after the wreck.

Captain Comer never returned to the Arctic following the failure of the *Finback* voyage in 1919, but his interest in the North never declined. He avidly followed the adventures of scientists and explorers in the Arctic, and continued to correspond with a number of these people, and with the American Museum of Natural History.[28] In this way he continued to contribute to the body of existing knowledge of the Arctic, especially the Hudson Bay area. His home, which was a veritable museum of material he had collected in the North, attracted old

Captain Comer posed in front of his East Haddam home for this photograph in 1933, four years prior to his death. Note the mounted walrus tusks on the porch and the running lights from the *Era*. (39.1306A)



friends and prominent individuals in the fields of exploration, natural history, anthropology, and government. The Captain was frequently called upon to recount his experiences in public speaking engagements, although he was apparently ill-at-ease in such situations.[29] In 1921 he was elected as a representative to the Connecticut legislature. It is not surprising that he was a popular and well known figure in the New London region and the lower Connecticut River valley.

Captain Comer died on 27 April 1937. His passing did not go unnoticed. About a year later a monument was dedicated in his honor, not far from his home in East Haddam. Both his funeral and the monument dedication received considerable publicity. Among those who attended and those who eulogized Comer were the Governor of the State of Connecticut, a daughter of Admiral Peary, and notables from the fields of science and exploration. It seems surprising that, following these events, Comer and his work were largely forgotten. Perhaps this occurred because his accomplishments branched out in so many different directions. A researcher interested in Comer's Eskimo collections, for example, would be unlikely to discover his map of Southampton Island or his collections of animal specimens. In any event, the sum of his achievements was overlooked in the years following his death.

If a general search for evidence of his work *is* undertaken, the results are impressive. His maps and sound recordings are preserved at two different mid-western archives.[30] Arctic explorers from Canada, Denmark, Norway, and the United States mention his name with praise in their memoirs. His scientific contributions are acknowledged in books concerned with such diverse subjects as birds and Eskimos. Contemporary ethnologists find his written records to be a highly valuable source of information about the Hudson Bay Eskimos, and his photographs grace museum exhibition halls and the pages of scholarly publications. And somehow, in addition to all of his arctic work, Captain Comer found time for his *primary* occupation. He spent thirty-seven successful years and made seventeen voyages in pursuit of seals and whales.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

The Comer Collection, manuscript collection 102 in the G. W. Blunt White Library of Mystic Seaport Museum, is an extensive source of information about Captain George Comer. This collection is comprised of thirteen volumes of his journals and notebooks, as well as correspondence, notes, newspaper clippings, and miscellaneous papers. The Comer photographs in the collections of the Seaport's Curatorial Department are also an important source. These two collections complement one another to provide a comprehensive and exceptional view of Comer's years in the Arctic regions.

Eight additional journals and notebooks kept by Comer are included in the collections of the Department of Anthropology at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City. These volumes generally cover voyages and periods of time not represented in the MSM manuscript collections. Thus, the greater part of Captain Comer's career at sea is well documented. Correspondence between Comer and various staff members of the AMNH is also located at that institution.

Finally, George A. Comer of East Haddam, Connecticut, contributed greatly to this study. He shared recollections of his grandfather, answered many questions, and provided two formal interviews, both of which were tape recorded. He was also kind enough to provide access to copies of the AMNH journals.

NOTES

[1]Comer made two additional voyages to Hudson Bay, one with the *Era* in 1906 and the other with the auxiliary schooner *Finback* in 1919. Both resulted in shipwreck.

[2]Barnard L. Colby, "Old New London Whaling Captains," *New London Day*, 24 August 1935; reprinted in Barnard Colby, *New London Whaling Captains* (Mystic: Marine Historical Association, 1936), pp. 223-24.

[3]The Old Dartmouth Historical Society in New

Bedford, Massachusetts, and the American Museum of Natural History in New York City have sizable collections of Comer's photographs.

[4] In very general terms, anthropology is the science which deals with the study of man, ethnology is a sub-field of anthropology and is concerned with the study and comparison of different cultures, and ethnography usually refers to the study of an *individual* culture. Comer's work among the Eskimos ranks as an ethnographic study.

[5] Journal of the bark *Canton* of New Bedford, 24 June 1893 through 16 October 1894, Department of Anthropology, American Museum of Natural History, New York. Hereafter, records at the American Museum of Natural History are indicated by the abbreviation AMNH.

[6] Journal of the topsail schooner *Era*, of New Bedford, 1 February 1904, volume 3, Coll. 102, G. W. Blunt White Library, Mystic Seaport Museum. Hereafter, records at Mystic Seaport Museum are indicated by the abbreviation MSM.

[7] *Ibid.*, 11 November 1903.

[8] See *The Bulletin of the American Geographical Society* 42 (1910): 84-90, and 45 (1913): 516-18; also, *American Anthropologist* 23 (1921): 243-44.

[9] *Arctic Club Bulletin of Information* (New York City), 1 April 1907, pp. 2-3.

[10] Journal of the *Era*, 7 July 1905, volume 4, Coll. 102, MSM.

[11] Journal of the *Era*, 4 July 1904, volume 3, Coll. 102, MSM.

[12] "East Haddam Man, Back From Icy North, Tells of Perilous Trip," *Hartford Weekly Times*, 22 October 1917.

[13] *Ibid.*

[14] See Journal of the schooner *Francis Allyn* of New London, 10 July 1888 through 3 April 1889, AMNH; also, notebook kept on the *Francis Allyn*, 2 August 1887 through 3 April 1889, volume 11, Coll. 102, MSM.

[15] See Robert Cushman Murphy, *Oceanic Birds of South America* (New York: American Museum of Natural History, 1936), 1:209-10; also, G. E. Verrill, "On Some Birds and Eggs collected by Mr. Geo. Comer at Gough Island, Kerguelen Island and the Island of South Georgia, with extracts from his notes, including a meteorological record for about six months at Gough Island," *Transactions of the Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences*, vol. 9 (New Haven: Tuttle, Morehouse, and Taylor Press, 1895), pp. 432, 434-35.

[16] "Veteran Whaler Talks of North," *Toronto Sunday World*, 24 January 1915.

[17] Jerome Allen to George Comer, 18 June 1903, box 1, Coll. 102, MSM.

[18] Journal of the bark *Nile* of New London, 29 October 1875, AMNH.

[19] *Ibid.*, 18 October 1875.

[20] Journal of the *Era*, 18-24 March 1905, volume 4, Coll. 102, MSM.

[21] See Lincoln Ellsworth to George Comer, 24 March 1914, and newspaper clipping, "Leader of Arctic Expedition," no. publ., 13 April 1914, both in box 1, Coll. 102, MSM.

[22] Donald B. MacMillan, *Four Years In the White North* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1918), p. 271.

[23] Peter Freuchen, *Arctic Adventures: My Life In the Frozen North* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1935), pp. 300-301.

[24] George A. Comer, interviews with the author, 16 February 1983 and 3 March 1983, MSM.

[25] Program, "Thirteenth Anniversary of the Canadian Camp," Hotel Astor, New York, 23 February 1915, box 1, Coll. 102, MSM.

[26] Journal of the auxiliary schooner *Finback* of Stamford, 12 July 1919 through 26 September 1919, volume 8, Coll. 102, MSM.

[27] *Ibid.*, 2 August 1919.

[28] Comer saved newspaper clippings and other material relating to Arctic explorers and expeditions. See Coll. 102, MSM.

[29] Lantern slides were used by Comer to accompany his talks. These are now at MSM, 66.339.1-82.

[30] Several of Captain Comer's track charts are preserved as part of the American Geographical Society Collection, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. His Eskimo sound recordings are located at the Archives of Traditional Music, Indiana State University.

Images of Young Women in Nineteenth-Century Songs of the Sea

CAROLINE MOSELEY

Young women figure prominently in nineteenth-century songs of the sea. It is accepted that the songs sung by seamen were very much the same as the songs by landsmen. Gale Huntington says that whalemen sang "everything that was sung on shore, of course, plus the special songs that had to do with their trade... popular songs of the period of the voyage... old, old songs and ballads from the British Isles... gospel songs and music hall songs, parlor songs and bawdy songs." Cecil Sharp noted that sailors, except when at work, "sing precisely the same songs as the country people," preferring "romantic love songs and ballads of adventure." The *Silver Moon* heard aboard New Bedford whalers is the same "Ro-holl on, silver moo-hoon" Mark Twain heard in Victorian parlors along the Mississippi River. On deck of the *Pequod*, little Pip quotes *Jenny Get Your Hoe-Cake Done*, a minstrel show tune; the shipwrecked Tomo enchants the Typeean court with his performance of *The Bavarian Broom Seller*, a hit of the eighteen-thirties.[1]

As seafaring song had so much in common with contemporary popular song in general, we might anticipate that the image of women in sea songs would correspond to that in other nineteenth-century music. Sailors were, after all, part of a larger society. They necessarily shared the ideals of that society, such as its views of women, and were familiar with its cultural products, such as its songs. They could not help but carry aboard their vessels much of the cultural baggage of Victorian society.

But sailors were also a subgroup of Victorian society, a folk group, quite separate from the larger society. They were all male; they all followed the same seafaring profession. They shared experiences, lore, speech patterns, indeed, an entire way of life and view of the world which was specific to seamen. They inevitably entertained views of women which differed in some ways from those of genteel society, and songs may differ accordingly. *Roll On, Silver Moon* would have been equally at home in the Spouter Inn or the Grangerfords' parlor; *The Maid of Amsterdam* would, perforce, remain in the tavern.

The young woman of nineteenth-century sea songs is, then, in many ways the standard "True Woman"[2] of nineteenth-century American culture, while in others she is most definitely not. Let us examine her character and attributes.

These women are all "beautiful" and/or "fair," each one a "goddess of beauty." Occasionally a girl is dark-haired, even dark-skinned, like "the Lass of Mowee," "The Young Indian Lass," "Sally Brown" the "bright mulatter," or the Valparaiso girls "with their dark and wavy hair." For the most part, however, the women celebrated in sea songs are Anglo-Saxon maids, like "Pretty Sally," "pretty Susan," "Bright

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Phoebe," "Lovely Caroline," "The Blooming Bright Star of Belle Isle," or "The Lily of the West," with her "golden hair in ringlets."[3]

The ideal woman in these songs is domestic, and nurturing to men. "Poll of Wapping Stairs" is exemplary because she makes flip and serves grog to her old dad "And never stints his measure." "She minds full well the house affairs/She seldom drinks and never swears." "Nancy Lee" keeps the house "all so neat and snug and sweet, for Jack at sea." One sailor wishes only "a warm house with a stone at my gate/And a cleanly young girl to rub my bald pate."[4]

Women seem to exist simply as a creature comfort for men, often equated with food and drink: "With our gals an' our beer, boys, oh let the song flow." Or: "With a jorum of diddle/A lass and a fiddle/Ne'er shall care in the heart of a tar be found." And, quite unmistakably: "It will make men's mouths to water/When maidens are in their youth."[5]

It is understood that the women are sexually available on demand. "When the Greenland lads come hame," we are told, they will "make the cradles for to rock, and the blankets for to tear./And every lass in Peterhead sing, 'hushabye, my dear.'" One girl declares, "... my friends and relations they angry may be [but] My generous lover you are welcome to me."[6]

The occasional scruple is easily overcome:

> I wooed her so closely she yielded
> egad
> Its now you'll be constant she
> whimpered and cried
> I know what I thought so I replied
> My dear can you doubt it ...[7]

The young women are remarkably undemanding: "All day we spent in sweet content/And at night we went to bed." Later, "we both shook hands and parted."[8]

The double standard is the only standard. The sailor may warn his lady: "And let no other man be sharers but me." He is also free to address his "Dear Nancy" thus:

> If I should meet some fair maids
> All blooming fair and gay
> If I should take a fancy
> What would my Nancy say
> What would I say dear William
> Why I would love her too
> And I would step one side
> While she conversed with you.[9]

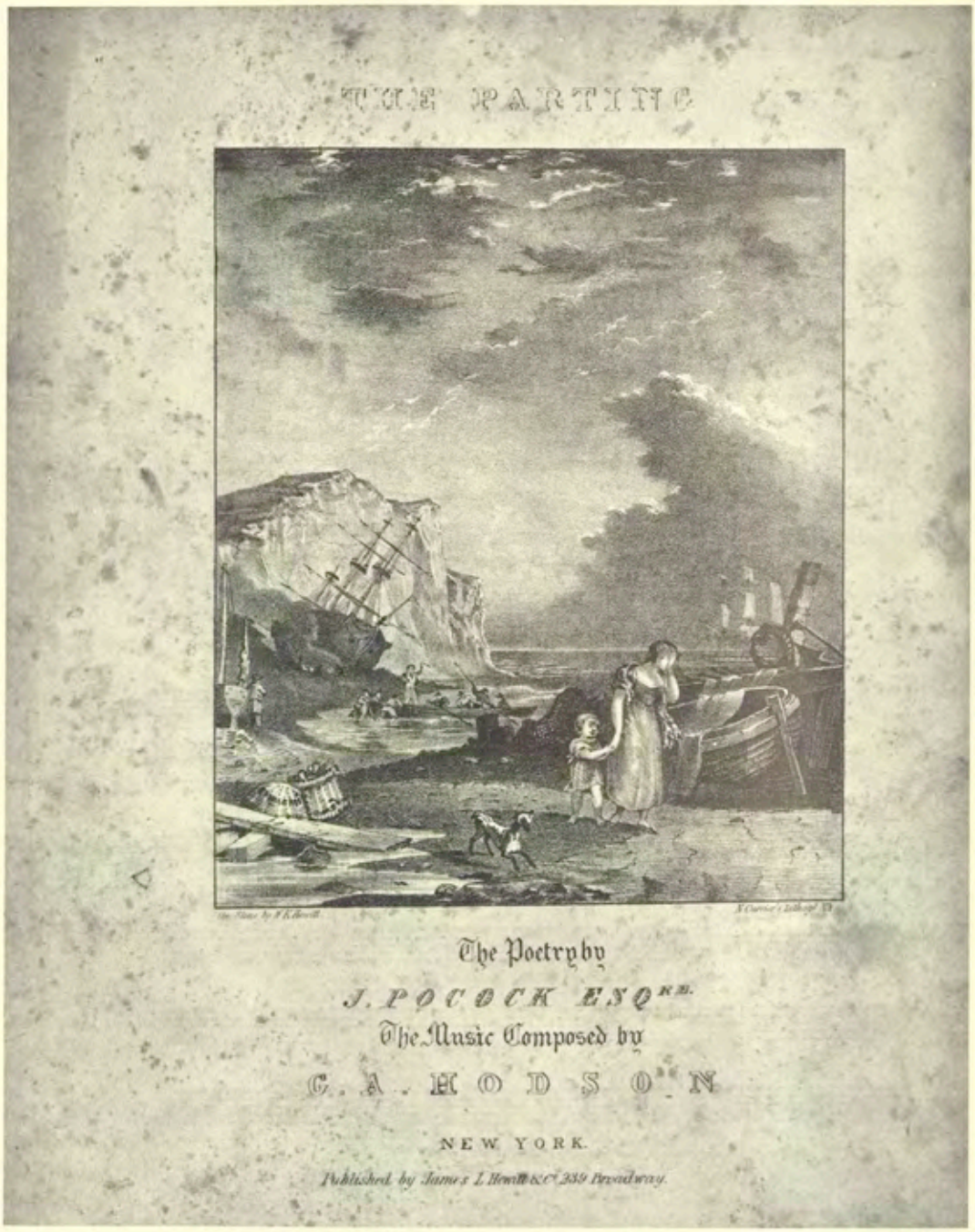
These women forgive any affront, with not so much as a murmer of protest. "The Silk Merchant's Daughter," for example, finds herself about to be killed to feed a group of her lover's shipmates. "She is to be slain for to feed all the men ..." and, indeed, "She is to be slain by her own true love's hand." In the nick of time, the castaways are rescued. The young woman's devotion to her "own true love" is unaffected by the extremity of insult she has endured: "Now these two are married and well do agree/A handsomer couple you seldom ever see."[10]

The typical woman is likely to be found at dockside, waving farewell. "See there she stands and waves her hand upon the quay," or, "Adieu, she cried and wav'd her lily hand." "Along the quay at Peterhead, the lasses stand around./Wi' their shawls all pulled about them and the saut tears rinnin' doon." She waits there until the strains of *Goodbye, My Love, Goodbye, Hurrah, Sing Fare Ye Well,* or *Farewell to You, My Own True Love* have died away, and there is no sound but the lapping of wavelets. Then she settles down to the serious waiting:

> Then like some weeping angel
> To the rocks every day went she
> She is waiting there for her only love
> Returning home from sea.

The sailor knows that "Ev'ry day when I'm away she'll watch for me." Practice apparently makes perfect: "And the longer my absence, more loving she'll feel."[11]

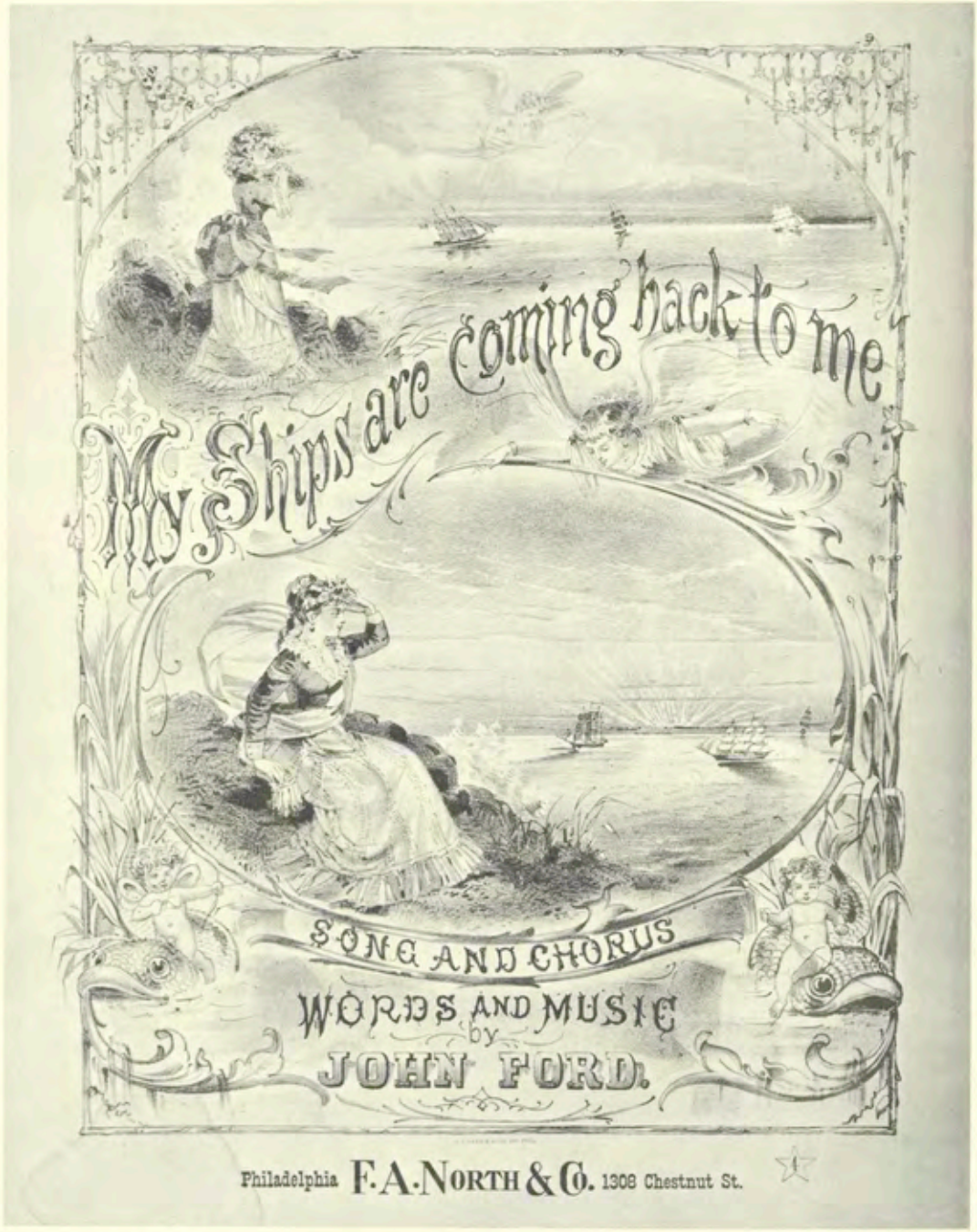
Women in nineteenth-century culture were supposed to be passive, compliant, and patient, but the women in sea songs wait longer and better than most. Their extreme passivity approaches masochism. Many songs tell the story of lovers parted,



A sailor's wife and child lament his departure on the sheet music for *The Parting*, written by J. Pocock and composed by C. A. Hodson, published at New York, ca. 1845. Drawn by W. K. Hewitt, lithograph by N. Currier. (Courtesy of Driscoll Sheet Music Collection, Peabody Museum of Salem)



The ideal Victorian woman awaits her sailor husband on the cover of the sheet music for *O Come My Love to Me, the Song of the Sailor's Wife,* written by Mrs. Glover and composed by Stephen Glover, published at Baltimore and New Orleans, ca. 1855. Lithograph by P. S. Duval Steam Lith. Press, Philadelphia. (Courtesy of Driscoll Sheet Music Collection, Peabody Museum of Salem)



An example of passive, patient womanhood, with angelic assistance, graces the sheet music for *My Ships Are Coming Back to Me,* written and composed by John Ford, published by F. A. North & Co., ca. 1875. Lithograph by G. S. Harris & Son. (Courtesy of Driscoll Sheet Music Collection, Peabody Museum of Salem)

and the man's return after a prolonged absence. Often, as in *Jamie's On the Stormy Sea*, the returning lover simply announces his return, after hearing the girl lament: "Grieve no more for I am Jamie /Home returned to love and thee." More often, the returnee tests the girl's constancy, rather cruelly, before revealing his identity. He may disguise himself, as in *The Beggarman* or *The Blooming Bright Star of Belle Isle*. He may attempt to seduce her, as in *The Dark-Eyed Sailor* or *The Banks of Glenco*. He may tell her her lover has been untrue, or even that he is dead, as in *The Mantle So Green*. Such abusive treatment is cavalierly excused: "'Twas only your love for me that I tried," or jocularly dismissed: "[I] hope to give you a surprise."[12] All is immediately forgiven.

Not all these women wait. A few don male attire and follow their men to sea, as do "The Female Sailor," "The Gallant Female Sailor," "The Female Sailor Bold," or "The Nobleman's Daughter." Such adventures have the traditional happy ending, however: marriage of the lovers. The woman is a True Woman after all: "So now his little steward has become his charming wife." Apparently unfeminine behavior is excused by an excess of a truly feminine emotion: "It was to seek her lover she sailed across the main." Or, "It was love caused all her trouble and hardships we are told,/May she rest at home contented now the Female Sailor bold."[13]

The concept of a woman disguised as a man was apparently non-threatening; rather, it had a certain erotic appeal. It was perhaps titillating to know what lay under the "Blue jacket and trousers," or to observe the Female Sailor "kiss the girls manly." We observe one "lady young and fair" who "dressed herself in scarlet velvet." When she was on deck, however, "There the wind did blow her waistcoat/And expose her milk-white breast." Gale Huntington notes that this is "one of the most popular songs that the whalemen sang."[14]

Perhaps only one Female Sailor song is really a tribute to a woman's independent spirit. In *The Female Warrior*[15] the heroine is chosen as master of her vessel, she has not gone to sea to follow a man, and she does not get married in the end.

The songs discussed thus far present the standard True Woman of nineteenth-century culture, exaggerated a hundredfold. The women described are submissive far beyond even the call of nineteenth-century prescriptive literature, probably because these songs were sung by males, and by sailors. The always available, always faithful girl would appeal to the fantasies of men, especially men who were away from home for long periods.

However, sailors also sang of women who are *not* mentioned in genteel parlor song, who had no recognized existence in Victorian popular culture: prostitutes. Again, sailors were a subgroup of the larger society, sharing some of its culture, but creating a culture of their own as well: songs based not on contemporary ideals, or male fantasies, but on their own experiences.

The woman in these songs is still good-looking: "Her dainty arms wuz white as milk,/Her lovely hair wuz soft as silk." She is still sexually available. She is a "flash packet" whose "gangway wuz open and wide." But

"The Sailor's Return," a popular romantic image for ceramics such as this pitcher, was also a theme in sea songs. Sunderland lustreware, mid-nineteenth century. (70.323)





The "flash packets" of bars, brothels, and boarding-houses were outsiders to Victorian society, but well known to sailors in songs and reality. (*Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, July 1873)

she is much less passive and much more mercenary than her better-bred sisters. Unlike the Blooming Bright Star of Belle Isle, the Nantucket Ladies "dress so neat/And go a'cruising through the streets." Unlike the Silk Merchant's Daughter, The "Gals o' Chile" "dance an' drink till the break o' day,/Then clean ye out an' blow yer pay." Unlike the legion of pretty Pollys, bright Phoebes, and lovely Carolines, the "Yankee gals" will "steal and pawn yer clothes," and are "tougher than the other side o' Hell!" And unlike Nancy Lee and her colleagues, who wait forever for their John Reilleys, Sweet Williams, and Dark-Eyed Sailors, these girls are egregiously unfaithful: "Now when I got back home from sea,/A soger had her dancin' on his knee."[16]

The sailors maintain a matter-of-fact attitude toward the girls in port. One warns, after being robbed: "Take my advice, drink no strong drink, don't go sleeping with no whore,/But get married, lads, and have all night in and go to sea no more." But another, even after suffering the discomforts of a social disease, declares: "If I meet that flash packet I'll board her again."[17]

Sailors came from a society that idealized women, but valued them only in so far as they were sexually pure, submissive, and domestic. They entered a society which was all male; and transient males at that, who did not have the opportunity, even had they had the inclination, to form lasting relationships with women. Thus, the objectification of women was necessarily intensified. "The Lass That Loves a Sailor,"[18] whether for an hour or a lifetime, was just another lass. As "The Rambling Sailor" says of his lass, "She may stay there till the day of her doom/I'll court some other girl in her room."[19]

The unifying element in all views of women, however seemingly contradictory, is the low esteem in which women are held. Virgin or whore, women exist for the convenience and comfort of men. They are possessions, which may be under exclusive ownership, or may be purchased for temporary use. In these songs men worry, not about losing their hearts, but about losing their property; that property may be wallet or it may be a woman. It is interesting that there are so few comic songs about women. Making fun of something in song is commonly a way of denying its threatening nature. There are not comic songs about women in the sea repertoire because women were not preceived as important enough to do real damage.

The conviction that women are far less significant in the scheme of things than men was not exclusive to sailors. It was a basic tenet of nineteenth-century society, one evident in much popular song. Many of the songs which resonated aboard American vessels echoed also in American parlors. The concept was simply intensified in sea songs, because of the particular nature of the seafaring life. We are all–nineteenth-century sailors and maidens, twentieth-century scholars and critics–creatures of our time and place.

NOTES

[1]Gale Huntington, *Songs the Whalemen Sang* (Barre, Massachusetts: Barre Publishers, 1964), p. xvii; Cecil Sharp, *English Folk-Song* (London, 1907), p. 97; *Silvery Moon*, in Huntington, pp. 233-34; Laurence Teacher, ed., *The Unabridged Mark Twain*, (1883; Philadelphia: Running Press, 1979), 2:390; Herman Melville, *Moby Dick*, ed. H. Hayford and A. Parker (1851; New York: Norton, 1967), p. 363; Herman Melville, *Typee* (1843; New York: New American Library, 1964), p. 253; *Buy a Broom* (Baltimore, [1827-28]).

[2]See Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," in *The American Family in Social-Historical Perspective*, ed. Michael Gordon (New York: St. Martin's, 1978), pp. 313-33.

[3]*The Blooming Bright Star of Belle Lake*, in Elizabeth B. Greenleaf, *Ballads and Sea Songs of Newfoundland*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1933), p. 268; *The Lass of Mowee*, in Huntington, p. 148; *The Young Indian Lass*, in Helen Creighton, *Songs and Ballads From Nova Scotia* (Toronto: Dent, 1932), p. 103; *Sally Brown*, in Stan Hugill, *Sea Shanties* (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1977), p. 49; *The Gals Around Cape Horn*, in Hugill, *Sea Shanties*, p. 139; Huntington, p. 111; *The Pride of Kildare*, in Huntington, p. 132; Huntington, p. 119; Huntington, p. 137; Greenleaf, p. 268; Huntington, p. 134.

[4]Charles Dibdin, *Songs Naval and National* (London: John Murray, 1841), p. 237; *Heart Songs* (New York: Chapple, 1909), p. 394; *As I Grow Old*, in Huntington, p. 301.

[5]*The Liverpool Packet*, in Hugill, *Sea Shanties*, p. 86; *All Girls*, in Dibdin, p. 93; *Cupid's Garden*, in Huntington, p. 93.

[6]*The Bonnie Ship the Diamond*, in Peggy Seeger and Ewan MacCall, eds., *The Singing Island* (London: Mills Music, 1960), p. 59; *The First Time I Saw My Love*, in Huntington, p. 225.

[7]*Women Love Kissing As Well As the Men*, in Huntington, p. 228.

[8]*The Undutiful Daughter*, in Huntington, p. 128.

[9]*The First Time I Saw My Love*, in Huntington, p. 225; *Farewell My Dear Nancy*, in Huntington, p. 266.

[10]William Main Doerflinger, *Songs of the Sailor and Lumberman* (New York: Macmillan, 1972), p. 296.

[11]*Nancy Lee* and *Black-Eyed Susan*, in *New Book of a Thousand Songs for the Million*, collected and arranged by An Amateur (New York: Richard Marsh, n.d.), p. 131; *The Bonnie Ship the Diamond*, in Seeger and MacCall, p. 59; *Our Ship She is lying in Harbour*, in Huntington, p. 124; *Nancy Lee* and *Farewell to Tarwathie*, in *The Singing Island*, p. 63.

[12]Huntington, pp. 252, 116; Greenleaf, p. 268; Doerflinger, p. 300; Huntington, p. 113, Creighton pp. 60, 171; *The Beggerman*, in Huntington, p. 116; *The Blooming Bright Star . . .*, in Greenleaf, p. 268.

[13]*New Book of a Thousand Songs*, pp. 161, 104; Creighton, p. 68; Huntington, p. 103; *The Female Sailor*, in *New Book of a Thousand Songs*, p. 161; *The Female Sailor Bold*, in Creighton, p. 68; *The Gallant Female Sailor*, in *New Book of a Thousand Songs*, p. 104.

[14]*The Female Sailor*, in *New Book of a Thousand Songs*, p. 161; *William Taylor*, in Huntington, pp. 94, 95.

[15]Doerflinger, p. 143.

[16]*The Maid of Amsterdam*, in Stan Hugill, *Shanties From the Seven Seas* (New York: Dutton, 1966), p. 48; *Ratcliffe Highway*, in Hugill, *Sea Shanties*, p. 136; *A Song on the Nantucket Ladies*, in Huntington, p. 165; *The Gals o'Chile*, in Hugill, *Shanties From the Seven Seas*, p. 53. *The Gals Around Cape Horn*, in Hugill, *Sea Shanties*, p. 139; *The New York Gals*, in Hugill, *Shanties from the Seven Seas*, p. 374; *A-Rovin'* in Hugill, *Sea Shanties*, p. 93.

[17]*Off to Sea Once More*, in Seeger and MacCall, p. 69; *Ratcliffe Highway*, in Hugill, *Sea Shanties*, p. 136.

[18]Helen K. Johnson, ed., *Our Familiar Songs*, (New York: Holt, 1881), p. 160.

[19]*The American Songster* (Philadelphia, 1845), p. 127.

BOOK REVIEWS

Eric McKee. *Working Boats of Britain: Their Shape and Purpose.* London: Conway Maritime Press, 1983. 256 pp., illustrations, appendices, notes, index. $39.95.

That a major new book on British watercraft is under way has been the story from our friends across the Atlantic, the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich. "Patience, you won't be disappointed"—and this past summer saw the publication of Eric McKee's work. It's worth the wait, for it sets new standards, and raises new questions in studying and documenting watercraft.

McKee's book belongs on the shelf of every student of small craft and of "work for boats," no matter in what type or nationality they are interested. It is tightly written, for there is a lot of information included in this relatively short book. While a survey, it's not a catalog of boat types like most such works. It's packed full of drawings—some 181—but only 15 are complete line drawings of boats. Most are informational and analytical. And that's what this book is, an analytical study of British working watercraft: analysis of how they go together and are used, a study of shapes and how they got that way, and some thoughts on organizing the data.

Working Boats is divided into two parts. The first studies influences on a boat's shape, including its surroundings, its work, and its users. The study of environment is interesting for non-British readers, for the author takes us on a tour of coastal Britain, showing us geography, geology, and weather conditions. Through it we can understand why many British boats look overbuilt to our eyes: many lived not in creeks and harbors, but rather on exposed rocky beaches. The utility of the "unhandy" dipping and standing lugs also becomes immediately apparent.

Structure, of course, influences a boat's shape greatly, and McKee shows us the various ways British boats go together. He uses this, together with hull proportions, to set up a system to sort out the manifold British types into forty different classes. In work boats, this is especially important, for a boat's type usually tells us nothing of its shape or construction. McKee's classification methods may well help sort out boats of other regions. It first considers construction, and then shape; thus classes can be added or subtracted accordingly.

The second part of the book is based on McKee's own field work. A Royal Navy engineer by trade and a competent marine draftsman and artist, McKee brought experience and expertise to his systematic study. Under the sponsorship of a National Maritime Museum Caird Research Fellowship, he was able to travel all over Britain hunting boats and their builders and users.

His main interest is in boat shape, and he shows us how builders from different areas arrive at their boats, whether simple flat-bottomed, double-ended, fore-and-aft-planked turf boats, or complex clinker boats built without molds. He shows us not how *we* might measure and build the boat, but the builder's method. Rules of thumb, free form clinker, half model use, whole molding, and conventional lofting are illustrated.

Almost unique in studies of boats is the amount of attention given to exploring the effects of propulsion systems on boat shape and how they work. Thus in towing, or tracking, we find out how tow ropes were attached, and how large rudders were. In rowing, McKee looks at the rowing geometry of various boats and shows how it, together with oar shape and length, were related to a boat's use, as, of course, are rowing styles. The discussion of wind power shows the effect of rigging on boat shape, in both stability and balance. McKee details the results of shortening sail on both of these areas, and the ways a boatbuilder transfers the load of sails to spars and hull. The discussion of the introduction of the marine engine and its effect on working watercraft is virtually the first serious treatment of this subject. Comparative data from other regions would be interesting, for speed of adoption and engine type varied greatly. Although this sort of analysis is familiar to readers of books on yacht design and naval architecture, it is refreshing to see similar treatment given to small work boats.

One chapter is devoted to conventional "boat book" description, providing examples of boats which had not otherwise been recorded. Of them, a twenty-four-foot Thames skiff and a fifteen-foot Tamar waterman's boat are especially appealing and would be fine craft for today's recreational needs.

The drawings alone make the book worthwhile. They are numerous, clear, and legible to the smallest details. McKee uses them to show much: boat structure, boats in use, different views of the same boat, boat handling gear, rigging details. His drawings remind us of the shortcomings of photographs, and indeed there is not a photo in the book. The only similar work I can recall is that of Sam Manning in this country, and Peter Dorleijn in Holland.

McKee's few boat lines drawings have construction details. Some are drawn to plank offsets, often a better way of transmitting information. The engineer's touch is evident: offsets are in feet and hundredths. Although the book is not aimed at the amateur builder, there is much suitable in it, including information on wood splitting tests, picking up lines, and designing unstayed masts.

The book's appendices provide further data on British coastal conditions, but, more interestingly, set out in a table examples of each of the forty classes of boats, including name, size, and documentation or plan source. The table gives graphic evidence that physically similar types may be found in different areas.

It's here that American readers, indeed any potential builder, will need help. For, although one of the book's motivations was to generate active working interest in British work boats, nowhere is it clear how plans may be obtained. McKee's references are to his own work, as well as to plans in the National Maritime Museum's collection, and to plans published in various places which are not to buildable standard.

McKee's book is not easygoing; it provokes too much thought. Suggestions for research projects abound, both things we ought to do and hints at future projects for the author. For instance, there is that lovely drawing of a boat called *Parson Gay;* perhaps the future may see some detailed looks at the boats of McKee's home waters of Plymouth and Cornwall.

Working Boats of Britain is a first and very successful attempt at synthesis in boat studies, moving to the level beyond description. It will prove inspirational. The author and his supporters at the National Maritime Museum are to be congratulated.

Benjamin A. G. Fuller
Curator, M.S.M.

Richard Henderson. *Philip L. Rhodes and His Yacht Designs.* Camden, Maine: International Marine Publishing Company, 1981. 415 pp., illustrations, appendix, index. $35.00.
Robert W. Carrick and Richard Henderson. *John G. Alden and His Yacht Designs.* Camden, Maine: International Marine Publishing Company, 1983. 445 pp., illustrations, appendix, index. $65.00.

In the past three years International Marine Publishing and sailing author Richard Henderson have teamed up to produce lavish volumes on two very influential twentieth-century American yacht designers. *Philip L. Rhodes and His Yacht Designs* establishes the format for the books: a brief introductory chapter tracing Rhodes's career, followed by an illustrated catalog of selected Rhodes desigsn, both notable and obscure.

An Ohioan by birth, Rhodes might not have been expected to consider yacht design as a career. But woodworking ability taught by his father, and a schoolboy fascination with this century's early speedboats, got him involved. In 1918, at age twenty-three, Rhodes graduated from Massachusetts Institute of Technology with a degree in naval architecture and marine engineering. After six or seven years in commercial shipyards and engineering firms, Rhodes set up his own yacht design office in New York. His continuing interest in speedboat and sailboat design, encouraged by *Yachting* editor Herbert Stone and others, got him established in a career that flourished through the 1960s.

The main portion of the book presents a sample of Rhodes designs in forty-six chapters. Here are such boats as the 1932 ocean-going centerboarder *Ayesha,* representing a type for which Rhodes became famous–the shoal-draft ocean racer; the welded steel "motorsailer" *Tamaris* of 1938, which ideally combined the elements of sail and power and became a trend setter for large, powered sailing cruisers such as the Rhodes Seventy-Sevens and *Barlovento II,* which also appear; the magnificent seventy-two-foot *Escapade,* a centerboard ocean racing yawl built by Luders in 1937 and still highly visible in such events as the Classic Yacht Regatta at Newport; *Carina II* of 1955, another ocean-going centerboard yawl which Rhodes claimed as his favorite design; the twenty-nine-foot waterline Bounty II class, a collaboration between Rhodes and

William Garden that was the first large stock auxiliary sailboat built in fiberglass, beginning in the mid-1950s; the Twelve Meter *Weatherly* of 1958, which defended the America's Cup in 1962; such popular and ubiquitous smaller boats as the Rhodes 19 and the Dyer Dhow; and many other sail and power boats of such varying sizes and types as to amaze one at Rhodes's versatility.

The book is heavily illustrated with photographs and lines, some of which suffer in reproduction. An appendix lists 390 Rhodes designs with dimensions, type, name, owner, and date.

John G. Alden and His Yacht Designs was published in 1983, after eleven years of preparation. Robert W. Carrick completed the biographical section on Alden, but did not live to see the book finished. Richard Henderson took over the second part, "100 Designs of John Alden."

Eleven years Rhodes's senior, Alden summered at Sakonnet, Rhode Island, as a child, and became a skilled sailor, once making a single-handed cruise from his home in Troy, New York, to Sakonnet. Although urged to attend MIT, Alden preferred practical training, and worked with several Boston naval architects, most successfully as a draftsman for B. B. Crowninshield.

Alden's future design concepts were greatly influenced by an experience he had in December 1907. He and several others went to Halifax to retrieve the fishing schooner *Fame*, designed and managed by Crowninshield, which was quarantined because of a smallpox outbreak among her crew. Grossly shorthanded and inexperienced, Alden and his crew ran into two winter gales, winding up off the Jersey shore exhausted, out of food, and alive mainly because of the *Fame's* superb handling ability and seaworthiness. Alden's respect for the round-bow fishing schooner was celebrated most notably in his Malabar series, beginning in 1921, which also reflected the influence of Charles A. Morse's *Lloyd W. Berry*, a yacht influenced herself by the Friendship sloop and the Gloucester fishing schooner. The ten Malabar schooners and their cousins, such as the lovely *Tar Baby*, even today connote John Alden to many people.

Henderson makes it clear, however, that Alden had much broader interests and abilities. Henderson selects for discussion various small coastal cruisers; a few double-enders; the 100-foot welded steel schooner *Puritan*, built by Electric Boat in 1929-31 and still reflecting the grand days of yachting wherever she goes; the graceful sloop *White Wings; Mandoo II*, built by Herreshoff in 1936 and today turning heads as *Royono;* motorsailers; and powerboats. As early as 1912, Alden began designing small one-design racers and daysailers, which he enjoyed racing almost as much as he enjoyed entering his Malabar schooners in Bermuda races and other offshore events.

Like the Rhodes book, this volume contains hundreds of photographs and lines. An appendix lists the known Alden designs, nearly 900 in all. Much of the design work was actually done by young draftsmen who would later become notable designers in their own right. Carl Alberg, Fenwick Williams, Clifford Swaine, and many others fleshed out the design concepts of John Alden on their drawing boards. But in all of these designs was the Alden touch: a husky, rugged model with a graceful sheer.

With the publication of these two books, International Marine Publishing clearly takes the lead in popularizing the traditions of yacht design. The well-stocked yachting library must now contain International Marine's productions of W. P. Stephens's *Traditions & Memories of American Yachting*, Uffa Fox's *Sailing, Seamanship and Yacht Construction* and *Uffa Fox's Second Book*, Roger Taylor's *Good Boats* series, as well as *Philip L. Rhodes* and *John G. Alden*.

The Wherry Oarsman

Steve Dodge. *Abaco: The History of an Out Island and its Cays.* North Miami, Florida: Tropic Isle Publications, Inc., 1983. 172 pp., illustrations, notes, bibliographic essay, index. $12.50.

Steve Dodge, associate professor of History at Millikin University, has written an informed and well-researched book that constitutes the first general and comprehensive history of Abaco in the Bahamas. This beautiful island and its cays trace their history back to our revolutionary days when fleeing Loyalists came from all parts of the Eastern Seaboard to settle under the British flag. As with most of the Bahamas, problems developed due to poor soil, little water, poor communications, difficulties in getting one's product to market, etc. Many gave up and abandoned the property that had been issued to them by the British government in the hope that islands like Abaco could be permanently settled, would prosper and afford protection against pirates

who were the scourge of the Caribbean at this time. Stability and a viable economy came slowly and in fits and starts for those who stayed behind, based upon the sea around them: boatbuilding, wrecking, fishing, and meager farming. Very slowly, indeed, communications were established amongst the out islands and with Nassau through the mail boats, which carried passengers, freight, and news. However, little change was effected until the advent of tourism and, later, the independence and separation of the Bahamas from the British crown. The present government plays a more active role in Abaco improving schools, supplying medical facilities, and increasing government services. Tourism has come in a quiet manner through foreign ownership of houses, stable apartment marina complexes, and visiting yachts.

Mr. Dodge describes clearly and well Abaco's harbors, beaches, and people. Of interest to many will be the detailed discussion of local boatbuilding. Yachtsmen will also find this book both enjoyable and helpful. The portrayal is accurate and does justice to a most lovely part of the world.

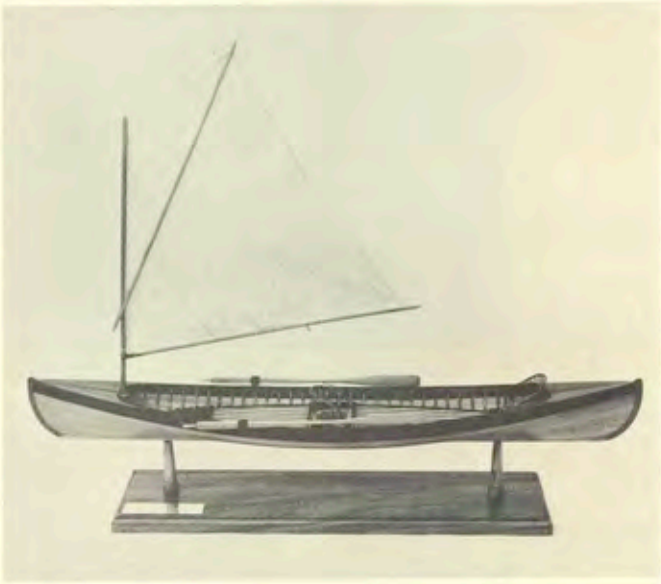
Irina C. Erickson
McGee and Barter Islands
Port Clyde, Maine

ACQUISITION

This outstanding St. Lawrence skiff model was recently acquired through the generosity of its builder, Robert C. Stere of Clayton, New York, and Harold E. Herrick, Jr., who helped fund its purchase. The model represents the classic skiff at the height of its development, in this case a 20'6" x 3'10"sailing skiff named *Bobby*, built by John D. Hunt of Alexandria Bay, New York.

The type seems to have evolved in the late 1860s in response to a need for a fishing boat for guides to take out sports, who began flocking to the Thousand Islands and other rural areas as these were opened by steamboat and railroad. By the 1880s, hundreds of skiffs were used to travel among the islands of the St. Lawrence.

Swift and stable, these boats coped easily with the short steep breakers kicked up by fierce summer squalls, yet could also easily be rowed in calms. They proved so popular that outfitters and boat shops in major eastern cities sold St. Lawrence skiffs to their customers.



Guiding fishermen became competitive, with a premium for getting to the grounds quickly. Hence sails began to be added to take advantage of prevailing winds; after their invention in the 1880s, folding or fan centerboards also became popular. But skiff sailing evolved without using rudders, possibly because of the river's many weed beds and sandbars. Helmsmen steered skiffs upwind and down by shifting their weight and adjusting sail and centerboard. By the 1890s, skiffs were raced, a tradition still carried on among the few survivors.

This model shows the highest degree of craftsmanship. It is built like a full-size boat, each plank individually shaped and held to its neighbor by copper rivets. The seats for the sportsmen are caned, the metal centerboard folds, and the necessary drain hole and plug are hidden under the stern seat. The model features, as well, a drawer under the middle seat to deposit fresh fish on a cool bed of weeds, and rod holders for trolling. It is a perfect record of the type. Built to 1½" scale, the model is 30¾" long. [83.104]



(Photo by Mary Anne Stets)

Robert G. Albion

AN APPRECIATION

Robert Greenhalgh Albion, well-known authority on American maritime history, died 9 August 1983 in Groton, Connecticut. A native of South Portland, Maine, he was buried there on his eighty-seventh birthday.

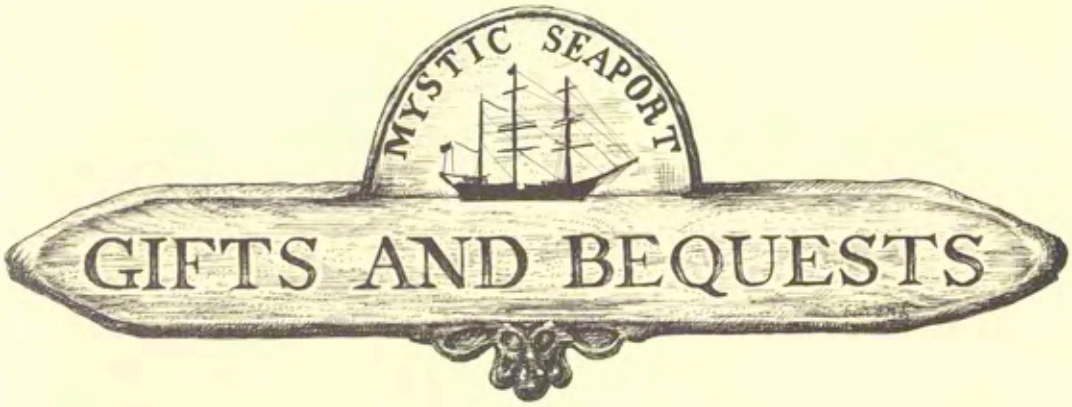
Dr. Albion occupied the Gardiner Chair of Oceanic History at Harvard University from 1949 to 1963, where his popular "boats course" introduced a generation of students to maritime history. Prior to this he taught at Princeton University for twenty years while serving in a number of administrative posts. During and after the war, 1943-50, he served as Historian of Naval History, resulting, long after, in publication of *Makers of Naval Policy, 1798-1947* (1980). Staying on as a consultant, he was awarded a Presidential Certificate of Merit in 1948.

Albion was a great and long-time friend of Mystic Seaport. A memorial service was held in his honor at the Meeting House on 21 October, followed by a reception at the Library. It was singularly appropriate that the occasion be shared by the Munson Institute program and the G. W. Blunt White Library, considering Albion's marked influence on both. Launched in 1955 after extensive planning by Albion and then Curator Edouard Stackpole, the Munson Institute of American Maritime Studies made an immediate impact on the Library, broadening its collecting aims far beyond those required by service to the Museum alone. The fact that the Library would be host to a collegiate program, first in the summertime and then year-round, influenced even the layout of the new Library which was being built in 1964-65. Further, Albion's *Naval & Maritime History: An Annotated Bibliography* (still the most comprehensive bibliography on the subject) became checklist and bible for building up the collections rapidly in the new G. W. Blunt White Library.

The number of young men and women Albion infected with a love for maritime history during his long teaching tenure at Princeton, Harvard, and Mystic, is not calculable—but the colleges and museums are full of them. However, to most on the Mystic Seaport staff, Bob Albion was the great, colorful, legendary personality who blew in each summer on the winds of the monsoon season.

Rarely has a scholar produced a more durable legacy. Albion was the author of many classics in the maritime field which will continue their hold on readers because they are eminently readable: *Forests and Sea Power: The Timber Problem of the Royal Navy* (1926), a pioneering work based upon his dissertation at Harvard; *Square Riggers on Schedule* (1938); *The Rise of New York Port, 1815-60*, probably his finest work, first published in 1939, and due for reprinting again this year by Northeastern University Press; *Sea Lanes in Wartime: The American Experience, 1775-1942* (1942) co-authored by his wife, Jennie B. Pope; *Seaports South of Sahara: The Achievements of an American Steamship Service* (1959), like most of Albion's books, far less restrictive than the title would suggest; *Forrestal and the Navy* (1961) with R. H. Connery; *New England the the Sea* (1972) with Benjamin W. Labaree and William A. Baker, which developed directly out of Munson Institute lectures; and, the book he had the most fun writing, *Five Centuries of Famous Ships* (1978). Ensconced at Harvard, he would go off to Widener Library and "knock off a couple boats" of an afternoon.

More on Albion's rich contributions to the field of American maritime history can be found in his *festschrift, The Atlantic World of Robert G. Albion* (1975), particularly in the chapter by his colleague John H. Kemble, "Maritime History in the Age of Albion."



GIFTS AND BEQUESTS

The development of the museum–the buildings, ships and wharves, the exhibits, books and manuscripts–give eloquent testimony to the generosity of members and other friends of Mystic Seaport Museum. There are continuing opportunities for gifts and bequests which will help assure its future strength and development.

Members of the Seaport who have not already done so are urged to perpetuate their interest in the work of the museum through a bequest. Some members will want to make a specific bequest while others may want to designate Mystic Seaport Museum as a residuary or contingent beneficiary of all or a portion of their estate.

Mystic Seaport Museum is a nonprofit institution publicly supported by gifts and grants. Contributions are deductible within legal limits for Federal income tax purposes. Inquiries regarding gifts and bequests are encouraged and may be directed to the Director of Resource Development.

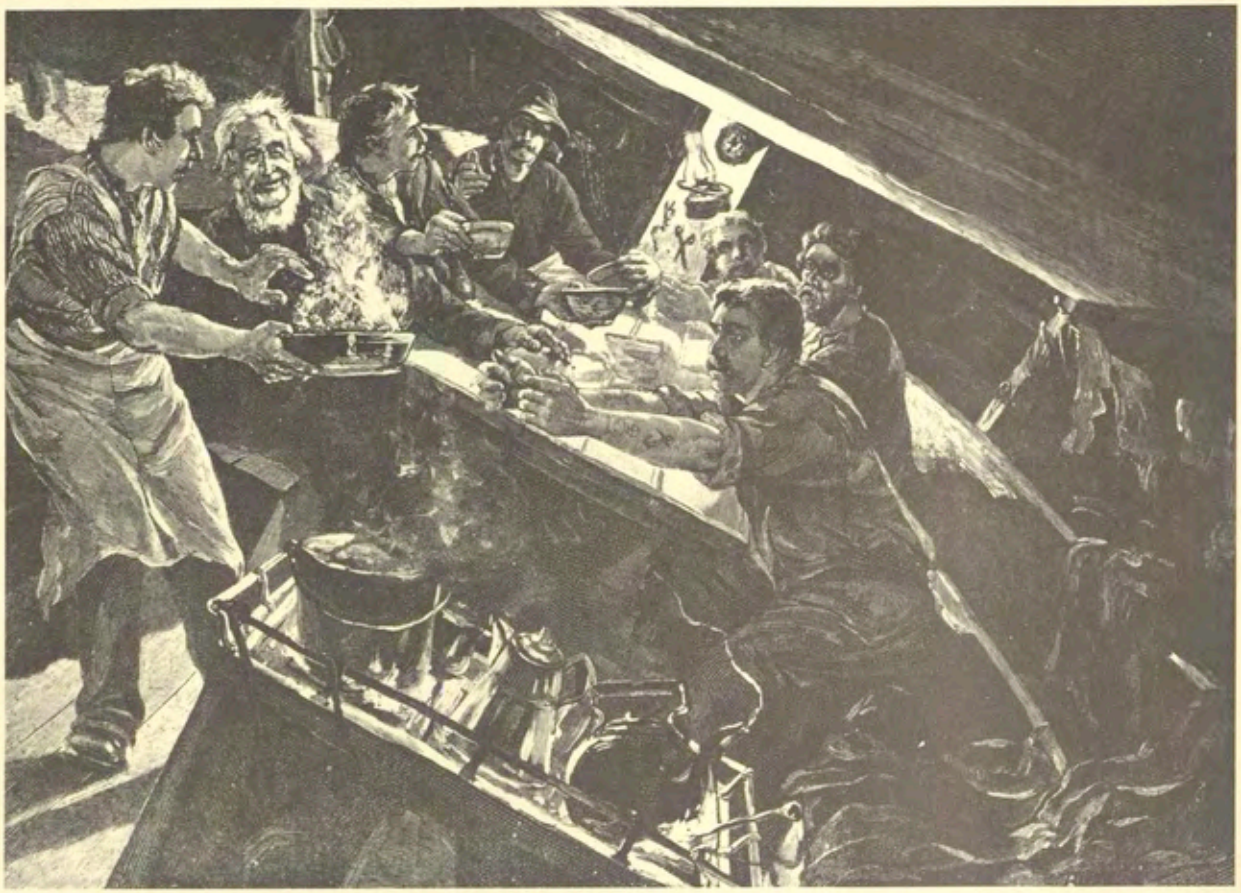
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All the rest, residue, and remainder of my real and personal estate I devise and bequeath to Mystic Seaport Museum, Inc., a corporation existing under and by virtue of a charter granted by the State of Connecticut, and located in Mystic (Town of Stonington) in said State, said estate to be used (or the net income to be used) at the discretion of the Trustees of said Corporation.



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