

## **HISTORY OF THE SHIP**

The history of the whaling ship California was a long and prosperous one. The ship was built in New Bedford, Massachusetts in 1842 and made numerous voyages in search of whales and whale oil until it was broken up in San Francisco, California in 1906. The business of whale fishery was important in the 18th and 19th centuries since it was one of the only sources of oil for lamps and candles and whale bone for corsets and other uses. In 1859, the discovery of petroleum greatly diminished the need for whaling and led to the decline of the industry not only in New Bedford, one of the primary ports of the 19th century, but all around the world.

The voyages of the California have been documented by several whaling historians. Alexander Starbuck of the United States Fish Commission in his History of the American Whale Fishery compiled data on whaling vessels. Starbuck's records indicate that as of 1876, the California had sailed eight voyages and possibly more that may not have been recorded. Another source, Whaling Logbooks and Journals, 1613-1927: An Inventory of Manuscript Records of Public Collections, compiled by Stuart C. Sherman, lists the California as completing seventeen voyages up to the year 1889. The ship was then reconfigured into a smaller vessel known as a bark, and made thirteen more voyages before being broken up in 1906. However, Sherman's inventory does not mention the 1858 voyage taken by the California.

According to Starbuck's record of the 1858 voyage, the California's journey began August 25, 1858, and ended June 6, 1862, two years after the last date in the Lafayette College log book. Starbuck's data shows that the ship's captain was Charles West and she was managed by I. Howland, Jr. & Company. The California weighed in at 398 tons but was said to have been later recalibrated at 367 tons. The location of the continuation of the logbook for this voyage is unknown although the end of the ship's journey is recorded in the Dennis Wood Abstracts from The Whalemens' Shipping List, a newspaper which lists the California's route during her full four-year voyage.

A record of the California's route between 1858-1860 can be roughly calculated from West's mention of island names, destinations, and ports. Also, pages from The Whalemens' Shipping List, a newspaper from the Dennis Wood Abstracts, reported the California's voyage until its return to New Bedford on June 6, 1862. The ship embarked from New Bedford, Massachusetts and sailed to the Canary Islands. From there they anchored in Bahia in South America, on the Argentine coast. They continued to the Falkland Islands and then up the west coast of South America to the Island of Desolacion. They then sailed to Guam in the Pacific Ocean, parts of Japan, and finally docked in Honolulu Harbor for about a month until they set out on the seas again.

Sources: History of the American Whale Fishery by Alexander Starbuck, Whaling Logbooks and Journals, 1613-1927: An Inventory of Manuscript Records of Public Collections, by Stuart C. Sherman and The Whalemens' Shipping List from the Dennis Wood Abstracts. Also, the New Bedford Whaling Museum in New Bedford, Massachusetts, (508) 997-0046, was extremely helpful in sharing their materials and resources for this research.

## **SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE**

The California ship's log is a 104-page journal that documents a whaling voyage over the span of two years, from August 25, 1858, to October 14, 1860. Most of the pages of the logbook are in good condition and fairly legible. However, a few pages are faded and hard to read while other parts appear speckled with white stains, most likely from salt water. Some pages have been torn out of the log and are missing. Also contained in this collection is a pen found inside the journal, presumably the one used to write the log.

**CALIFORNIA (WHALER)  
SHIP'S LOG, AUGUST 25, 1858-OCTOBER 14, 1860**

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LAFAYETTE COLLEGE**

Most of the daily entries consist of reports on the weather, whale killings, and sightings of other ships. These entries were written by the captain of the ship, Charles West. He notes the date, weather conditions, and latitude and longitude of the ship. Although the log is full of entries dealing with whale sightings, some passages of special interest on whales date from October 24, 1858; December 1, 1858; and January 5, 1859. Encounters with other ships were noteworthy events, allowing for the exchange of food and information. West describes these discussions of the season's production and unusual sightings on the seas or in port.

A particularly interesting account of shipboard violence is covered in the entries dating from October 25, 1858, to November 4, 1858. A dispute broke out between two men, William Chansue(?) and Mark Garity(?). William C. struck Mark G. with his fist and Mark G. then hit William C. with a cutting spade producing a 5 and 1/2 inch gash on his head. When the captain was alerted, he found William C. in poor condition and proceeded to put Mark G. in irons. The next few entries of the logbook describe William C.'s condition. On October 29, 1858, William C. died from injuries inflicted by Mark G. The Captain brought Mark G. down to see the body and Mark G. remarked "O my God I killed him." Mark G. was then placed in double irons and on November 1, 1858, Captain West delivered him to the Consul in Bahia. Several other men on board the ship were taken in for depositions and questioning. However, after November 4, 1858, West makes no further mention of Mark G. or the incident.

The last pages of the logbook contain miscellaneous statistics on whaling, mainly about the number of whales that were caught and at what latitude and longitude. West also makes reference to letters sent home to his family, sightings of other ships, and other miscellaneous personal notes.

**PROVENANCE**

The logbook was a gift of George Bushar Markle on December 18, 1962.