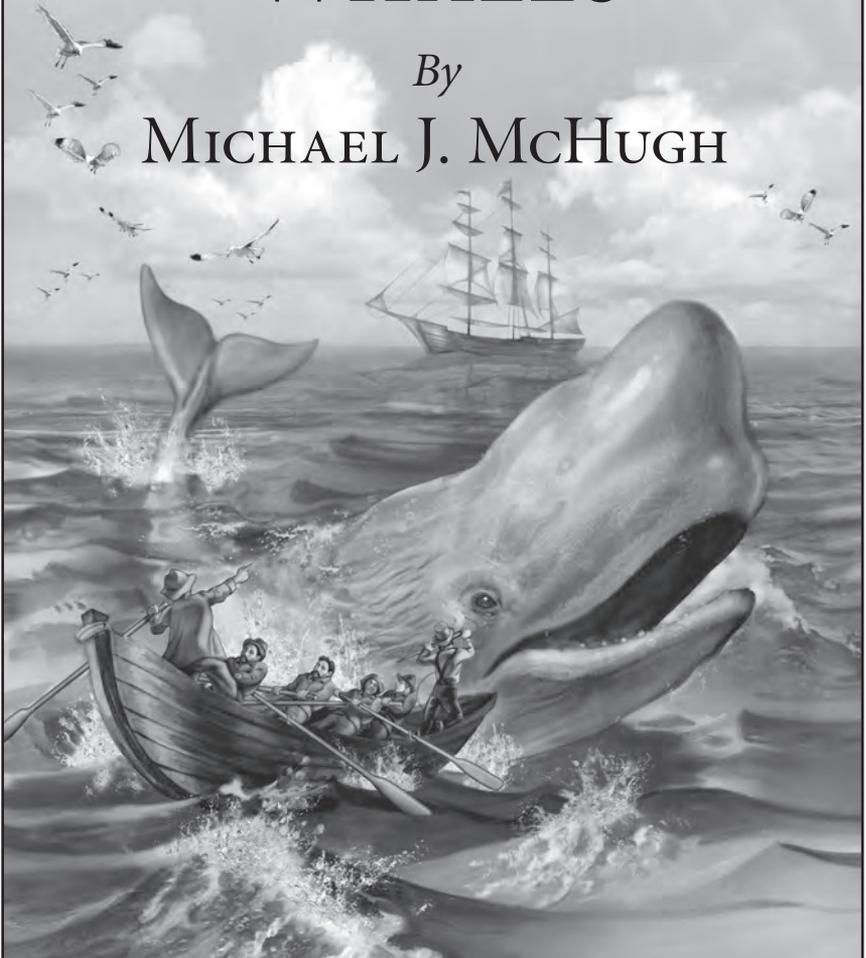


HUNTING FOR WHALES

By

MICHAEL J. McHUGH



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Hunting for Whales

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Dedication & Acknowledgement

This book is dedicated to the famous nineteenth century author and novelist R. M. Ballantyne. His classic whaling book entitled, *Fighting the Whales*, helped to inspire and shape several chapters of the book you are about to read.



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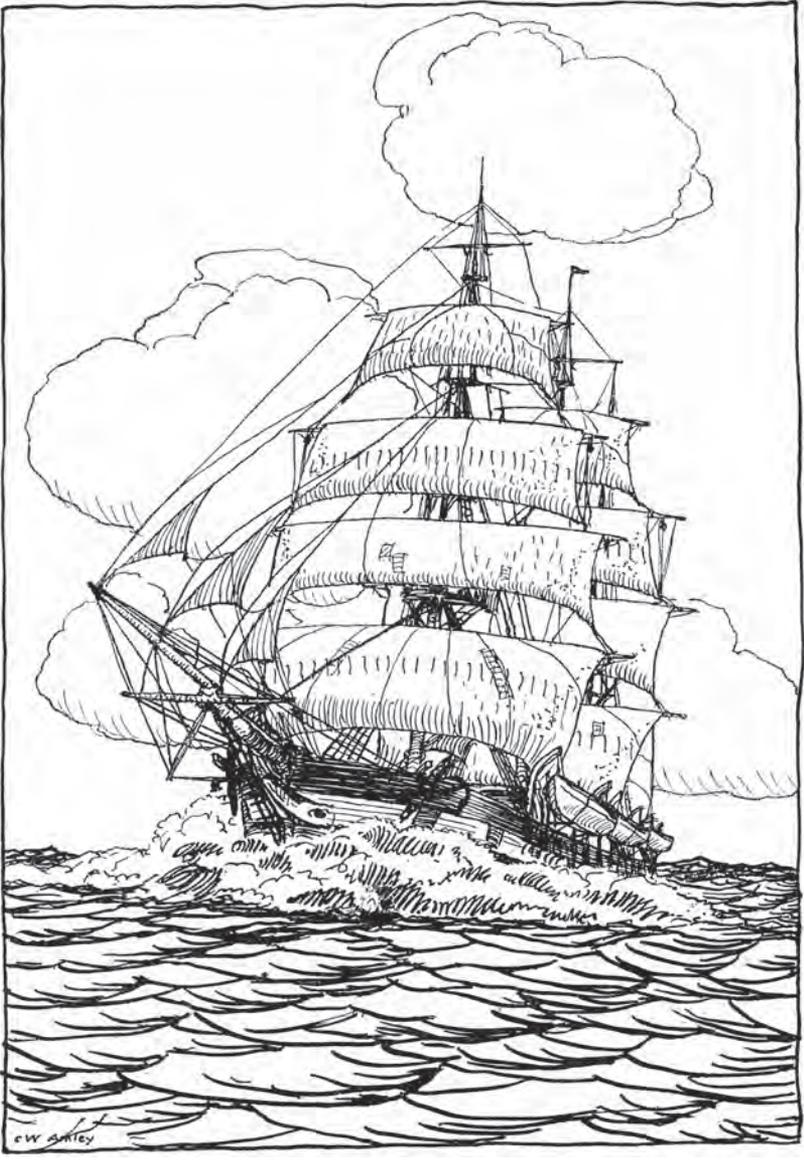


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HUNTING FOR WHALES

—INTRODUCTION—

It took a great deal of determination and courage to set out on a whaling voyage in the nineteenth century. Most ship owners required crew members to sign on for at least a two-year voyage, and sometimes demanded as long as a four-year commitment.

The anxiety that many men felt as a result of being taken away from their families or friends for extended periods, was also punctuated by significant periods of utter boredom, when the seas were quiet and the whales were scarce. If the difficulties associated with leaving loved ones and dealing with boredom did not crush you emotionally, then the routine demands of being part of a crew of whaling men was often enough to break you physically. A ceaseless array of tedious watches and hard labor amidst the scorching sun or stormy gale was the common lot of whaling men. Perhaps the greatest threat to life and limb, however, came during the actual act of hunting and processing the whales themselves; unless, of course, you factor in the food that sailors were expected to eat, which was often spoiled or rancid.

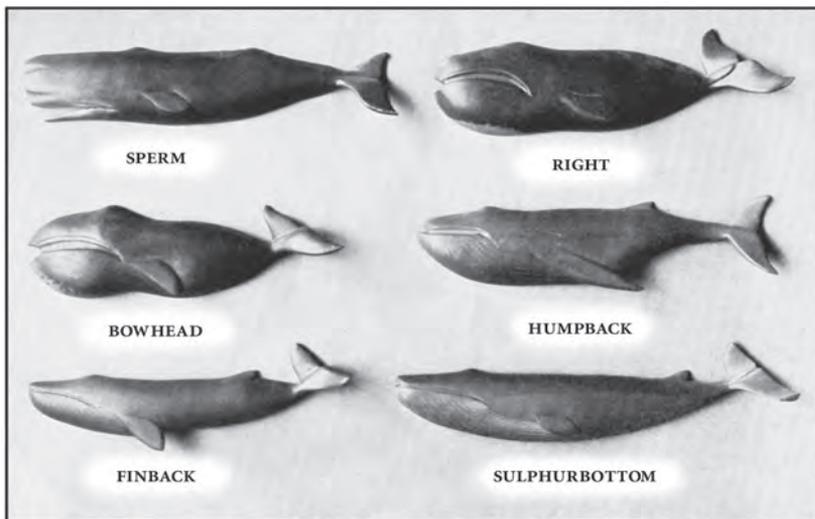
All in all, it should not be surprising to discover that most sailors only shipped out on one long whaling voyage during their career. A few hearty men, however, managed to find a way to love this strenuous life, and stayed at sea over the long haul. Some of these men began their whaling careers as cabin boys, and eventually worked their way up to the point where they became captains.

The story you are about to read is a fascinating account of two young men, from very different backgrounds, who experience the adventure of whaling during the mid-nineteenth century. It is a story not only of high sea adventure and hardship, but also of friendship, love, and God's redeeming grace.

Prior to the Civil War in the United States, most Americans living on the eastern seaboard, particularly in New England, considered whaling a very important business enterprise. During these bygone days, the American people relied greatly upon the whaling industry to supply them with useful products, such as whale oil and whalebone. Towns such as New Bedford, Mystic, and Nantucket became prosperous as a result of the popularity of such products.

In modern American society, few people understand why men risked their lives and endured long periods of loneliness simply to hunt for whales. It is the hope of the author, that readers of this book will be able to appreciate the daring exploits of whalers, and to rightly esteem their accomplishments. May your respect for whales and whaling men grow as you consider what it was like to come face-to-face with a monstrous creature, armed only with an iron spear and Yankee courage.

Michael J. McHugh
Palatine, Illinois
2011



MODELS OF SIX WHALES MADE BY MR. FRANK WOOD



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East coast whaling ports of the 1850's
From: *The Whalemens Shipping List*, published
by the National Marine Digital Library.

CHAPTER 1

Memories of My Youth

A dense fog rose slowly from the cobblestones of old New Bedford town. It was early in the spring of 1902, and my bones still ached from the dampness and cold.

As I walked slowly on, I began to view the wharf and smell the lingering aroma of rotting canvas and wood. Ninety paces ahead, I could see the tall skeletons of old ships, looking like something out of an elephant graveyard.

Many things had changed in the tiny New England town of New Bedford since the collapse of the whaling industry; but, as an old man, I could still comfort myself in the knowledge that the innkeeper still knew my name. After a long walk, I finally approached the familiar door which led into the Whaler's Inn. Moments later, much to my delight, a plump and seasoned innkeeper bellowed out my name.

"For the love of big whales, if it isn't old Jim Surrey!" spouted the proprietor of the dimly lit establishment. "What brings you in from the cold, my friend? Have you a taste for a bowl of chowder this fine day?"

"No, No," I responded. "Staying away from your chowder has caused me to live into old age. My hope is to meet with my old shipmate, Timothy Dronner, and to rekindle our friendship."

"Well, if you can't have a warm stomach this day, may ye have a heartwarming gam with your friend," replied the good-natured innkeeper.

As I moved deeper into the confines of the inn, a corner booth graced with an oil lamp came before me. Sitting down, I quickly set aside my cap and cane and ordered up a hot drink. Before long, I found myself signaling to the innkeeper for

another drink to be brought as I recognized the voice of an old friend coming closer to my ears.

“Hallo, Master Jim!” asserted the bright-eyed visitor named Timothy Dronner. “I hardly thought to see ye out this day considering the cold and damp.”

“My old bones never could tell me what to do with my time mate. We seldom find the time for a gam, dear friend, so I am here even though me bones are talking kinda loud these days. Sit down, then, sit down before ye fall down.”

“Jim, can it truly be that we shipped out on our first voyage almost sixty years ago?” asked Timothy as he began to puff on his long-necked pipe.

“Pretty nearly so, my friend, we were but mere lads and as green as cucumbers,” I responded. “Even after all these years since we have hung up our oilskins, I still can’t get used to seeing New Bedford town so still and quiet. Time was when every part of town was bursting with activity.”

“I know what you mean,” said Timothy quickly. “I can still see Captain Flynn strolling down the wharf, top hat and all.”

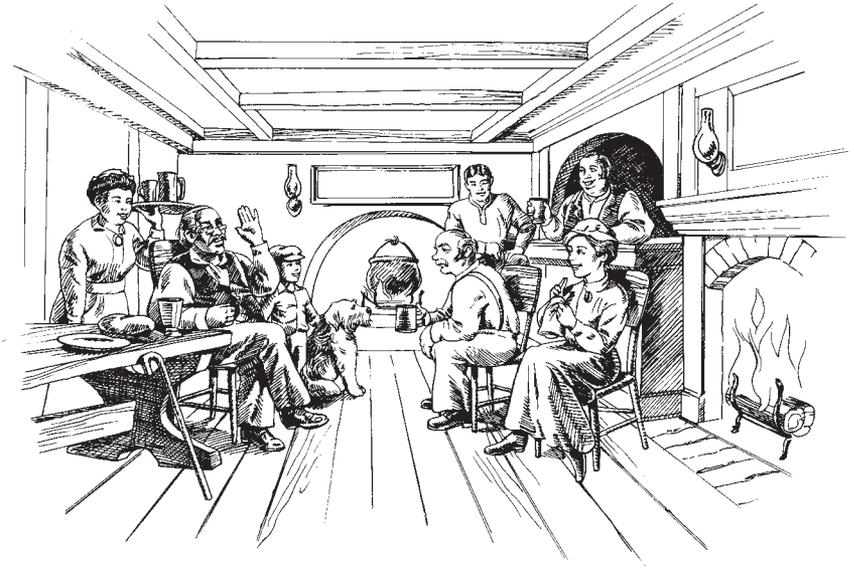
“It’s hard to keep from thinking about the days of our youth, old friend,” I added, as I began to stare into a nearby fireplace. “It all seems like a wild dream, and, at the rate our memories are fading, even the dream may soon be gone.”

“We must not let the story of whaling men be capsized and lost, shipmate,” said the concerned old sailor named Timothy as he turned to the crowd gathered at the inn.

Moments later, this grey-haired salt of the sea boldly stood up and addressed the curious onlookers. “Dear people of New Bedford, my name is Timothy Dronner, and I ask thee to gather round and lend an ear to my friend and former shipmate, Jim Surrey. He has a tale worth telling about the great days of sail and of the men who fought big whales. Fill your glasses then, and listen to my friend spin a story worth passing on to your children and grandchildren.”

Slowly, people began to position themselves close to the heavy wooden table where I sat, in utter silence, still taken aback by the boldness of my friend’s speech. A short time later, a small group of townspeople sat staring at me as I reluctantly

resigned myself to the task of telling the story of my adventures as a whaling man.



A prolonged hush fell over the Whaler's Inn as I slowly began to explain how I was first led to become a whale hunter. Amidst the clanking of glasses and shuffling of chairs, I started to take on the role of an old storyteller by lifting up my gravelly voice and beginning a voyage of words.