

- 51 The author is grateful to Ronica Watlington for information on Halbeck's life in Bermuda.
- 52 *The Bermudian*, June, 1934, p. 14.
- 53 *The Royal Gazette*, October 29, 1937, p. 1; November 2, 1937, p. 1; September 28, 1946, p. 8.
- 54 *The Royal Gazette*, May 1, 1935, p. 1; January 28, 1949, p. 12.
- 55 See (inter alia) *The Royal Gazette*, January 2, 1935, p. 4; January 3, 1935, p. 1; January 7, 1935, p. 2; January 8, 1935, p. 6; also *The Bermudian*, February, March and April, 1935.
- 56 *The Royal Gazette*, May 25, 1933, p. 8; June 7, 1933, p. 3; June 26, 1933, p. 3; May 22, 1935, p. 12. See also *The Bermudian*, April, 1933, p. 18; August, 1933, p. 15; August, 1935, p. 15; and *Island Voyager* magazine (Fort Wayne, Indiana), April, 1933, p. 6.
- 57 *The Royal Gazette*, August 29, 1933, p. 1. The Victorian artist Edward James had arrived quite similarly.
- 58 *The Royal Gazette*, September 12, 1933, p. 1.
- 59 *The Royal Gazette*, September 22, 1948, p. 1. He lived and worked at "Palmetto House," Devonshire.
- 60 *The Royal Gazette*, September 11, 1949, p. 1; see also *The Bermudian*, February, 1950, pp. 14–15.

## Chasing Fool's Gold: Whaling in 19th and 20th-Century Bermuda

Aldemaro Romero, PhD  
Dean's Office, College of Arts and Sciences,  
Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville,  
Edwardsville, IL 62026, US  
aromero@siue.edu

*ABSTRACT: Whaling in Bermuda, which was always an opportunistic activity, became more so during the 19th, and particularly the 20th Centuries. Despite the introduction of new technologies, Bermudians seem to have never lost faith in the revival of this activity. However, a combination of scarcity of whales, competition by American pelagic ("Yankee") whalers, and political and economic circumstances made this revival unfeasible. As time went by, whaling in Bermuda was being carried out more and more by blacks. Despite the presence of numerous species of marine mammals, exploitation concentrated almost exclusively on humpback and sperm whales, with total absence of "blackfish" (pilot whale) or dolphin fisheries as occurred among other former British colonies in the Western Hemisphere.*

### INTRODUCTION

As explained in an earlier work (Romero 2008) Bermuda saw increased whaling activity during the 18th Century due to the liberalisation of the industry by the British Crown. But the shifting of Bermuda from a largely agricultural society to a maritime one in the 19th Century, and the extreme poverty of its people, led it to take on more opportunistic ventures. As a result, there was a surge in the number of whaling stations erected and/or expanded and in the number of whaling vessels imported or locally built. Additionally, Yankee whalers visited Bermudian waters either to capture whales or in transit to whaling grounds, or both, in growing numbers.

Since social, economic, and political conditions had not significantly changed by early 19th-Century Bermuda, whaling continued to be a local activity, although largely conditioned by the seasonality of whales showing up in those waters. Traditionally, Bermudians had hunted mostly humpback whales (*Megaptera novaeangliae*), which



*Fig. 1: Wooden sheath used to protect the blade of a whaler's lance. Photo: Aldemaro Romero*

appear in Bermudian waters between January and March.

At the turn of the 19th Century, whaling off Bermuda was rather primitive. Part of the problem was that during the 18th Century, Massachusetts in general, and Nantucket in particular, had banned the exports of whaling paraphernalia to Bermuda in fear of competition.

Bermuda's whaling boats were, for the most part, like the ones described for Nantucket, *i.e.*, powered by six oarsmen, with a steersman and a harpooner carrying a harpoon with a detachable iron head attached to a rope. These boats were 28 feet in length on average. Each boat had two spare harpoons and three lances, sometimes protected by a wooden sheath (Fig. 1). Initially, the whalers normally used very short (and thick) lines to hunt whales (no more than 100 ft, or about 30 m). This helps to explain the whalers' difficulty when the whales tried to escape by plunging. Humpback whales have been recorded diving as deep as 240 m off Bermuda (Packwood 1993, 26; Hamilton *et al.* 1997).

Whales were scouted by look-outs stationed on cliffs, who announced the presence of whales by blowing conch shells. Men on board whaling vessels also used conch shells to announce they had caught a whale. When a whale was killed, the boats towed it to the shore as close as possible to the whaling station (whale-house or "establishment") and then hauled it into shallow waters. It could take up to 17 hours from the moment the animal was struck to the time it was brought to the whale-house (Jones 1884b). At that time, whalers used telegraph flags in the whale-houses to announce whether or not they had whaled successfully and even the species of whale they had captured. To announce they had capture a baleen whale (almost always a humpback) a telegraph flag was displayed on the south yard arm of



*Fig. 2: Undated postcard photograph taken probably around 1900. Notice all the people involved in the flensing operation are black adult males*

the whale house; for sperm whales they displayed the same pennant band flag on the north yard arm. If a brig displayed the telegraph flag, it denoted two whales captured and if over a brigantine, three (Kennedy 1975:56).

The animal was then flensed (cut up and sliced), usually by black adult males (Fig. 2). The first step was to cut off the blubber in pieces as large as could be carried, and once on shore, cut into smaller pieces that could fit into boilers—large iron pots or cauldrons. Men, women and children (mostly black) participated in the on-beach operations. After being boiled, the blubber was cooled in pits plastered with tarras, a German natural cement, so that no copper cooler was required. The oil was placed in a cedar cistern. Oil was exported only after fulfilling the local needs as illuminant.

The proceeds were then divided as follows: one to two barrels for the owner of the whale-house, and the remainder divided among the owner of the boat, the harpooner, the steersman, and the oarsmen (1/9 each) (Tucker 1962). The quantity of oil from the average whale was 30 barrels of 30 gallons each.

The men then removed the flesh ("sea beef") and the meat was divided up among the poor, who could not pay the high prices of other meat sources, and who also took some of the unused oil for their lamps (McCallan 1986, 77). According to Cotter (1828) "the noise and confusion is beyond description, women, and children calling to the operators, who from time to time throw large pieces of the flesh on shore. In a few hours, a whale approaching 60 feet is reduced to a skeleton, and scarcely [*sic*] a house, whether occupied by whites or

Blacks, where a treat of whale beef does not take place that day or the next. The English have a strong prejudice against this food, but the Bermudians have a method of cleansing it, which leaves no fishy flavour, and it is as tender as veal." The meat was salted and dried, but the more delicate parts were dressed. The most sought after parts were those between the head and the "shoulders" (probably the flippers) (Packwood 1993, 89–90). Meat from a cub humpback was considered a treat by the families of the fishermen and labourers (Jones 1884b). During flensing it was not unusual for sharks to feed on the carcass.

When these large whales are towed to shore the vast quantity of blood escaping from their wounds attracts numbers of sharks, some of very large size, which mutilate the body and devour much of the meat. This well-known habit of the sharks is sometimes turned to profitable account by the colored boat-men, who take what is left of the body of a whale, after the process of 'flinching' has been gone through, outside the reefs, and let it remain as a bait. Several boats will join in one of these expeditions, having experienced spearmen on board, who, at every opportunity, spear a large shark which, in its turn, is converted into oil which is of particular commercial value" (Jones 1884b).

Other by-products from whales were the hide used to make footwear, particularly for slaves (Tucker 1983; Packwood 1993, 92). The bones were used for implements and the vertebrae as stools at St. David's (Smith 1955; Zuill 1958; Packwood 1993). People with rheumatism were counselled to get into a whale carcass "after the entrails were taken out, and into this cavity, the affected person is put and kept there until he sweats thoroughly."<sup>1</sup>

### 1800–38: MECHANISATION BEGINS

The commercial restrictions that kept Bermudian whaling in a primitive stage were probably lifted—or at least circumvented—at the turn of the 19th Century. For example, in 1809 the brigantine *Dragon* was purchased in Nantucket and on April 17, 1817 became the first whaling vessel in Bermuda to use a whale gun (Packwood 1993, 26). Apparently, this gun was imported that same year by Francis Fowle (Kennedy 1975, 56). The *Dragon* was owned by Captain Francis Forbes Hinson, a mariner, shipbuilder and farmer, from Paget Island.<sup>2</sup> Hinson's interest in whaling dated to at least 1797 when he purchased Paget Island to provide a safe anchorage for his whaling boats. To that end, he almost completed a canal from the Ship Channel to a small lagoon about 70 m inland. Apparently he made a "whale net" of stout cordage to net whales trying to enter the canal but that was never successful. Instead, he netted a French vessel with it. Hinson sold his stake around 1818. The possible buyer of Hinson's enterprise was the

company Lightbourn, Middleton and Tatem that by early 1819 sought people with whale hunting experience "whether black or white" for employment on the *Dragon* (Packwood 1993, 164).

Yet Hinson was not done with the business of whaling. He reappeared on November 16, 1831, this time whaling off the island of Trinidad in the West Indies (Romero *et al.* 2002). On that day he manumitted (freed for faithful and/or meritorious behaviour) five slaves he was taking to the Trinidad whale-fishing grounds (Packwood 1993, 164). The next year he was back in Bermuda and named a new whaling schooner *Edward Goodrich* after a merchant who had underwritten some whaling efforts before he died in 1817 at the age of 59 (Wilkinson 1973, 363). Hinson himself died 1832 (McCallan 1986, 233).

These developments in the Bermudian whaling business coincided with the appearance of the Bermuda *Blue Books*. Beginning in the 1820s, the *Blue Books* (a compilation of statistics used by the British Parliament for record-keeping purposes) began to provide more complete reports of whaling activities in Bermuda. For example, the *Blue Book* for 1824 shows that Bermuda exported 91 barrels of whale oil from St. George's (valued at £364), while from Hamilton 8,300 gallons were exported, of which £101 in value was sent to the West Indies and £23 "elsewhere" (Bermuda *Blue Book* 1824). In 1825 a total of 3,462 gallons was exported from Hamilton, of which £474 was sent to the West Indies and £50 elsewhere. From St. George, 540 gallons was exported (valued £68) to the West Indies (Bermuda *Blue Book* 1825).

By this time, Bermuda was not only exporting whale oil but also whaling know-how. For example, commercial whaling in Trinidad most likely began around 1826, the year that C.A. White, a retired sea Captain from Bermuda, bought 17 quarrees (55 acres) of land on the flat westernmost tip of Gasparee (Gaspar Grande), from a Trinidadian, Mr. de Percin. This land later came to be known as Pointe Baleine (Whale Point). In May, 1827 White petitioned the Cabildo (Port-of-Spain Council) for permission to open a subscription list to establish a whaling industry (City Council Records 1827). The Cabildo granted his request, since they felt it would not interfere with their sale of coconut oil from Manzanilla on eastern Trinidad; after all, the 2,400 gallons they produced each year could not satisfy local demand for lamp oil. White appointed Charles Hugon as his sales agent (*Port of Spain Gazette*, March 3 and 14, 1827).

By 1829, 17 whales were landed at four different whaling stations in Bermuda (Bermuda *Blue Book* 1829):

|                        |                            | <i>Whales</i> | <i>Barrels</i> |
|------------------------|----------------------------|---------------|----------------|
| <i>At St. George's</i> | Mr. Hinson's Establishment | 12            | 300            |
|                        | Mr. Higg's Establishment   | 3             | 80             |
|                        | Mr. Athell's Establishment | 1             | 14             |
| <i>At Somerset</i>     | Mr. Burrows' Establishment | 1             | 40             |

The *Blue Book* for 1832 described the whale industry as "inconsiderable," employing about 12 whale boats and their crews, operating for three months a year and rarely taking more than 20 whales per year yielding about 1,000 barrels. Yet, this publication considered this industry "capable of considerable extension, at small risk by the employment of additional capital." From then on it is difficult to calculate the amount the whale oil produced, not only because unlike other islands in the West Indies, the Bermudian *Blue Books* did not record the exact number of whales nor the amount of whale oil produced, but only the amount exported, not considering local consumption. To make things worse, the figures of exported oil included other types of oils, making it virtually impossible to figure out exactly how many whales were captured.

Another whaling company in the first half of the 19th Century was the Benjamin Hayward establishment at St. David's, which was the largest in Bermuda. Hayward reported that his company had captured 11 whales in 1836, yielding 7,000 gallons of whale oil. At that time, oil was sold at five shillings a gallon and a large whale produced 1,500 gallons. Whale meat sold at nine pence a pound.

On July 17, 1838 the *Royal Gazette* reported Benjamin Higgs offering for sale the whole of his whaling establishment at Cedar Hill as follows:

The subscriber offers for sale if applied for immediately The Whole Establishment at Cedar Hill for CASH, on accommodating terms, or in Barter for produce,

*Viz.:-*

1 Most superior WHALE BOAT; or Two, if wanted with Harpoons, Warps, Lances, Oars, and every requisite for such an Establishment, all in Excellent Order

1 COOLER, to hold 35 Barrels Hot Oil,

2 Ditto (quite new,) to hold the Blubber of a large whale

4 Excellent large Iron Boilers, three quite new,

2 Large Cooper [*sic*, copper] Ladle\*, quite new,

Blubber Knives, Hand Hooks,

BLOCKS and FALL, and every other appendage requisite for such an Establishment.

All these articles being in Excellent Order, may be ordered to any part of the Island at a trifling expence. Application to be made at CEDAR

HILL, to  
BENJAMIN HIGGS  
St. George's, June 25, 1838

At the same time the other whaling boat owner was a Mr. Howard (Gosling 1952).

### 1832-60: THE HUNT FOR SPERM WHALES

Bermudians saw a new opportunity in exploiting a species of whale that had remained elusive to them: sperm whales (*Physeter macrocephalus*). Because of both their aggressiveness when chased and their ability to dive very deep (more than 2,000 m), sperm whales were almost impossible to catch with hand-held harpoons until the early 18th Century, when harpoon guns were introduced.

The first recorded capture of a sperm whale off Bermudian waters took place in 1832 followed by another one in the summer of 1839 near St. George's that yielded 84 barrels of oil. It was struck by Josiah Smith. Another capture took place in 1840 (Hurdis 1897, 340; Verrill 1902, 278). On April 21, 1849 a whale, which had been found dead, was towed into Somerset. The animal was presumably harpooned by an American whaling vessel (Hurdis 1897, 339). On June 1, 1849 a sperm whale carcass was found drifting near the lighthouse, probably also hit by an American whaler. According to Hurdis (1897, 340) "These are the only instances of its capture in Bermuda during the last nine years."

Whaling continued as a sporadic and opportunistic venture in the following years, with up to a dozen whales captured in a single whaling season. In addition to the whale station on Smith's Island (where King George IV had granted landowners additional ownership rights to 20 ft below low-water mark, allowing the whalers to haul their whales onto their property), other smaller whaling establishments were set up at Ferry Point, Tucker's Town, Devonshire, Warwick, Southampton and at Whale Island in Ely's Harbour. Yet, this was an unregulated activity, with boats encumbering each other while chasing whales (Wilkinson 1973, 656-7). All of these ventures tended to be short-lived and not very profitable, especially since they had to compete with American whalers operating in the area.

In general, little whaling took place in the 1840s and 1850s, despite increasing efforts to develop the industry. The whaling establishment in Southampton was a small concern operated in the 1830s by a syndicate of black businessmen who had their own whaling boats and business from their own property. They were Benjamin Richardson, Richard Conyers, Henry Taylor, Stephen Tucker and William Tankard (Jones 1993, 187). Most of these ventures failed because of competition and lack of funding.

Table 1 WHALING VENTURES ESTABLISHED IN BERMUDA FROM 1812 UNTIL 1840

| Company            | Date established | Boats    | Men             | Months of operation | 'Black whales' |                      |                  | Sperm whales |                      |                  | Total gallons |
|--------------------|------------------|----------|-----------------|---------------------|----------------|----------------------|------------------|--------------|----------------------|------------------|---------------|
|                    |                  |          |                 |                     | Whales taken   | Gallons sold (local) | Gallons exported | Whales taken | Gallons sold (local) | Gallons exported |               |
| John Hayward       | 1812             | 2        | 21 <sup>1</sup> | 2                   | 5              | 4,000                | 0                | 0            | 0                    | 0                | 4,000         |
| Dan. Lightbourn    | 1838             | 2        | 19 <sup>1</sup> | 2.5                 | 2              | 2,019                | 0                | 0            | 0                    | 0                | 2,019         |
| Port Royal Co.     | 1839             | 3        | 25 <sup>2</sup> | 2                   | 0              | 0                    | 0                | 0            | 0                    | 0                | 0             |
| Jones, Smith & Co. | 1840             | 2        | 19 <sup>2</sup> | 2.5                 | 1              | 880                  | 0                | 1            | 2,550                | 0                | 3,430         |
| <b>Total</b>       |                  | <b>9</b> | <b>84</b>       |                     | <b>8</b>       | <b>6,899</b>         | <b>0</b>         | <b>1</b>     | <b>2,550</b>         | <b>0</b>         | <b>9,449</b>  |

1 All white 2 All "coloured"

Source: Bermuda Blue Book 1841

Table 1 details the Bermuda whaling industry for 1840.

In 1849 the Bermuda Whaling Company was organised with Samuel Saltus Ingham as Secretary; shares sold at £3 each (Kennedy 1975, 56). The lack of success and the intense competition for the few whales left in Bermudian waters led to a January 1851 meeting of whaling entrepreneurs at Beer's Royal Hotel on Front Street, Hamilton. They decided to join efforts, creating a single company with Ingham as secretary. He advertised that they were looking for about 20 men and imported several New England whaling boats that were added to the existing fleet by the local investors. With them came four experienced men ready to buy shares whose names I have not been able to locate. The colonial government provided a £100 subsidy in order to buy a new gun that could shoot a harpoon with an explosive head from as far as 80 yards away. Despite this new technology and investment, the company's boats caught only one whale at the West End that year. Another was secured off Ferry Point, but by an independent whaling crew. Each yielded about 30 barrels (Wilkinson 1973, 656).

On July 28, 1852 the only whale captured was a 30-foot sperm whale by a St. David's boat, captained by Charlie Fox. In 1853 there were two or three establishments operating. Two adult whales and a calf were caught at the East End with at least one of them being a sperm. During this operation, one boat from Smith's Island, owned by Jacob Catlin Smith, was smashed by a whale rolling back on it. The whale escaped. In 1854 the crew from the whaling station at Port Royal, owned by a Mr. Masters, caught a 54-foot whale and it was not until 1859 that Bermudians tried again with boats at St. David's, Tucker's Town, and Southampton, but these attempts were unsuccessful (Gardner 1853; Jones 1884b; Hurdis 1897, 340; Verrill 1902, 278; Kennedy 1975, 56; McCallan 1986).

By 1856 there were six boats left (Bermuda *Blue Book* 1856) and by 1859 there were only two whale-boats operating: one at Tucker's Town and the other at Southampton. That year the *Blue Book* commented: "The once flourishing whale fishery of Bermuda has declined a long time since; this business now employs only about six boats and the crews for three months per year... It could do better if it had more capital and were better laboured. Labour is, indeed, the one grand want in an economical sense, of Bermuda. Table fish of excellent quality and great variety abounds, and can be taken in any quantity; but the coloured population, who have great method in their laziness, and indulge it as scientific principles, will never catch as much as to cause the price to fall, or their market to fluctuate." Also in 1856, the Spanish Vice-Consul, a certain Mr. Todd, at St. George's, imported from England a musket, which he used to shoot at whales with powder and a harpoon: we do not know if he was successful.

By then, whaling had become a romanticised activity as epitomised by popular rhymes such as one from St. David's (Packwood 1993, 26–28).

*Jump up, Charlie Fox, and don't be afraid,  
Strike that whale on the shoulder blade.*

*Charlie Fox, tall and thin  
Struck that whale right under the fin*

*There's Capt'n Masters with his spyglass:  
Run boys, run! Whale-boat's fas!*

*There's Joe Moses with his tip toes  
Down to the whale-house away he goes*

*There's Bro Israel with his long knife  
Who touches this whale, I'll take his life.*

*There's ol' Tappin who thought of his fiddle  
And the warp got a tangle' round his middle.*

### 1861–1900: THE DECLINE OF AN INDUSTRY

In the 1860s, kerosene, which had been developed in the 1840s, started to replace whale oil as illuminator in Bermuda (Tucker 1983, 134). This meant the demand for whale oil decreased dramatically. For the rest of the 19th Century only seven whales were captured:

1. May 1863: a 47-ft sperm whale (Jones 1884b)
2. April 22, 1866: a humpback calf that yielded 40 barrels and was processed at Port Royal (Jones 1884b; Verrill 1902, 275)
3. June 19, 1869: a 47-ft sperm whale south of David's Head (Jones 1884b; Verrill 1902, 278)
4. April 26, 1871: a 22-ft humpback calf processed at Port Royal (Jones 1884b; Verrill 1902, 275) whose mother was struck and beached the following day. The calf yielded 5.5 barrels of oil.
5. December 18, 1891: *The Royal Gazette* reported that the *Shamrock*, a 28-ft American-built boat from St. David's Island, captured a whale 14 miles off St. David's. The 55–60 ft animal was harpooned by Joseph Fox and towed to Southampton Bay. The steam tug *Britannia* helped towing to Smith's Island.
6. September 1892: a sperm whale struck by Joseph Fox at Smith's Island yielding 30 barrels of oil (Wilkinson 1973, 657).
7. December 11, 1894: a 56-ft sperm whale was killed 14 miles off

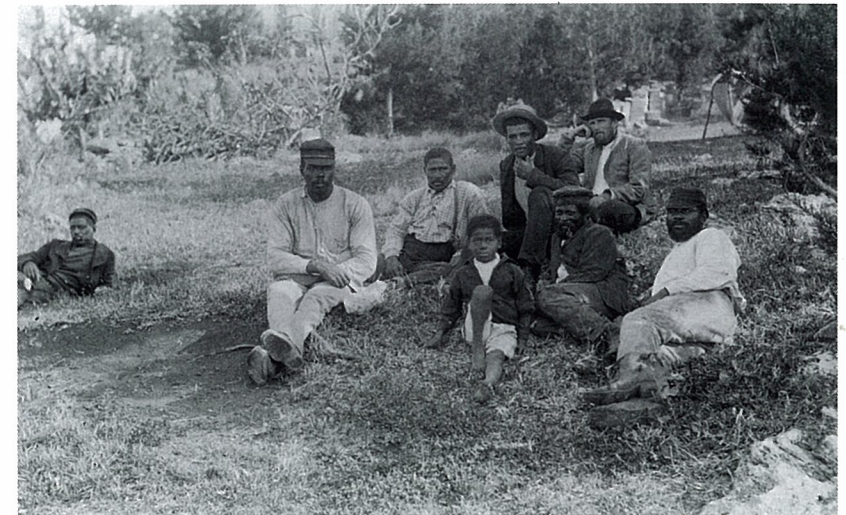


Fig. 3: A March, 1890 picture of a crew of St. David's Island whaleboat while visiting the islands of Castle Harbour

St. David's Island. Again the harpooner was Joseph Fox on board the *Shamrock*. He used a bomb lance. The animal was towed to Southampton Bay and yielded 60 barrels of oil valued £260 (Wilkinson 1973, 657).

Despite the paucity in the capture of whales, during the second half of the 19th Century, a Bermuda Act was passed in 1867 according to which: "If at any time the carcass [*sic*] of any whale or any part thereof, be suffered to lie or remain on the shores, or to drift or float in or about any waters adjacent to these Islands, or within the same until such whale or part of a whale become offensive or a nuisance, the several persons whose boats may have brought such whale in, shall be liable to a penalty of twenty pounds, for every boat concerned therein, to be recovered by any person suing for the same; and every owner paying the same may recover it back with costs from any person or persons by whose fault or neglect such nuisance shall be proved to have been occasioned" (Gray 1884, 655).

By this time the whaling crews were composed exclusively of "coloured" men (Jones 1884b) (Fig. 3).

By 1875, the shore whaling industry in Bermuda was all but dead. As recorded in the *Blue Book* for 1875: "There was a time when whale fishery in Bermuda was pursued to advantage, and the oil fishery obtained met with a ready sale for home consumption, but the pursuit of this industry has long since declined and is only occasionally revived and even then to no great extent." The note added that in addition to the presence of kerosene in the market, high tariffs

imposed for whale oil by the US government meant that whale oil was no longer a profitable commodity.

By 1880 the only recorded whale boats were Tommy Fox's *Shamrock* (with a whale gun) and 100 ft of line, Thomas Seon Hayward's *Molly* (later owned by Anthony B. and Thomas Hayward), Henry William Lightbourne's *Three Sisters*, and Joseph Minor's *Rebecca* (Smith 1955; Schortman 1969) with some of the whaling equipment imported from New Bedford (Jones 1993, 56). By 1885 there were no whaling stations in operation any more (Kennedy 1975, 56).

All this goes to show that despite local efforts, whale populations in Bermudian waters were depleted. However, towards the end of the 19th Century, the Royal Navy used whales for target practice in local waters (Tucker 1962).

#### THE 20TH CENTURY: THE SWAN SONG

The first record of whaling off Bermuda in the 20th Century is from April 1901 when a 30-ft sperm whale was taken (Verrill 1902, 110).

This may have encouraged some to try to pursue whaling again as evidenced by the 1903 Whaling Industry Act (published in May 1904). This legislative action was initiated after a petition by Eugenius Harvey to revive the whaling industry. The Act basically provided him with a permit to build and operate a whaling station for the production of whale oil and "other products" for 20 years. The Act also established that his operations had to prevent "the introduction of any noxious or deleterious matter into any public waters" with provisions for the General Board of Health to regulate the disposal of the carcasses of the whales. Only three years later (1906) a second Whaling Industry Act established a deadline of May 21, 1908 to have the whaling station fully operational. Both of these Acts were repealed in 1923, suggesting that this venture led nowhere.

Despite the lack of any meaningful whaling activity, some Bermudians remained undeterred and continued their hopes to revive the industry. For example, in 1925 Antonio Marshall went to New Bedford, Massachusetts, and bought two whaleboats with whaling equipment for £500. The equipment included brass shoulder guns of 40–50 pounds in weight that used gunpowder. The trigger was made of steel and utilised a 12-inch dart. Marshall kept the whaling boat at Claudia Darrell's property at the Waterlot Inn on Jews Bay in the Little Sound. The look-outs on land used directional flags to signal the crew where the whales were. Marshall went out whaling with Joseph Perry out of Rural Hill, but although he hit at least one animal Marshall never caught a whale and ended up selling the equipment (Jones 1993, 53–57).

By the 1930s there was only one whaling boat left. It was the 32-



Fig. 4: *The Southampton Whaler, later renamed Bonito. Charles Ainsworth Darrell is the steersman handling the long oar. The boat has the typical six oarsmen (unidentified) and the builder, Gunnison ("Gunny") Astwood, who later acted as the gunner*

ft, 7-ft beam vessel known as *Southampton Whaler*<sup>3</sup> built in Bermuda in 1931. The frame was made of Bermuda cedar and plank of aeroplane pine. It used a long oar for steering and had a 37 mm harpoon gun mounted (Fig. 4). The builder was Gunnison ("Gunny") Astwood, who later acted as the gunner. The captain (steersman) was Charles Ainsworth Darrell, an ordained deacon of the Mount Zion African Methodist Episcopal Church, who purchased the whaling equipment manufactured by the Naval Company of Philadelphia in New Bedford, Massachusetts. The boat was based in Sinky Bay, Southampton East. It left port about 8 a.m. on "fine days." When rough seas occurred, the vessel was towed by a motor boat. It carried six oarsmen and the crew, all blacks, was usually made up of Henry Butler, Godfrey Simmons, James, John, and Thomas Smith, and Basil Tribli. There were three substitutes in case any of the above could not make it: Eddie Smith, Preston Simmons and a "chap by the name of Bean" (Kan 1933; Jones 1993, 53–57).

This venture was unsuccessful. In 1933 alone they made 30 trips, saw several whales but caught none. At one point they hit one, but after 12 hours of struggle they lost the animal. They planned to make money exhibiting the whale and selling the meat but they ended up going out of business and sold the boat (Kan 1933; Jones 1993, 53–57).

On September 10, 1932 a male sperm whale, 13 ft 3 ins long, obviously a very young calf, was caught not by harpooning but by tying a rope to its tail. This suggests this animal was an abandoned calf

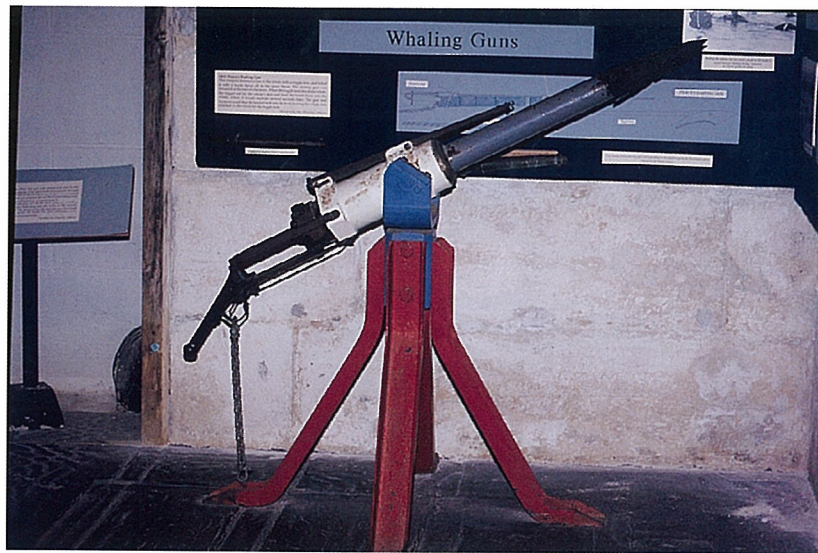


Fig. 5: The Norwegian harpoon gun used by "Gunny" Astwood

in distress. The animal was first sighted by Joseph Lambert about half a mile from the shore of Ely's Harbour and later grounded at Burches Point. C. A. Darrell, with the help of three companions (Charles Darrell, William Mason and Norman Bean) towed the animal to Somerset Beach on Skroggins Bay tail first and placed it on exhibition there, where it was nicknamed "Guppy." As Darrell said to the local press: "I waited 20 years for a whale" (Anonymous 1932; Kan 1933; Wheeler 1933).

The last two whales killed in Bermudian waters were in 1940 and 1942, respectively. On April 17, 1940 three humpbacks were seen 15 miles SW of Bermuda and a 42-ft male humpback was killed the following day, after nine attempts at shooting the animal and several hours of struggle. The harpooner was "Gunny" Astwood, who used his Norwegian-made gun-propelled harpoon (circa 1920, Fig. 5) and a bomb lance from Joseph Soares's motor-vessel, the *Tanamakoon*. This gun was so heavy that had to be mounted on the foredeck, specially strengthened to accommodate it. They used a Pierce's Darter Gun (with a 60-ft range), which fastened a line to the whale with a toggle iron, while killing it with a bomb lance all in the same throw. The darting gun was mounted at the end of the harpoon and when the toggle iron struck the whale, the trigger rod hit the whale's skin firing the bomb into the whale, exploding few seconds later. The gun and harpoon could then be hauled back into the boat, leaving the whale-line attached to the whale by the toggle iron.

In addition to Soares and Astwood, the other members of the crew were Thomas Smith, Granville Wilson, Arthur Bean, Reggie Pitt,

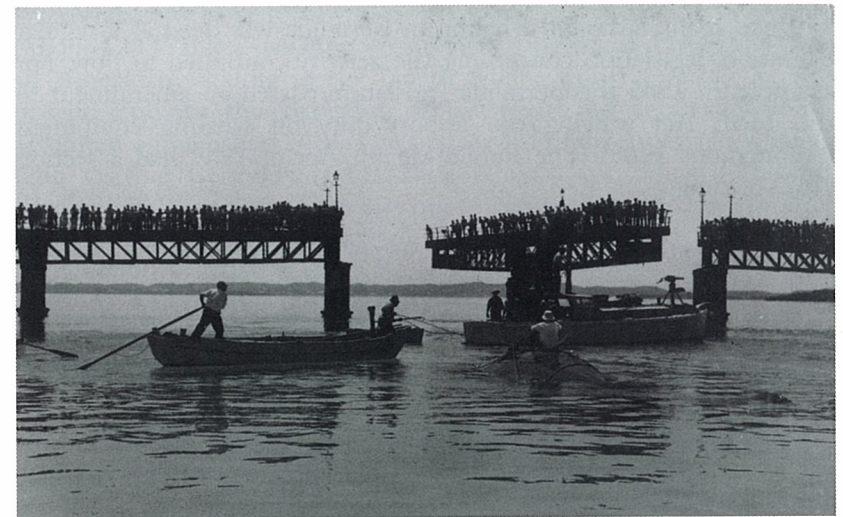


Fig. 6: A humpback whale being towed before numerous spectators congregated on Watford Bridge in 1940. Between the whale and the bridge can be seen the *Tanamakoon* with a harpoon gun

Erskine Simmons and Joshua Wilson. Astwood could not use his own boat, *Bonito*, because apparently it was not sturdy enough to have the gun-propelled harpoon mounted on it.<sup>4</sup>

After nine shots at the whale, the animal was killed and taken to Darrell's Wharf, then Boss's Cove in Pembroke. A crowd of about 300 people congregated around Watford Bridge to observe the operation (Fig. 6). A shilling per person was charged and the whalers made about £300. The flensing of this 35-ton animal generated seven tons of meat, of which half was sold; the carcass was then moved to Boat Bay, where its oil was processed, generating 2,400 lb of oil (six barrels). The remaining carcass was towed three miles off the South Shore and cast adrift. The carcass reappeared at St. George's three days later and Soares was summoned to dispose of the animal, towing it with the motor boat *Sylvia* and the *Tanamakoon* five miles east of St. David's Island. The carcass reappeared, this time at what is today Pompano Beach Club. The whalers then decided to attach heavy "mooring lines" to the carcass to ensure its sinking (Anonymous 1940; Wheeler 1941; Harvey 1965).

The last taking of a whale in Bermuda took place on November 13, 1942. After an unsuccessful attempt by Joseph Soares to capture what seemed a distressed animal inside the reefs off Ducking Stool in Pembroke, the whale, a 38-foot male humpback, was machine gunned and towed to Darrell's Wharf in Hamilton Harbour (someone even proposed the use of a plane to dive-bomb the animal). The whale died at 7 a.m. on November 18 (Anonymous 1942; Wheeler 1943).



Once again, although whaling in Bermuda was dead as a regular operation, legislation concerning the activity continued to flow. For example, in 1945 the Bermuda legislature passed an amendment to the Tariff Act waiving the import duty on whaling equipment (Anonymous 1945). The Public Health Act of 1949 had a section (167) reading:

Without prejudice to anything in the last foregoing section, any person who brings in, or assists in bringing in, the carcase of any whale or fish of these Islands shall take such measures as may in the circumstances be necessary to prevent the carcase —

from lying or remaining on the shore of these islands;

or

from drifting or floating in any waters of these Islands, in such manner as to be, or be likely to become, prejudicial to the public health or offensive to any person.

Any person who contravenes or fails to comply with the foregoing provisions of this section shall be guilty of an offence against this Act.

A contravention of or failure to comply with any of the provisions of sub-section (1) of this section shall, for the purposes of Part IV of this Act, be deemed to be a nuisance.

The only other record of a marine mammal being captured in Bermudian waters besides humpback and sperm whales is from April 9, 1887, when a seal was harpooned. Although it was cited as a common or harbour seal (Hurdis 1897, 340–41), it is more likely to have been a hooded seal (*Cystophora cristata*), which tends to go astray off Bermuda and in the northern Caribbean.

According to Verrill (1902, 270, 276) there may have been right whales (*Eubalaena glacialis*) captured in Bermudian waters, as one was recorded as being taken in 1792, and a pair in 1840. Jones (1884b) describes whales with parasites typical of right whales: “Some of the larger whales when captured are found to be infested externally by parasites, among others the well-known cirripede (*Balanus*), which, from the large seize some of the specimens attain, must have been *in situ* for a considerable period” (Jones 1884b). The most recent sighting of right whales in Bermudian waters is from Payne (1995). Fin whales have been reported for these waters, but there is no evidence of them ever being captured (Verrill 1902, 276). For a full list of marine mammals recorded for Bermudian waters see Appendix 1.

It must be noted that in 1978 the Bermuda Protected Species Order was enacted. This piece of legislation protects all corals, sea turtles, marine mammals and threatened species of mollusks and fish.

### “YANKEE” WHALING

About 120 “Yankee” whaling vessels visited Bermuda during the years of American whaling in the North Atlantic (1712–1925). This is second only to the Bahamas, which registered about 250 visits (Romero unpublished MS). The first record of an American whaling ship visiting Bermuda is for 1762 when Capt. Micajah Coffin, commanding the sloop *Sandwich* out of Nantucket, sailed in April for the “Bermuda Ground” (Stackpole 1953, 50; Lund 2001, 651).

Around the 1850s is when we see the peak of activities by Yankee whalers in Bermuda. Yet, there are very few traces, if any, of intense contact between Bermudians and Yankee whalers. That was due to a combination of factors: 1) Bermuda was a stronghold of the British during the Revolutionary War, which made its waters off-limits to New Englanders; 2) during the British-American War of 1812, the English utilised Bermuda as a major base for their naval operations and any American vessel in those waters (whaler or otherwise) was captured and taken there; 3) during the American Civil War, Bermudians who had more historical ties with the South, particularly Virginia and the Carolinas, sided with the Confederates, making Bermudian waters hostile territory to Yankee whalers; and 4) by the time of the heyday of Yankee whaling, the local populations of humpbacks were already severely depleted since shore whaling began around 1663 in those waters (see Table 2 for a sample of activities by Yankee whalers off Bermudian waters).

Thus, despite the overall large number of Yankee whalers visiting Bermuda, it seems that those visits were more a matter of convenience for obtaining provisions for ships either heading to the Eastern Atlantic grounds or heading south to the Caribbean. Also, some transshipment of whale oil took place in those waters (Clark 1887). My survey of archival material in Bermuda yielded no information about relationships between Yankee whalers and the locals. For example, the *Blue Book* for 1858 notes that only four Yankee whalers totalling 592 tons and employing 73 people called into port. That is as far as information goes in British records on Yankee whaling activities in Bermuda. The last significant whaling activity by American whalers in Bermuda took place in the 1880s when a few American whalers operated off the South Shore and would occasionally send a boat in for supplies. At the end, Yankee whalers preferred to stop in the West Indies for resupply rather than Bermuda, because of the port charges (Jones 1884b, Romero unpublished).

**Table 2 SAMPLE OF ACTIVITIES IN WHICH YANKEE WHALERS WERE INVOLVED IN BERMUDIAN WATERS**

| Date    | Vessel                | Type, port of origin      | Activity  | Source   |
|---------|-----------------------|---------------------------|---|--|
| 1812    | <i>Ranger</i>         | Ship; Nantucket, MA       | Captured with "1,300 sperm" and taken to Bermuda                      | Starbuck, 1877; p. 212   |
| 1812    | <i>Sally</i>          | Ship; New Bedford, MA     | Captured with "1,200 sperm" and taken to Bermuda                      | Starbuck, 1877; p. 212   |
| 1813-4  | <i>Monticello</i>     | Ship; Nantucket, MA       | Captured and taken to Bermuda   | Starbuck, 1877; p. 212   |
| 1818    | <i>Agenora</i>        | Brig; Fairhaven, MA       | Withdrawn from merchant service, sunk                                 | Starbuck, 1877; p. 224   |
| 1840    | <i>Com.</i>           | Ship; New Bedford, MA     | Condemned. Had 500 whale  | Starbuck, 1877; p. 344   |
| Jan 4   | <i>Decatur</i>        | MA                        |   |  |
| 1851    | <i>Wade</i>           | Bark; New Bedford, MA     | Condemned   | Starbuck, 1877; p. 436   |
| Jan     |                       |                           |   |  |
| 1853    | <i>Pavillion</i>      | Brig; Edgartown, MA       | Condemned; sent home 68 sperm   | Starbuck, 1877; p. 457   |
| 1856    | <i>Solon</i>          | Barque; Westport, MA      | Saw humpbacks   | Starbuck, 1877; p. 518, Mitchell and Reeves, 1983; Logbook at ODHS |
| Apr-May |                       |                           |   |  |
| 1861    | <i>Mary Gardiner</i>  | Barque; Sag Harbor, NY    | Chased for two hours off Bermuda by a rebel privateer on passage home | Starbuck, 1877; p. 572; Logbook at NSoa                            |
| 1868    | <i>Draco</i>          | Barque; New Bedford, MA   | Saw humpbacks at Bermuda  | Starbuck, 1877; p. 610; Mitchell and Reeves, 1983; Logbook at ODHS |
| May     |                       |                           |   |  |
| 1873    | <i>Annawan</i>        | Barque; New Bedford, MA   | Lost near Bermuda; 5 men lost   | Starbuck, 1877; p. 646   |
| July 8  |                       |                           |   |  |
| 1873    | <i>Crown-inshield</i> | Barque; Fairhaven, MA     | Condemned and sold; 600 sperm and 100 whale sent home                 | Starbuck, 1877; p. 632; Logbook at ODHS                            |
| Aug 28  |                       |                           |   |  |
| 1880    | <i>Perry</i>          | Barque; Edgartown, MA     | Wrecked in hurricane  | Hegarty 1959, p. 6; Logbook at PPL                                 |
| Aug 29  |                       |                           |   |  |
| 1880    | <i>Caleb Eaton</i>    | Schooner; New Bedford, MA | Dismasted; 200 sperm  | Goode, 1887; p. 189  |
| Oct 4   |                       |                           |   |  |

| Date   | Vessel             | Type, port of origin        | Activity  | Source              |
|--------|--------------------|-----------------------------|---|---------------------|
| 1884   | <i>Tropic Bird</i> | Barque; New Bedford, MA     | Condemned   | Hegarty 1959, p. 16 |
| 1900   | <i>Frances</i>     | Brigantine; New Bedford, MA | Sold  | Hegarty 1959, p. 34 |
| Oct 19 | <i>Barstow</i>     | MA                          |   |                     |
| 1921   | <i>A.M.</i>        | Schooner; New Bedford, MA   | Weathered two hurricanes NE of Bermuda. Three boats, one man lost | Hegarty 1959, p. 45 |
| Sept   | <i>Nicholson</i>   | MA                          |   |                     |

NSoa: Rogers Memorial Library; ODHS: Old Dartmouth Historical Society, New Bedford, MA  
 PPL: Providence Public Library, Providence, RI

**Bermuda Shore Whaling**

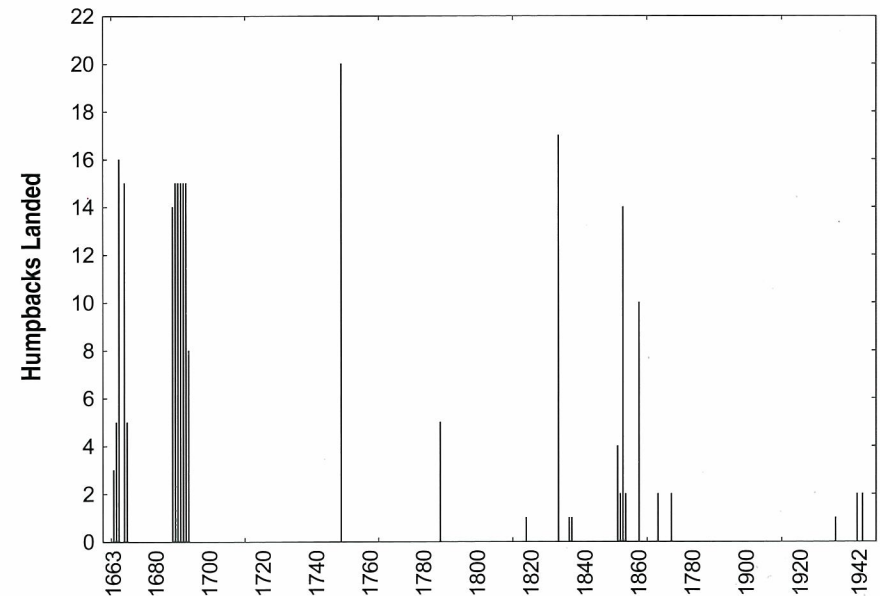


Fig. 7: Incomplete statistics of the number of humpback whales killed during Bermudian shore whaling operations

**CONCLUSIONS**

Whaling in Bermuda was always the product of necessity on an island poor in natural resources. Originally this activity was carried out by local elites who employed slaves as oarsmen and some white foreigners as harpooners. This was always a seasonal venture and, thus, a complementary one to other economic activities such as trade, fishing, piracy and smuggling. After the American Civil War, whaling declined drastically, probably due to a combination of scarcity of whales and competition by American pelagic ("Yankee") whalers.

Studies carried out in the 1970s and 1980s confirmed previous suggestions of a dramatic decline in humpback whale populations in the area, which now is believed to be used by this species only on its way north during migration. Fig. 7 is a graph of the number of humpback whales killed in Bermudian shore whaling operations. This is a necessarily incomplete graph because many of these activities were never reported and sometimes even the species of whale was unclear.

Opportunistic feeding by humpbacks in Bermudian waters has been hypothesised (Stone *et al.* 1985). Although Bermudians tried to exploit less seasonal species such as sperm whales by using more mechanised technologies like explosive harpoons and lance bombs, by the middle of the 19th Century all whaling activities declined sharply. Yet, for the last two centuries a number of Bermudians had faith that whaling could be revived: they kept importing whaling boats and paraphernalia, developed and/or expanded whaling stations, and legislation was enacted to regulate a virtually non-existing industry. At the end, this venture involved almost exclusively blacks and by the 20th Century all whaling became very sporadic and purely opportunistic. Despite the fact that pilot whales ("blackfish") and other marine mammals were present in Bermuda waters, their hunting was never developed and all whaling activity confined itself almost exclusively to humpback and sperm whales.

Whaling in Bermuda was always seen as having great potential but the fact of the matter is that its waters never had a great population of these animals, the population that was there was overexploited, and Bermudians had to compete with Yankee whaling while being curtailed in their attempts at modernising this activity because of commercial embargoes by the US and political and economic circumstances beyond their control. In a way, whaling for Bermudians was a type of fool's gold.

#### Acknowledgements

Edward Harris, Trevor Moniz and Mizzah Hunt secured some documents not available at US libraries. I am indebted to Dennis Robinson of the Bermuda National Archives, Charlotte Andrews of the Bermuda Maritime Museum, Dr. Wolfgang E. Sterrer of the Bermuda Natural History Museum, and Rosemary Jones for their hospitality and access to information during my visit to Bermuda.

#### ENDNOTES

1 From a diary from the visit of HMS *Tyne* to Bermuda in 1829–30 (Edward Harris, pers. comm.).

2 The island was named after William, the fourth Lord of Paget, one of the early investors of the Bermuda Company, which from the beginning was involved in whaling.

3 This boat was later christened as *Bonito*.

4 The *Bonito* ended up being displayed at a local restaurant (Windjammer).

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Anonymous. 1932. Whale captured by rope tied to its tail. *Royal Gazette* (Bermuda), September 13, 1932, p. 1.
- Anonymous. 1940. First whale caught here in over 40 years. *Royal Gazette* (Bermuda), April 19, 1940, pp. 1, 3.
- Anonymous. 1942. Whale off North Shore eludes fishermen. *Royal Gazette* (Bermuda), November 14, 1942.
- Anonymous. 1945. *The West Indies Year Book 1945*. London: Thomas Skinner & Co. Publishers.
- Bernhard, V. 1999. *Slaves and Slaveholding in Bermuda*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press.
- Clark, A. H. 1887. The whale-fishery. 1. History and present condition of the fishery. pp. 3–218. In: G. B. Goode (Ed.). *The fisheries and fishery industries of the United States*, Section V, Volume II, History and methods of the fisheries. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- Cotter, R. 1828. *Sketches of Bermuda, or Somers' Islands*. London: E. Wilson.
- Gardner, F. M. 1853. Correspondence of the Shipping List. *Ship Sylph*, July 24, 1853.
- Gosling, A. E. 1952. Preserved in a ginger jar. *The Bermuda Historical Quarterly* 9:345–50.
- Gray, R. 1884. *Acts of the Legislature of the Islands of Bermuda 1690–1883*. Vol. I, 1690 to 1867. London: Wildy and Sons, Lincoln's Inn Archway.
- Hamilton, P. K., G. S. Stone & S. M. Martin. 1997. Note on a deep humpback whale *Megaptera novaeangliae* dive near Bermuda. *Bulletin of Marine Science* 61:491–494.
- Harvey, S. 1965. The day the war-time menu said: 'whale steaks.' *Bermuda Mid-Ocean News*, August 7, 1965.
- Hurdis, J. L. 1897. *Rough notes and memoranda relating to the natural history of the Bermudas*. London: R. H. Porter.
- Jones, Elizabeth. J. 1993. *Bermuda Recollections*. Hamilton: The Ministry of Community, Culture & Information.
- Jones, M. 1884a. Introduction. *Bulletin of the United States National Museum* (25):ix–xxiii.
- Jones, 1884b. *The mammals of Bermuda*. *Bulletin of the United States National Museum* (25):143–61.
- Kan, R. 1933. Southampton whaler. *The Bermudian* 4(9):26–28.
- Kennedy, J. 1975. *Bermuda Hodge Podge*. Hamilton: Bermuda Book Store.
- Kepler, J. 1999. Estimates of the volume of direct shipments of tobacco and sugar from the chief English plantations to European markets, 1620–69. *The Journal of European Economic History* 28:115–36.

- Lund, J. N. 2001. *Whaling masters and whaling voyages sailing from American ports. A compilation of sources*. New Bedford, MA: New Bedford Whaling Museum.
- McCallan, E. A. 1986. *Life on Old St. David's, Bermuda*. Hamilton: Bermuda.
- Packwood, C. O. 1993. *Chained on the Rock. Slavery in Bermuda*. Hamilton: The Island Press Limited.
- Payne, R. 1995. *Among Whales*. New York: Scribner.
- Romero, A. 2008. Between War and Poverty: Whaling in 18th-Century Bermuda. *Bermuda Journal of Archaeology and Maritime History* 18:7–32.
- Romero, A., R. Baker, J. E. Creswell, A. Singh, A. McKie & M. Manna. 2002. Environmental history of marine mammal exploitation in Trinidad and Tobago, W.I. and its ecological impact. *Environment and History* 8:255–74.
- Schortman, E. F. 1969. A short history of whaling in Bermuda. *The Mariner's Mirror* 55:77–85.
- Smith, B. 1955. Whaling was big business here a century ago. *The Royal Gazette Weekly*. May 1, 1955. p. 14.
- Stackpole, E. A. 1953. *The Sea-Hunters. The New England Whalers during two centuries 1635–1835*. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co.
- Sterrer, W. (Ed.) 1986. *Marine Fauna and Flora of Bermuda*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Stone, G. S.; S. K. Katona, L. Baraff & E. B. Tucker. 1985. *Humpback whale (Megaptera novaeangliae) studies at Bermuda, 1985*. Preliminary Report in partial fulfillment of National Geographic Grant #3052-85.
- Tucker, T. 1962. Smith's Island, pocket of peace. *The Bermudian* (January): 20–21, 35, 37.
- Tucker, T. 1983. *Bermuda Today and Yesterday, 1503–1980s*. London: Robert Hale Limited.
- Verrill, A. E. 1902. *The Bermuda Islands*. New Haven, CT: Published by the author.
- Wheeler, J. F. G. 1933. Notes on a young sperm-whale from the Bermuda Islands. *Proceedings of the Zoological Society of London* 1933:407–410.
- Wheeler, J. F. G. 1941. On a humpback whale taken in Bermuda. *Proceedings of the Zoological Society of London* 111:37–38.
- Wheeler, J. F. G. 1943. On a humpback whale taken in Bermuda in 1942. *Proceedings of the Zoological Society of London* 113:121–25.
- Wilkinson, H. C. 1958. *The Adventurers of Bermuda*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Wilkinson, H. C. 1973. *Bermuda: From Sail to Steam. The History of the Island from 1784 to 1901*. London: Oxford University Press. Two volumes.
- Zuill, W. 1958. *Bermuda journey. A Leisurely Guidebook*. Hamilton: The Bermuda Book Stores.

## APPENDIX 1

Confirmed records of the marine mammals of Bermuda (after Sterrer, 1986 and Romero, unpublished).

| Species                           | Common name                              |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| <i>Eubalaena glacialis</i>        | North Atlantic right whale               |
| <i>Megaptera novaeangliae</i>     | Humpback whale                           |
| <i>Balaenoptera physalus</i>      | Finback whale                            |
| <i>Balaenoptera acutorostrata</i> | Common minke whale                       |
| <i>Balaenoptera physalus</i>      | Fin whale                                |
| <i>Physeter macrocephalus</i>     | Sperm whale                              |
| <i>Kogia breviceps</i>            | Pygmy sperm whale                        |
| <i>Ziphius cavirostris</i>        | Goosebeak whale or Cuvier's beaked whale |
| <i>Mesoplodon mirus</i>           | True's beaked whale                      |
| <i>Steno bredanensis</i>          | Rough-toothed dolphin                    |
| <i>Tursiops truncatus</i>         | Bottlenose dolphin                       |
| <i>Stenella coeruleoalba</i>      | Striped dolphin                          |
| <i>Globicephala macrorhynchus</i> | Shortfinned pilot whale                  |
| <i>Cystophora cristata</i>        | Hooded seal                              |