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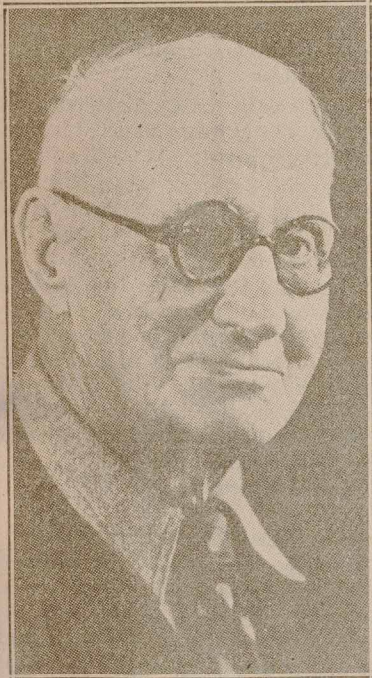
"Oldest Citizen" Recalls Whaling Days And Distant Trading Ventures

Captain Ed Walter Smith At 88 Receives Boston Post Gold Head Cane— Was Born In Long Point Settlement — Has Contributed Relics To Museum

By Bob Clark

Captain Ed Walter Smith has returned once more from his winter home at Carver to Provincetown, where he was born in 1851 and last last week Selectman Jesse D. Rogers presented him with the "Oldest Citizen" gold-headed cane given by the Boston Post. And on June 22 he plans to celebrate his 88th birthday "batching it" at his Law Street residence. All's right with the world, or would be, according to Captain Smith, if it weren't for the loss of two half-barrels of "fancy" beef, ship's stores, confiscated by South American customs officials through the stupidity of his New York mate more than 65 years ago.

"Hard lines", said the Captain,



CAPTAIN ED. WALTER SMITH

"losing ship's stores we packed all the way from New York and paying four dollars fine on each half barrel for bringing them ashore! If that pesky mate had followed orders, the whole thing could have been avoided.

"Mr. Matthews," I said, "While I'm turning in ship's papers, you land the cargo, but be sure to leave our fancy beef right where it is in the hold."

"Well, sir, I was on the wharf watching the last load of cargo come in, and I could see those beef casks perched right on top of the load. As soon as they were landed, the customs officers confiscated the barrels and fined me \$4 for each. I never wanted an American man-o'-war so bad in my life!"

After a few such hair-raising experiences during his career as master of merchant vessels in the South American and West Indies trade Captain Smith is inclined to deprecate whaling adventures in Cape Cod waters, where many times he was face to face with a fighting mad whale and near enough to punch him.

Take, for instance, the time Capt. Joshua Nickerson of Provincetown killed a baby whale and got the mother into a seething fury.

Captain Smith, who had commanded vessels since he was 17, was aboard his sloop at Provincetown with other craft when someone brought news of whales off Highland. Captain Smith weighed anchor immediately, as did Captain Nickerson, but Nickerson had a steamer and outstripped every other vessel to the quarry. When Captain Smith came upon the scene, a baby whale had been killed and the mother was thrashing about and bellowing, giving every indication of her intent to smash man and vessel to flinders.

"Its \$500 if ye kill that whale before she wrecks my steamer!" Captain Nickerson called. So Ed Walter and his shipmates manned their whaleboat and pulled up in the shadow of the whale, where Captain Smith took careful aim and fired a bomb-lance into the "life" of the huge sea mammal.

While Captain Smith never had a great deal of trouble with live whales, calm or excited, he says that a dead whale once scared him out of a year's growth.

"One whale from which we got 100 barrels of oil in 1888 was bloated with gas by the time we hauled her into the surf at New Beach", Captain Smith recalled. "My brother stood up in his dory alongside and began to cut into the blubber with the 'spade' used for the purpose. The spade went ten inches into the

whale's fat side and nothing happened, but when the spade dug a little deeper, that whale literally exploded.

"There was a sharp report and a rush of gas, and something hit my brother on the shoulder and knocked him into the breakers. It seems there was an embryo whale inside the big one, and when the spade gave the gas an exit, the unborn whale went sailing through the air like a cannonball."

Captain Smith was born in the Long Point settlement, one part of which was founded by his grandfather, Eldredge Smith, shortly after the War of 1812. He went fishing with his father, Robert Smith, from the time he was twelve years old, and at seventeen was master of a fishing boat and made several trips to Midbay Ledge.

During his boyhood he witnessed the transfer in 1861 of Mason and Slidell, Confederate envoys to England, from the custody of the U. S. officials to the British steamer Rinaldo after the British government had protested the seizing of these envoys.

"No sooner had the Rinaldo steamed out of the harbor", Captain Smith said, "than a terrible blizzard broke over the Cape. The Rinaldo weathered it, we found later, but the sloops 'M. Y. O. B.' ('Mind Your Own Business') and 'Wasp', belonging to my uncle and my father, sank at their moorings at Head of the Cove, where they had been considered out of danger."

At 24, Captain Smith made his first voyage to the West Indies as Captain of a 100-ton Provincetown trading vessel. He took the craft from Liverpool, Nova Scotia, to Grand Cayman Island successfully and remained in merchant vessels for about 20 years. One of his activities during the '70's was salvaging cargo from wrecks off the Cuban coast in defiance of the Spanish government, then in control of the island.

In the east room on the first floor of the Provincetown Historical Museum are displayed many relics of whaling and seafaring, contributed by Captain Smith after he left the bridge more than 20 years ago.

Captain Smith keeps house all by himself at his home, 6 Law Street, which he has decorated with many photographs and other mementos of his long career on the ocean.

By Irving S. Rogers

Whaling Ships and Old Items: These items are taken from an old copy of the "Whalemen's Shipping List and Merchants' Transcript" dated October 19, 1875.

"A letter from Captain Roberts, of the whaling schooner William A. Grozier, to the Agents at Provincetown: 'August 23rd, fell in with the dismasted iron ship Aurora, in lat. 38 degrees 40' long. 36 degrees 25'. Her cargo was wool and grain. She was all burnt out, except a portion of her cargo in the bottom. The fire was too hot to save remaining cargo. She was a splendid ship, built in 1874 at Greenock; had no water in her. I think by appearances that the fire broke out in her suddenly, and that those on board had to leave in a great hurry, if they did not perish on the wreck. We found a lady's gold watch and several pieces of gold and silver."

Years ago, in the days before the Pilgrims landed at Provincetown, the Indians caught whales along the shores of Cape Cod. Later when the whalers became numerous our whaling vessels had to sail to distant places in the Atlantic, Pacific and Indian Oceans for a "full ship." But one rare case occurred in the year 1888 which caused the New Bedford Mercury to print a special item headed "Whaling Off Cape Cod." The item reads, "A large right whale captured by Schooner A. B. Nickerson, Provincetown, Mass., June 4th:—Whaling steamer A. B. Nickerson killed a large right whale off Cape Cod today which was successfully towed to the oil works at Herring Cove." (Wharf and buildings for boiling oil inside Provincetown Harbor near old fort hills on Long Point.) "It is the largest right whale ever captured in this vicinity, being nearly 60 feet long and estimated to yield about 1000 pounds of bone, worth between \$3,000.00 and \$4,000.00. A finback whale and the calf of the one killed were also shot but sank immediately. The Nickerson reports eight or nine more finbacks in the school and will go gunning for them in the morning."

These items were evidently during the days when whaling, fresh-fishing and coastal trade, reached its peak in Provincetown. Snow's Quarterly Return of Vessels for the period January 1, 1859 to March 31, 1859 gave the following report of all vessels which passed Long Point Light. January: 8 Ships, 10 Barks, 34 Brigs, 1247 Schooners, 2 Sloops and 18 Steamers. February: 3 Ships, 3 Barks, 3 Brigs, 477 Schooners, 9 Steamers. March: 11 Brigs, 1005 Schooners, 4 Sloops, and 11 Steam-

ers. Total number of craft entering or leaving Provincetown Harbor 3,372.

Somebody writing for the old Provincetown Banner evidently had a sense of humor but printed the following item with all fingers crossed. "There are some very queer-looking signs along Commercial Street, some of the ancient sort. There is a dingy little board not far from the Union House, which is painted in just about this style: 'CORN&straw'. This we are reminded of by the 'Directory' we have elsewhere noticed. On the whole, we should like to publish that document, as it contains a number of very pat notices. Some of the puffs however, are pretty strong, though here and there well-deserved, and perhaps those who are made famous would not grudge a trifle, in the way of regular advertising, hereafter. We give a specimen.

"Charles Nickerson's a dry goods man—

Buy bonnets all of Mary Ann.

James Engles sells his plates and stoves—

John Smith sells cinnamon and cloves.

The license of the poet shows itself perceptibly in the last line. Beef and vegetables are clumsy things in rhyme.

Conant Street dry goods sells cheap for cash,

And Delia Mills' store cuts a dash.

This will do for today."

More items from the Whaler's reports: The schooner Charles Thompson, captain not reported, owned by S. S. Swift, was in port at New Bedford with 100 barrels of sperm oil on September 21, 1875 . . . The schooner C. L. Sparks, owned by David Conwell arrived in port on September 15, 1875, with 230 barrels of sperm oil and 100 barrels whale oil . . . The brig D. A. Small, captain Curren, owned by William Curran, sailed from Provincetown March 25, 1875, for a voyage in the Atlantic Ocean. The brig was reported in Flores, Azores, with 300 barrels of sperm oil . . . The schooner Edward Lee, owned by Asaph Atkins, arrived in port September 27, 1875 with 90 barrels of sperm oil . . . The schooner E. H. Hatfield, captain not reported, owned by E. & E. K. Cook & Co., arrived in port on September 27, 1875, with 250 barrels of sperm oil .