

NOW AND THEN

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P'town
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"We love the articles of the Joshua Paine House," wrote Helene [Mrs. Albert] Smith. "We're sending a copy to Honduras, to our grandson Don Thibeault at the American Peace Corps. We'll have lots more attic material for you...."

Al and Helene Smith's attic had already yielded hand-written records nearly 100 years old, preserved through three generations of Paines and treasured by the Smiths, current owners of the history-filled rooming house. One such record, a 12-page manuscript pencilled by Joshua Paine Sr., is the "whaling story" he promised his daughter, Nancy Wiley Paine, when she was studying at Wellesley College in 1880.

Joshua, then 60 years old, was a prosperous ship chandler and insurance executive, not a writer. Yet the excitement of his whaling days (perhaps 1835-40, when he was in his teens) comes to life again through his scrawled notes, crossed-out lines and jammed-in afterthoughts. Unscrambled, part of them read as follows:

"Six Months...and No Oil"

We sailed off onto the western ground [near the Azores] and one Sunday morning in August, then about six months from home without a drop of oil—it was a clear calm morning without a ripple on the water or a cloud in the sky. It being very warm below, we was eating our breakfast on deck as we often did. Someone looked off about a mile, and there was one of the largest sperm whales you ever saw. She lay with the

water washing over her back; her hump looked as big as a 90-gallon cask, and she appeared to be at home and spouted at his leisure. We watched him with wishful eyes and wished he was ours.

[Notice that the whale is "she" when sighted, like a ship, but "he" the moment Paine mentions whale-like activity.]

The Capt. looked at her for a while and says to the men, I am no Sunday fisherman, neither do I approve of Sunday whaling, but there is 90 barrels of oil out yonder and no doubt we can take it alongside before noon.

All men ready and waiting to go, we lowered our boats and quietly paddled off towards the monster, for he was a big one. We paddled along near him but not near enuf to harpoon before he starts off a little and goes down. When he came up, he was a little farther off. When we came within two or three darts of him, he starts along again; and so he continues to do. Sometimes we could get almost near enough but not quite. When we came close he would go faster; if we stopped and laid back, he would keep a little distance from us. So we chased all day until near sunset, when our vessel was just barely in sight, and we turned about and got on board about two hours after dark, hungry and weary, well satisfied to turn in and have a sleep. In the morning he was gone.

"Must Get This Fellow"

After this we cruised around for a few days. At last one pleasant afternoon the watch aloft called, "There she blows" and we espied another large whale,

spouting and playing on the water. The captain said, "Now boys, we must get this fellow if we can, for we are six months from home and no oil." We hove the ship to and lowered our three boats. The Capt. take the head of his own boat, not willing to trust any one else. We put up our sails and took in our oars, and as easy and fast as we could we went down alongside of him, and before he was aware of anyone being near, the capt. darted two harpoons into his back, clear to the hitches. Then didn't he give an awful spring and flurry with his tail and strike the water and fight awfully! In so doing he hit the boat with the corner of his flukes and cut it completely in two between the bow and the harpooner.

Though the boat filled and we were all in the water in an instant, the second mate came up with his boat; we gave him our line and got in with him and abandoned ours. (You know the harpoon is attached to a long line and we never let go that line unless the whale dives so deep that he carries the boat under; then of course we have to cut the line. Sometimes the whale will run for miles, and then I tell you, you go over the water like as if was a toboggan slide, only more so.)

We now hauled up again to give him a lance, but he flurried and fought awful, so we had no chance; and the first we knew his flukes came up under the boat and stove the bottom in.

"With No One To Hear Us"

The boat filled and we twelve men in a sunken boat fast to a whale! The chief

mate picks us all up into his boat, and the ship, seeing our condition, comes close up and we shear alongside and climbed on board and got out the spare boat.

Then we tried him again, but we could not get anywhere near him, for when we came up, he would thrash and fight with his flukes. When off at a distance, he would be quite easy, but when we hauled up to lance him, he seemed wild. We tried all the afternoon to get a lance, but could not.

Near dark we started off in a circle around and got our boat right ahead of him. We pulled right for the end of his head, and before he mistrusted us, we had an iron in his head between the case and junk, and that, you know, is a soft place in the head that you can throw an iron [into]. The Capt. says hold the boat close, for the whale was fluking at a terrible rate but could not reach us as our boat was forward of his flukes. And the Captain with his long lance put it into the back of his neck three or four times. Then didn't he spout thick blood and flurry a few times, turned up on his side and died. Whales always turn up on their

side when dying. Then and there in the darkness, with no one to hear us, we took off our hats and gave three hearty hurrahs.

The ship came along, we took him alongside. The next morning early we were aloft reeving cutting falls and cutting in his blubber. We cut him in that day and went to work boiling out the oil, and he stowed us down eighty barrels of oil.



The Joshua Paine House - 1980