

the LOOKOUT

SEAMEN'S CHURCH INSTITUTE OF NEW YORK



SEPTEMBER 1975

THE PROGRAM OF THE INSTITUTE

The Seamen's Church Institute of New York, an agency of the Episcopal Church in the Diocese of New York, is a unique organization devoted to the well-being and special interests of active merchant seamen.

More than 753,000 such seamen of all nationalities, races and creeds come into the Port of New York every year. To many of them the Institute is their shore center in port and remains their polestar while they transit the distant oceans of the earth.

First established in 1834 as a floating chapel in New York harbor, the Institute offers a wide range of recreational and educational services for the mariner, including counseling and the help of five chaplains in emergency situations.

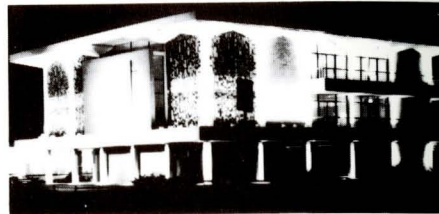
Each year 2,300 ships with 96,600 men aboard put in at Port Newark, where time ashore is extremely limited.

Here in the very middle of huge, sprawling Port Newark pulsing with activity of container-shiping, SCI has provided an oasis known as the Mariners International Center which offers seamen a recreational center especially constructed and designed, operated in a special way for the very special needs of the men. An outstanding feature is a soccer field (lighted at night) for games between ship teams.

Although 61% of the overall Institute budget is met by income from seamen and the public, the cost of special services comes from endowment and contributions. Contributions are tax deductible.



Seamen's Church Institute
State and Pearl Streets
Manhattan



Mariners International Center (SCI)
Export and Calcutta Streets
Port Newark, N.J.

the LOOKOUT

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STEAM SCHOONER

by James L. Shaw

The Floating Kettle of the Pacific Coast

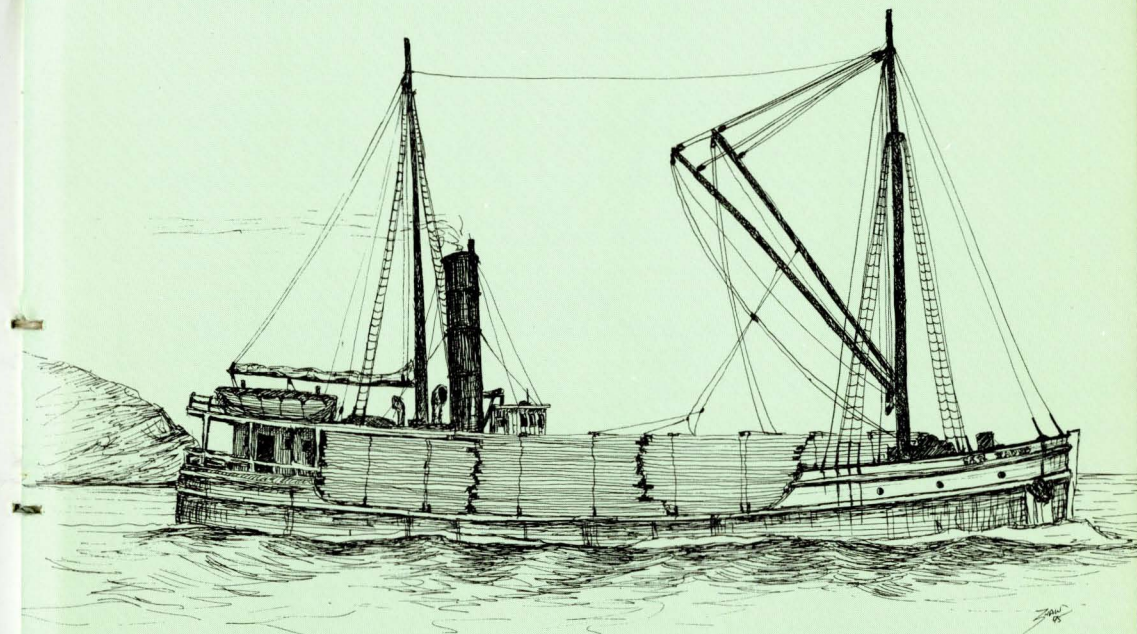
Years ago, along the Pacific Coast, one could still see the small lumber ships that plied their trade between San Francisco and the logging ports of the Pacific Northwest. Far from being a noble breed of vessel they tended to be short and stocky and built of the same strong timbers that were lashed to their decks. A tall, skinny smokestack betrayed them to sail men as being converts to the new age of steam. The constant belching of the new engines soon had the little ships pegged as the "Floating Tea Kettles."

It was steam power, however, that made the vessels unique along the coast. With it they could fight against wind, tide and current to load and unload in the small niches and dog-holes that made up the rugged coastline. With this ability

they helped spawn a fledgling lumber industry that grew to help build much of twentieth century America.

Where towns and villages grew up along the coast, it was the small steam schooners which brought in food, clothing and news from the outside world. In return, they carried out lumber and logs destined for world markets. Wrecks were numerous but for each ship that died two more were born.

Many of the boats were fashioned by the skilled hands of Scandinavians who had immigrated to a new country and found it much like their own land left behind. The longevity of many of the little craft attest to the Norsemen's skills in the building of ships. Created with a wide beam and shallow deck, the schooners



were often loaded as high as the Captain's bridge with cargos of Douglas Fir and Humboldt Redwood — all, of course, based on the belief that lumber itself floats and thus should add to the buoyancy of the vessels.

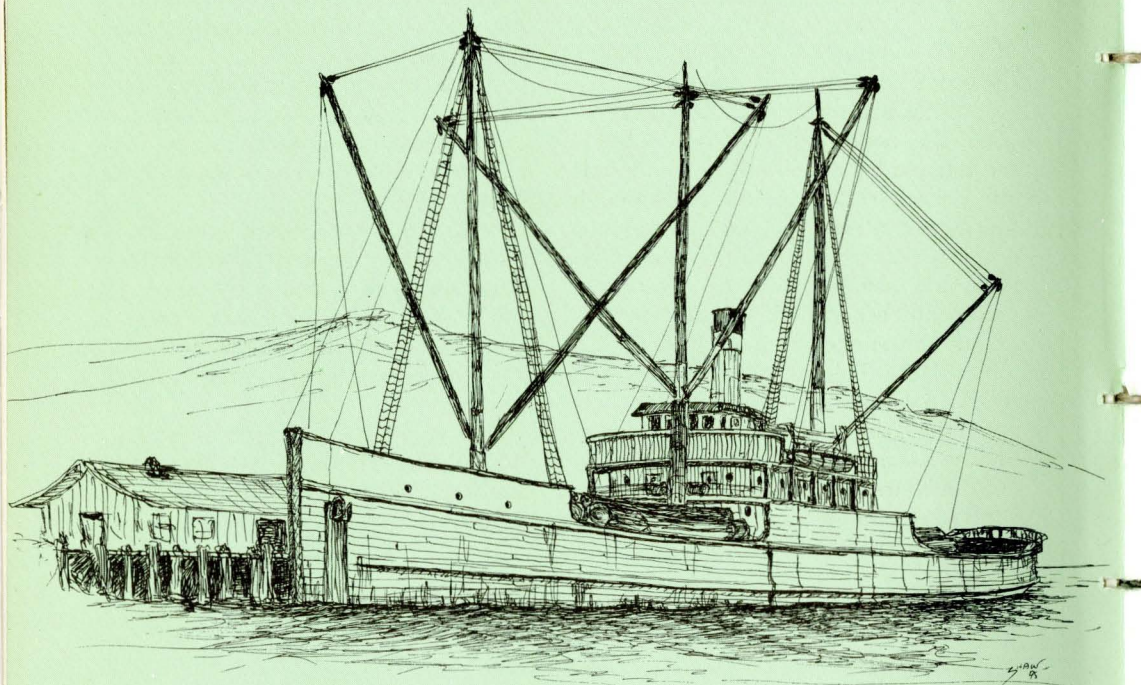
Passengers were accommodated, though rarely welcomed, on board. Cabins were structured as the seamen would have them, three bunks high and devoid of space. Meals were usually good but irregular, depending on the work load. Being small, the boats had a tendency to roll with the swells rather than plow through them as larger vessels might do. Passengers during foul weather were known to line the rails in certain anticipation of things to come.

Wrecks were inevitable considering the conditions of weather and coastline. Several of the little schooners were lost without a trace, and many managed to entangle themselves with the shoreline in some manner or other, thus serving as

temporary beacons of danger to their fellows at sea. In the course of time, only gentle mounds of sand and wind-etched timbers marked their grave sites along the beaches of the Pacific.

Those that did survive a life at sea for the most part succumbed to over-use or obsolescence. Highways and railroads were built through the forests and gradually the schooners no longer had a place in their former trade. Today only a few remain. Most have been reduced by time and the elements to rusting boilers and skeletal ribs jutting out of the backwashes of San Francisco Bay. Still, at least one continues to swing from its hawsers on the daily tides. The old WAPAMA. Resurrected from the mud flats, she now welcomes visitors at the San Francisco Maritime Museum. She is the last of her breed and for those who would come aboard, she offers a look back into yesterday, if only for a moment.

Illustrations by author.



19th Century Marine Underwriter's Office Planned for Smithsonian

Pictured above is a rendering of part of a 19th century marine underwriter's office-suite currently being erected at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. with a helping hand from the American Institute of Marine Underwriters.

According to Mr. C.B. Mitchell, Public Relations Counsel of the American Institute of Marine Underwriters here in NYC, the insurance office will duplicate those found between 1840 and 1880, and will be a part of the Hall of American Maritime Enterprise. This hall will also contain numerous displays, exhibits, films and models portraying the story of Americans afloat from the days of Columbus to the age of automation.

Mr. Dale Taylor, chairman of the AIMU Smithsonian Subcommittee, has noted that "the relations between marine underwriters and shipowners throughout the course of history has been close, beneficial, and sometimes controversial. And since marine insurers have influenced every phase of American marine enterprise in some way, we feel the Smithsonian project is a perfect way to re-acquaint citizens of our industry's history."

The Hall, along with its comprehensive insurance display, is expected to open its doors in time for the 1976 Bicentennial celebration. The Smithsonian estimates that some 14 million people each year will view the Hall's hundreds of years of maritime history on display.

The AIMU Smithsonian Subcommittee began the task of gathering pertinent pictures, documents, furniture and artifacts of a 19th century provenance early this year with each item being historically correct.

"A good number of member companies as well as industry organizations have donated materials," said Taylor. "This will truly be an 'insurance industry' display.

"However, there are still items that we need to make it a complete office. Those companies, organizations or brokers who would like to participate in this program are welcome to contact us and discuss any materials they might have that would be appropriate.

"This really is a 'once in a lifetime' opportunity to help in sharing the marine insurance history with the general public," added Taylor.

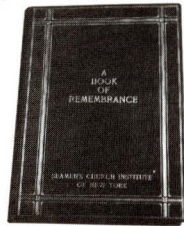
Anyone having materials to donate should contact C.B. Mitchell, Public Relations Counsel, at the American Marine Insurance Underwriters, 99 John Street, New York City 10038. Telephone (212) 233-0300.

A Book of Remembrance

With the inscription shown in the photo below, the late Stephen and Martha Comstock of Newark, New York brought to fruition a desire which they had long cherished . . . a Book of Remembrance for the Seamen's Church Institute of New York.

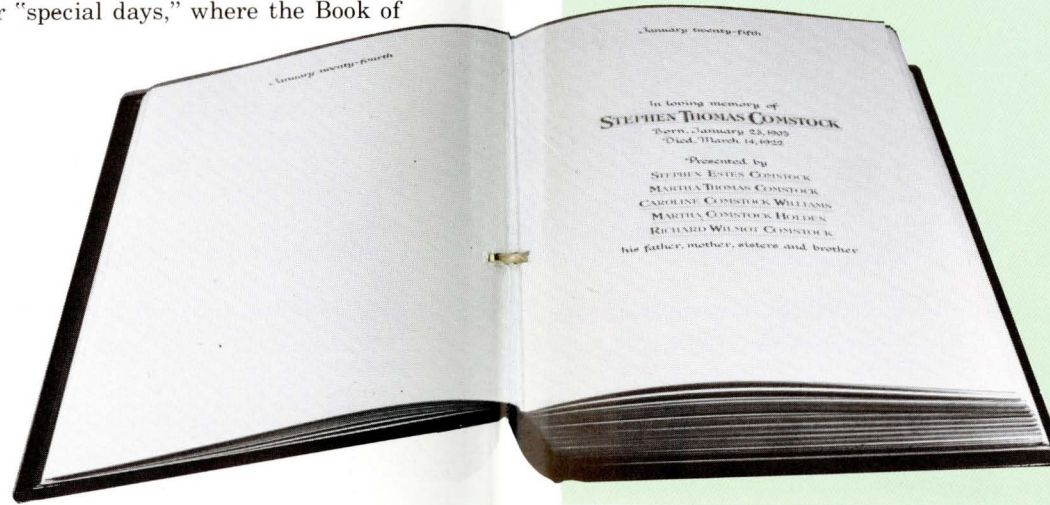
Their benevolent project was inspired by the custom of hand lettering and illuminating the very early Bibles, wherein the names of the most important saints were lettered in red, and each saint's day was thus designated a "Red Letter Day."

It was the Comstocks' thought that all of us have a red letter day which we wish to commemorate. Their concern was to find a way by which a "Red Letter Day" Gift and the memory of its donor would endure.



dividual page was handsomely engrossed for each of the days they selected, and inscribed with the special message indicating the event or occasion they wished to memorialize.

During their lifetime the Comstocks paid visits to the Institute's Chapel on their "special days," where the Book of



Remembrance reposed in its place of honor, open to their page. The Comstocks have passed away, but not the memory of their benevolence.

Others have followed their inspiration, either through Living Endowments or bequests. Each year, on the anniversary date of the event cited, the person or persons memorialized are included in the special prayers during religious services held in the Institute's Chapel. The book remains open to their page for that day, and so it shall be, in perpetuity.

If you have a Red Letter Day we suggest that "The Book of Remembrance" is a most fitting and satisfying way to honor some loved one, or event whose memory is cherished.

To those who might ask why the Institute has a "gap" between its daily operating cost and its earned and special in-



Functioning within this concept and context, it is likely that the Institute will continue to incur an annual deficit until an Institute endowment of significant proportions is achieved. The *Endowed Red Letter Day Memorial Plan* is one way toward such an achievement.

Some persons may prefer to "build up" the sum of ten thousand dollars with the Institute over a period of time. Others may do so by bequest. Either is acceptable within the *Red Letter Day Memorial Plan* and should probably be discussed with an attorney from several viewpoints, tax deductibility being one.

If there is a Red Letter Day in your life, please let me know.

THE REVEREND JOHN M. MULLIGAN, D.D.
Director

SUGGESTED RED LETTER DAYS

- Birthday
- Wedding Day
- Child's Birthday
- Anniversary
- Memorial to a loved one
- Occasion for giving thanks
- Beginning or end of memorable event
- Escape from near tragedy
- A cherished, but undisclosed event

come, the explanation is simple. It is because most of the various Institute services to seafarers are given without compensation; only the hotel and food services "pay their own way" — as the expression goes — out of the Institute's total operations. A perusal of our Annual Report makes this abundantly clear.

The Institute, its Board of Managers, its founder, and its Charter, have mandated that ministry to seafarers means a *total* ministry to the whole seaman — with all that total implies . . .

There was a *Moby Dick*

by Raymond Schuessler

(*The Incredible Story of the ESSEX*)

Editor's Note: This is the first of two stories on whaling ship disasters. Both are documented accounts and the one that follows will be remembered by all who have read Melville's *Moby Dick*.

Next month's story is a tale of equally high adventure and to our knowledge has never before been published.

Somehow, in reading these tales of high risk, personal endurance and tragedy, novels like *Jaws* begin to pale in the light of the realities faced by whalers of the early 19th century.



The square-rigged *ESSEX* under the command of Captain George Pollard, Jr., sailed out of Nantucket in August 1819 to hunt for whales in Pacific waters.

The 238-ton, three-masted ship carried a crew of 20, five of them Negroes. All of them prayed for good sailing weather and a minimum of storms but the danger that really lay in store for them was unthinkable outside of a book of fiction.

Captain Pollard at 29, young for a whaling captain, and First Mate Owen Chase just 23, tingled with the excitement of a new whale hunt and the thought of a fortune in whale oil—perhaps a thousand barrels, plus bones and ligaments for corset hoops and maybe a lucky find of ambergris so rare and expensive for perfumes. The two year voyage could make them rich young men.

Even Thomas Nickerson, the youngest

crew member at 15 thrilled to the chase, little knowing what foul fate waited for him at age 17.

The voyage would be a long one before they even entered the waters of the giant sperm whale. First they had to round the treacherous waters of Cape Hope and then into the feeding grounds of the mid-Pacific near the equator.

Veteran harpooners on board would instruct apprentices in the art of throwing the huge spears. "If you miss the proper spot to thrust, you will face a frenzied behemoth who is capable of smashing the whaling boat and its occupants to bloody kindling," it was said.

By Christmas the *ESSEX* hit the heavy storm areas of the Cape and successfully made its way by mid-January into the calmer waters off Chile.

The First Mate Owen Chase kept a

journal of the voyage and wrote of their stop at the Galapagos Islands where they captured and stored below 300 huge turtles. These 150 pound turtles required neither food nor water to keep and provided delicious fresh food for the crew during the months ahead.

After 14 months at sea, the *ESSEX* finally reached the rollicking grounds of the whales 2,400 miles west of Ecuador near the equator. It was November 20, 1820.

"Thar she blows!" the lookout bellowed from his lofty perch on the masthead.

When the ship was about 1000 yards away from the spouting beast the whale boats were lowered.

As one boat neared a whale, First Mate Chase heaved the first harpoon. But it missed a vital spot and the angry whale turned on the intruders and bullwhipped

the boat with its tail splitting one section.

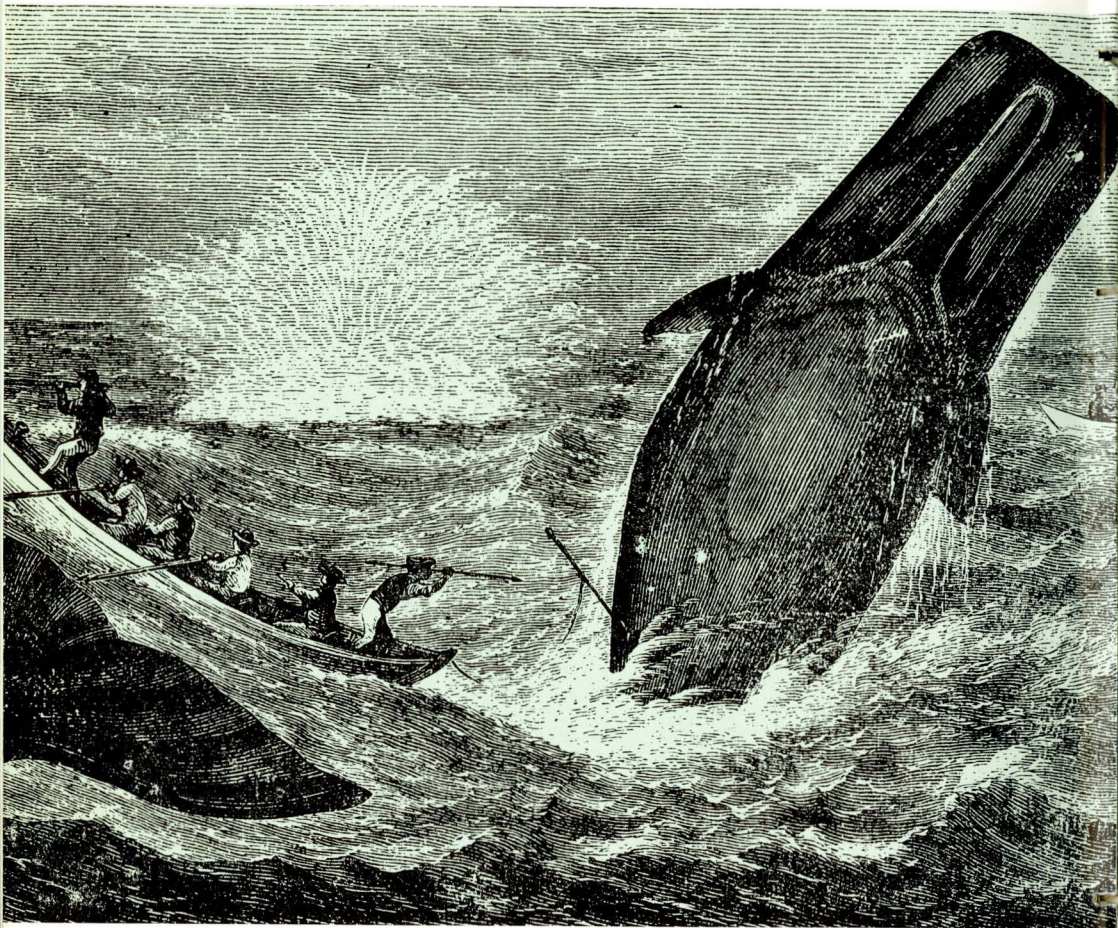
Chase immediately cut the line loose and a jacket was thrust into the hole. Luckily the boat made its way back to the *ESSEX* where the boat was repaired with canvas.

But now the hunters became the hunted. As Chase wrote in his journal:

"I saw a very large spermaceti whale at least 85 feet in length . . . he spouted two or three times and disappeared. In a few seconds he came up again about the length of a ship away and made directly for us at the rate of about three knots."

The mate tried to turn the helm away but the ponderous beast smashed the ship directly amid ship like a guided torpedo. The ship shivered like a top and crewmen toppled about wildly. Chase wrote:

"The crewmen were deprived almost of



the power of speech."

The whale then surfaced alongside as if to take account of the damage it had done.

The ship was badly damaged. After all, the beast was at least one-half the weight of the ship. All joints were loosened and her bow split. The pumps were started but the first mate was shaking his head in disbelief. Could the ruptured ship be saved?

Chase again saw the beast, "Apparently in convulsions on top of the water (certainly it must have suffered a concussion from the tremendous blow to its head) enveloped in the foam of the sea that his continuous and violent thrashing about had created. I could see him distinctly smite his jaws together as if distracted with rage and fury."

Even as the ship began to list and sink, the hurt whale prepared to deal one more blow:

"Surf flew in all directions about him... and his course towards us was marked by a white foam sixteen feet in width which he made with the continued violent thrashing of his tail. His head was about half out of water, and in that way he came upon and again struck the ship a shattering blow."

With this last charge the huge mammal completely "stove in the bow." The whale did not return as if knowing that he had cursed the enemy that dared disturb his frolic. Within minutes, the *ESSEX* turned on her beam ends and floated "half awash."

The men on board threw what they

could into the spare boat and lowered away. When the other whale boats returned Captain Pollard was astounded to find the ship he had left an hour ago, sinking. "In heaven's name, what calamity has struck?"

All Mr. Chase could offer with his hands widespread was the unbelievable explanation that a wild and wily whale had pounded the ship open and that it was sinking.

All the crew now boarded the disabled vessel salvaging 200 gallons of fresh water, bread ("hard bread"), some turtles, guns, tools, sails and then distributed them among the three boats containing seven persons each. They assumed that the provisions would last them for two months . . . time enough, they hoped, to reach the Marquesas Islands some 1500 miles away.

But heavy storms wrenched the boats during the first week, causing the boats to leak. To add to their danger, a huge shark attacked one of the sleeping men during the night. Pounding the creature with oars and axes they drove him off but not before he had further ripped the leaking boat.

After three weeks, the weather became unbearably hot. The food and water was almost gone and still no sign of land. When the winds died, the men sat like moaning cadavers in the calm. Some men were driven to drink sea water which made them deathly ill.

On December 20th after almost a

month at sea, a small island, six miles long, and 300 miles east of Pitcairn Island was sighted. It was rocky and mountainous with little vegetation and no animal life except birds. Three of the crew decided to stay, while the rest sailed on for Easter Island, 800 miles eastward.

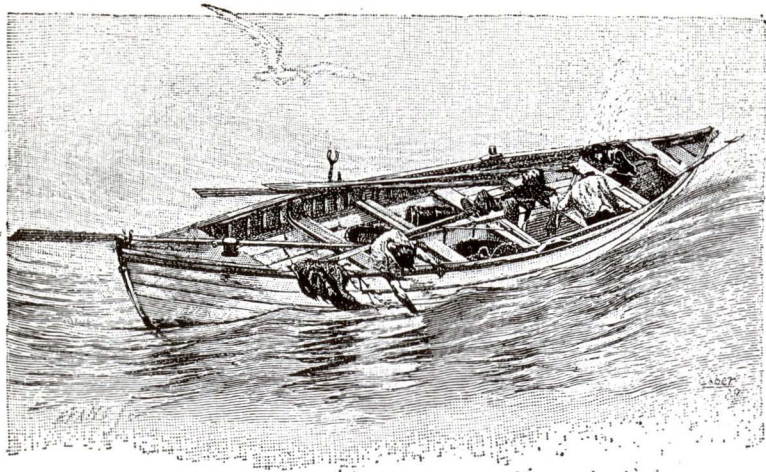
By February, the pitiful sailors began to drop off. After two died, and a third succumbed, the first mate, Chase suggested a dreadful idea — that the corpse not be laid overboard but kept for food. It was agreed.

On Captain Pollard's boat, with no communication with the other boats, three men had already been devoured. When hunger grew acute and no one would oblige to die naturally, it was decided to expedite supper by drawing straws. Not only was the man to furnish food to be so chosen, but also the executioner who would pull the trigger. Captain Pollard later wrote:

"We looked at each other with horrid thoughts in our minds, but we held our tongues. I am sure that we loved one another as brothers all the time; and yet our looks plainly told what must be done.

"We cast lots and the fatal one fell on my poor cabin boy, seventeen year-old Owen Coffin whom some thought was kin to the Captain. I started forward instantly and cried out "My lad, my lad, if you don't like your lot I'll shoot the first man that touches you.

"The poor emaciated boy hesitated a moment or two, then quietly laying his



head down on the gunwhale of the boat said, 'I like it as well as any other.' "

The executioner hesitated to kill the poor boy but was persuaded by the unlucky victim to carry out his task.

Three weeks later, with most of the remaining men sick and unable to move, a ship was sighted. It was another Nantucket whaler the *Dauphin*, a few miles off the coast of Chile.

Only Captain Pollard and one other seaman, Ramsdell, were alive. The men were scarcely able to tell or cared to remember the horrendous story of their ordeal.

Chase and two survivors were picked up by the *INDIAN* sailing out of London. The third boat was never seen again.

These five survivors had covered 3500 miles during three months in open boats, a remarkable achievement.

What happened to the three men set

ashore on Henderson Island? They were all rescued by the British ship *SURREY* having survived ingeniously on berries and blackbirds and rain water although they found the skeletons of many other castaways who had not been so fortunate.

Did Herman Melville, the author of *Moby Dick* know of this ordeal before he wrote his famous novel?

Indeed he did. He even talked to the son of the first mate. Melville met 16 year-old William Henry Chase at sea in 1841 and not only heard the tale, but scrutinized the diary of Owen Chase; the notebooks of Captain Pollard, and those by one other survivor. In fact, Hans Gottschalk in "Shelley's Study Guide" on *Moby Dick* claims that Melville, after he talked to the son, actually talked with Captain Owen Chase himself when they were both aboard the *ACUSHNET*.

So you see, *Moby Dick* did live.

As part of the Mysteries of the New York Harbor series, "Professor" Edward Norberg, senior lecturer at SCI's Roosevelt Institute added yet another area to his educational repertoire when he gave an open lecture on board the Staten Island Ferry about "Commerce and Containerization" in the Port of New York.

The month-long series of talks on the sights, sounds and secrets of New York Harbor was developed by the Staten Island based High Rock Park Conservation Center in co-operation with Richmond College, CUNY and the NYC Dept. of Marine & Aviation; and is one of High Rock's environmental education programs designed to inform New Yorkers of where they live, work and travel.





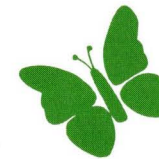
Thirty-eight Sisters of Charity from Mount St. Joseph, Ohio recently were guests at SCI when they visited the Shrine of Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton (next door to SCI) the focal point of their tri-city tour of places associated with the life of Mother Seton, the foundress of their order.

Besides the Shrine, the Sisters also visited St. Patrick's Cathedral, Trinity Church, St. Paul's Chapel, and St. Peter's Church in New York, then continued to Baltimore and Washinton, D.C.

Pictured (left to right) are Sister Judith Metz, group escort; Mr. John Ryan, SCI hotel manager; Father Robert Brown, director of the Shrine of Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton, and Sister Antonia Marie Vilt, group escort.



The Ship That Was Sunk by Butterflies



By William E. Miles

It's never really rained "cats and dogs", as the old saying goes, but it is a matter of scientific record that there have been zoological cloudbursts during which frogs, toads, worms, fish and other forms of animal and insect life have fallen from the skies. Perhaps the strangest such shower of all time occurred more than half a century ago when so many butterflies rained down from the sky that they sank a ship!

In 1912, as the merchant ship *Adler* plowed through the wind-whipped waters of the Persian Gulf, Captain Hans Vogel stood on the bridge, peering through a telescope at what appeared to be an enormous dark cloud. He handed the telescope to his first mate who, after looking through the powerful lenses, observed the dark mass looked more like birds.

But, as the ship's officers were soon to

find out, they were neither clouds nor birds. They were butterflies — thousands of them that, within the space of a few minutes, completely encircled the ship. The butterflies were all colors of the rainbow — red, white, yellow, blue — and whirled like pinwheels through the air. They alighted on the deck, the rigging and the sides of the funnel. They flew into every nook and cranny of the ship, down into the hold and the engine room. They piled up on deck like brightly-colored autumn leaves as they covered the ship in a suffocating cloud.

Captain Vogel attempted in vain to get rid of the butterflies with water pumps and fire extinguishers. But as soon as a cloud of them was dispersed, another mass alighted on the ship. In the engine room, the butterflies covered all the controls. In response to a plea for help from the chief engineer, Captain Vogel rushed down the hatches to the engine room. While he was there, the helmsman — temporarily blinded by the butterflies — relaxed his grip on the wheel. The ship pitched and lurched and, with an ominous grating sound, ran ashore on Jebrin Island.

The *Adler's* hull was ripped in two and she gradually started to sink. After unloading the cargo, Captain Vogel ordered the crew to abandon ship. Later, at an official inquiry into the wreck, he testified to the fact that the ship was sunk by butterflies.

Although his testimony sounded incredible, it was confirmed by the leading scientists of the day. They pointed out that the butterflies had probably been blown to sea by the terrific force of a gale or tornado and had clung desperately to the ship as a haven from the storm.

Seamen's Church Institute of N. Y.

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New York, N. Y. 10004

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AT NEW YORK, N. Y.



AN ANCIENT MARINER

An old sea captain eyed his son
Who complained how fate had abused him:
In trying his hand at many trades
Good fortune badly had used him.

The Captain's words to his son were brief
And revealed how well he knew him:
"If a man's uncertain what port he's for,
No wind is favor'ble to him!"

by Lloyd Stone