

And God Created

Great Whales

Georgia Knowles Cook Ferguson

1976



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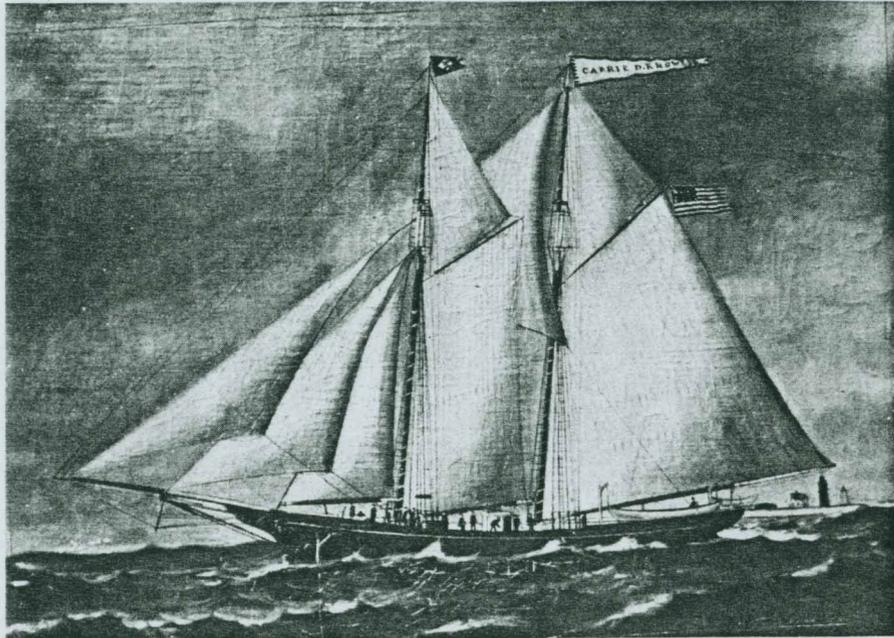
Great Whales

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To bee Faroba
who lives in the old
Knowles home on Pearl
Street

Georgia Ferguson



The Carrie D. Knowles

To my sons, Hugh and George,
who asked me to write about
their great grandfather
George Osborn Knowles
and his whaling vessels



George Osborn Knowles



Georgie Dyer Knowles

George Osborn Knowles was twenty two years old and the year was 1864. He had just cast his first presidential vote for Abraham Lincoln and had started to work in the whaling business for his uncle, Stephen Cook – who was his mother Delia's brother.

Knowles was a respected name in the early days of Cape Cod. Richard Knowles had sailed to Plymouth from England in 1639, had married Ruth Bower, and a son John had been born. John was killed by the Indians on June 3, 1675, but he left a wife, Apphia Bangs, and a son also, named John Knowles, who later became a colonel in the militia.

Colonel John married Captain Paul Sears' daughter, Mary, and their son was Colonel Willard Knowles, who became a member of the Sessions Court, a Commander of the Second Barnstable Regiment, a selectman, a representative and Justice of the Peace. When a son was born to Willard, he named him John for his father and grandfather. This John Knowles had a son Samuel, a farmer who lived in Eastham on Cape Cod; he was town clerk and a member of the house of representatives. In Eastham Samuel's son was born whom he named Joseph Pepper – Pepper being his mother Hannah's maiden name. From Eastham Joseph Pepper Knowles moved to Provincetown where on old records he appears as a merchant and manufacturer of boots and shoes. The family

today has his shoemaker's hammer mounted on a board of old tools. The hammer is well worn and knicked, with J.P.K. carved on the handle.

Although Joseph Pepper did not follow the sea he followed with interest the voyages of his Knowles cousins of Eastham, especially Josiah Knowles. He was worried in 1858 when Josiah was 27 years old and captain of the clipper ship, the *Wild Wave*. She had struck an uncharted coral reef on a run from San Francisco to Valparaiso and was a total loss. Ten passengers and a crew of thirty men luckily found refuge on nearby Oeno Island. Knowing help was needed, Captain Knowles started in an open boat for Pitcairn Island twenty miles away, taking with him the mate and five seamen. They reached Pitcairn, where the men cut down trees with tools which belonged to the Bounty descendants, and built a schooner thirty feet long which they christened the *John Adams*. Then they set out for Tahiti, fifteen hundred miles away. A sloop-of-war which they met on the sea picked up the survivors on Oeno, who later said they had lived on oranges, coconuts and wild goats.

Finally Captain Knowles arrived at the Marquesas where he sold the *John Adams* to missionaries for \$250, later making his way back to Cape Cod.

With many Knowles captains in his family, Joseph Pepper followed sea careers with great interest, while he and Delia lived with their family in their white house on Pearl Street in Provincetown.

Carrie Knowles Cook, who is one hundred years old and who is Delia's granddaughter, loved this religious, kind lady and tells of spending the night at Grandma Knowles'. After supper on a chilly evening, the family knelt in their night clothes around the stove in the living room. Delia said prayers, and then there was a rush to the upstairs bedrooms, to the comfort of feather beds heated by warming pans.

Next door lived Delia's brother Stephen Cook, in an elegant house surrounded by a high iron fence.

Ten children were born to Joseph Pepper and Delia – six of whom died when they were very small. In the Knowles plot in the Provincetown cemetery, on a hill in back of the town, is a row of tiny headstones marked for six small Knowles children. Delia was so sad to lose her first babies that the next ones who came along were named for those who had died. There were two Hannah Kidders, two Lovisa Kibbys, and twins Willie B. and Lizzie B. These little marble stones are all joined together in a line and can be seen today. Out of a family of ten children, only George Osborn and his brother Joseph and two sisters, Lucy and Julia, lived to grow up.

It is not hard to believe that young George Osborn was impressed by the affluence of his Uncle Stephen. Stephen's whaling business was thriving, his fleet was growing and he was an important member of the town.

So, soon after finishing school at Greenwich Academy in Rhode Island, George Osborn started to work for his uncle, Stephen Cook.

On June 11, 1866, George Osborn married Georgie Myrick Dyer. They lived over Uncle Stephen's store on the wharf for a few years, and then moved to a white house surrounded by a white picket fence, with a gate opening onto the board side walk on Commercial Street. The house had a lovely back yard and a trellis over the kitchen door, where niagara grapes grew in profusion. A water pump for the neighbors to use stood in the little lane on the west side of the house.

Across the street they owned a store which the local druggist hired, and in back of that building was a short pier where on clear nights one could count the flashes of the lighthouses, Woodend, Long Point and Highland.

The Civil War was raging, and Uncle Stephen was ailing, when George Osborn was called to fight. Whale oil was desperately needed for guns and cannons, so Uncle Stephen told the authorities he couldn't carry on alone, and that he had transferred the business to George Osborn. The authorities felt that George could do more good for the country by producing oil, so they excused him from service. Uncle Stephen retired to his elegant house on the corner of Commercial and Pearl Streets and George took over and worked hard.

When the business was transferred, Knowles wharf was on the water side of the main street about opposite Pearl Street. There were buildings all down the wharf; the first one had a door opening from Commercial Street leading into the office. Here stood a large roll top



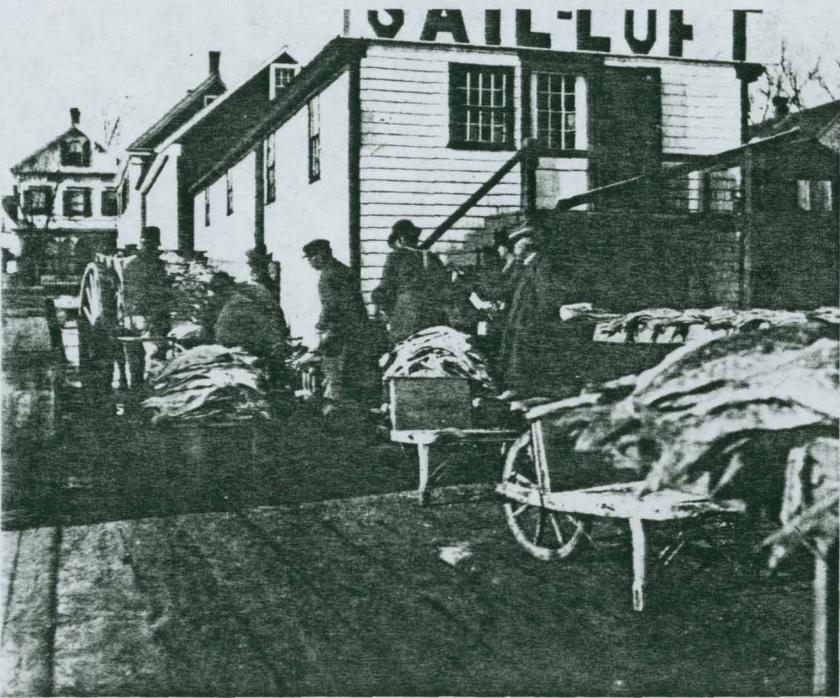
Uncle Stephen



Carrie D. Knowles



The Joseph Pepper Knowles Home



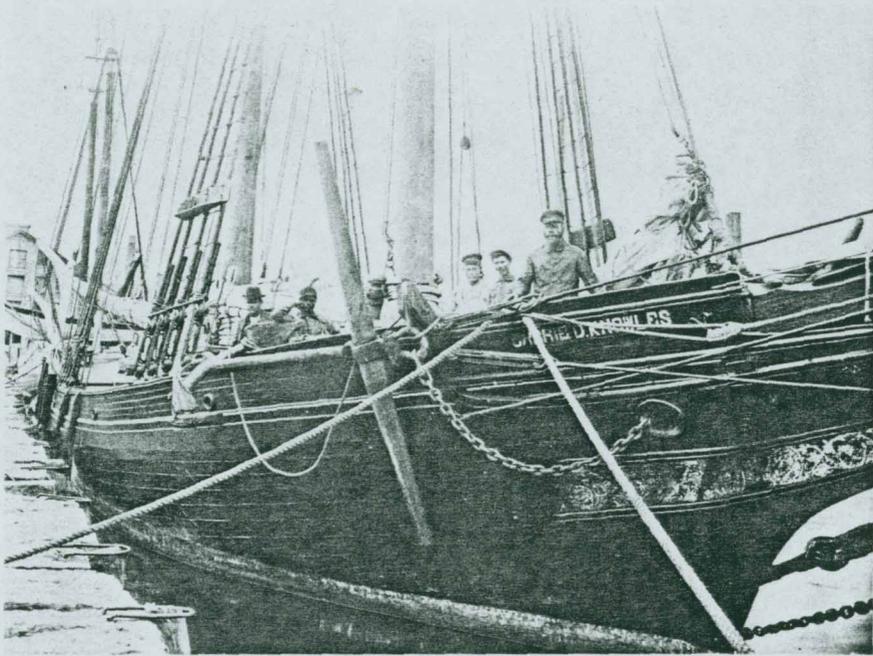
The Sail Loft

desk with lumps of sugar in one of the drawers for the horse, Billy, and on the desk top sat a paper weight with a little turtle under glass, whose legs trembled when it was moved. Mrs. Carrie Knowles Cook keeps that paper weight on her desk today. There was a high desk, and a stool for a helper, and a huge safe standing along the wall. Next was a room with a round stove in the center and chairs for friends and captains to sit in and chat. Beyond this building, going toward the water, was a storage shed where supplies of all kinds were kept, kegs of nails, ropes, tools and provisions. On the left on the east side was a huge coal bin with coal to sell to the townspeople. Billy pulled the cart that delivered the coal.

Attached was another building which held barrels, called casks, piled high to the ceiling. The casks filled with oil were waiting for George Osborn to sell them in New Bedford and empty casks were waiting to go aboard for the next voyage – Further down the wharf a large building held dories and equipment for the whaling boats; and from the outside steep stairs led to a sail loft where George Pettis, with his sail maker's palm, sat cross legged on an immaculate floor mending sails and making new ones.

All along the three sides of the wharf vessels were tied up, awaiting their next voyage or unloading the casks of oil which had been tried out of the whale blubber aboard the vessels.

The filled casks were clearly marked sperm oil or whale oil. The fatty whale oil is of a different consis-



Whaler tied up at Knowles Wharf



George Osborn's white house and back yard in center

teny than oil from the sperm whale, which is a kind of liquid wax used in a refined state for fine machinery.

Sometimes there was a pile of ambergris on the wharf, a secretion of the sperm whale usually found floating on the water. This was very valuable and used as a fixative in perfume.

Sometimes, certain casks were marked Spermaceti, an oil from the head of sperm whales used by the cosmetic companies in making fine creams. Then too there was baleen, the tough flexible whale bone through which whales strained their food; this was used for corset stays, umbrella ribs and clock springs.

Because Stephen Cook and George Osborn Knowles were so closely associated in the ownership of whalers, they can not easily be separated. In old records, in a given year each one would own a vessel which sailed from and returned to the same wharf, and belonged to the same fleet.

Stephen Cook's name first appears in an old record as owner of the *B.F. Sparks* and the first time George O. Knowles' name appears is in 1879 when he became owner of the *Quick Step*. The following chart is a list of vessels owned by both men. They all sailed in the Atlantic and southern waters, they were all schooners and with the exception of the *Ellen Rizpah* and the *B.F. Sparks* none brought back whale bone. The sailors did, however, make scrimshaw on the long voyages as presents to their families back in Provincetown.

YEAR	VESSEL	TONS	CAPTAIN	AGENT
1876	B. F. SPARKS	92	Ewell	Stephen Cook
1878			Ewell	Stephen Cook
1880			Ewell	Stephen Cook
1877	ARIZONA	74	Nicholas White	Stephen Cook
1878			Nicholas White	Stephen Cook
1877	ELLEN RIZPAH	67	John Dunham	Stephen Cook
1878			John Dunham	Stephen Cook
1879			John Dunham	Stephen Cook
1880			John Dunham	Stephen Cook
1881			John Dunham	Stephen Cook
1882			John Dunham	Stephen Cook
1883			John Dunham	Stephen Cook
1884			John Dunham	Stephen Cook
1885			John Dunham	Stephen Cook
1885			John Dunham	Stephen Cook
1886			John Dunham	George O. Knowles
1887			John Dunham	George O. Knowles
1878			GAGE PHILLIPS	107
1881	J. Nickerson	Stephen Cook		
1884	Wm Dyer	Stephen Cook		
1886	Wm Dyer	George O. Knowles		
1887	J. E. Dyer	George O. Knowles		
1891	C. Marston	George O. Knowles		
1892	C. Marston	George O. Knowles		
1893	C. Marston	George O. Knowles		
1894	C. Marston	George O. Knowles		
1879	QUICK STEP	94	Cook	George O. Knowles
1881			Cook	George O. Knowles
1883			Charles Marston	George O. Knowles
1884			Charles Marston	George O. Knowles
1885			Charles Marston	George O. Knowles
1886			Charles Marston	George O. Knowles

SAILED	ARRIVED	BARRELS SPERM OIL	BARRELS WHALE OIL	POUNDS WHALE BONE
May 11	Aug 30 '77	310	150	
May 1	Sept 1 '79	325	45	48
May 3	Sept 16 '81	200	40	
April 6	Sept 11 '77	130	—	
April 15	Lost at sea Aug 1879 — 300 barrels sperm oil 40 barrels whale oil aboard			
Feb 15	Aug. 13 '77	125	200	
Feb 4	Sept 7 '78	80	170	1900
Feb 3	Aug 3 '79	135	180	
Feb 14	Aug 27 '80	130	180	
Feb 17	Sept. 14 '81	75	175	
Feb 14	Aug. 11 '82	195	135	
Feb 14	June 20 '83	75	200	
Feb 15	Aug 24 '84	130	190	
Feb 12	June 8 '85	160	230	
June 30	Sept 25 '85	60	—	
Feb 1	Sept 13 '86	70	200	
Jan 31	Lost in hurricane — Aug 20, 1887 — 4 men saved			
April 25	Aug 30 '80	1,000	Detained by Spanish Gov't in Cuba — released	
May 11	Sept 11 '83	460	20	
June 7	Oct 5 '75	450		
May 10	Sept 6 '87	400		
Nov 22	Aug 9 '89	600		
Feb 19	Aug 25 '91	430	20	
Feb 15	Aug 16 '92	440		
Feb 27	Sept 2 '93	430		
Feb 2	Aug 20 '94	400		
July 3	Sept 5 '80	220		
May 11	Sept 21 '82	120		
Feb 14	Sept 14 '83	160	75	
Feb 15	Sept '84	150	110	
May 3	Sept 14 '85	100	180	
Feb 1	Sept 14 '86	60	200	

YEAR	VESSEL	TONS	CAPTAIN	AGENT
1880	ALCYONE	92	Asaph Atkins	George O. Knowles
1882			Ewell	George O. Knowles
1884			Ewell	George O. Knowles
1886			John Dunham	George O. Knowles
1886			John Dunham	George O. Knowles
1887			John Dunham	George O. Knowles
1888			Mello	George O. Knowles
1889			Mello	George O. Knowles
1890			Collin Stevenson	George O. Knowles
1892			Collin Stevenson	George O. Knowles
1892			Collin Stevenson	George O. Knowles
1893			Collin Stevenson	George O. Knowles

1887	MARY CURREN	102	J. E. Dyer	George O. Knowles
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1887	CARRIE D. KNOWLES	121	Charles Marston	George O. Knowles
1889			Charles Marston	George O. Knowles
1890			Nichols	George O. Knowles
1891			Nichols	George O. Knowles
1892			Nichols	George O. Knowles
1893			Nichols	George O. Knowles
1895			Collin Stevenson	George O. Knowles
1896			Collin Stevenson	George O. Knowles
1897			Collin Stevenson	George O. Knowles
1898			Collin Stevenson	George O. Knowles
1899			Collin Stevenson	George O. Knowles
1899			Collin Stevenson	George O. Knowles
1901			Collin Stevenson	George O. Knowles
1901			Collin Stevenson	George O. Knowles
1902			Collin Stevenson	George O. Knowles
1904			Collin Stevenson	George O. Knowles

SAILED	ARRIVED	BARRELS SPERM OIL	BARRELS WHALE OIL	POUNDS WHALE BONE
March 17	Sept 9 '81	110	20	
May 29	Sept 26 '83	335		
June 8	Oct 2 '85	180	50	
Feb 9	June 14 '86	240	185	
July 3	Sept 4 '86	20		
Feb 9	Aug 30 '87	275	15	
Aug 15	June 7 '89	135		
Aug 22	Aug 30 '90	290		
Oct 16	Sept 12 '91	400	30	
Jan 23	Sept 12 '92	430		
Dec 6	Sept 15 '93	400		
Dec 6	Sept 11 '94	400		

Feb 9	Lost with all hands - hurricane Aug 20 1887			
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June 16	Oct 19 '88	335		
May 8	Sept 20 '90	500		
Nov 19	July 25 '91	350		
Oct 21	Aug 25 '92	500		
Nov 26	Aug 24 '93	500		
Nov 29	Sept 18 '94	450		
May 29	Oct 19 '95	400		
May 8	Oct 21 '96	250		
May 1	Nov 5 '97	330		
June 27	Sept 22 '98	400		
March 13	Oct 17 '99	300		
Dec 13	Sept 23 '00	400		
Jan 29	July 31 '01	500		
Oct 31	Sept 12 '02	300		
Dec 31	Aug 19 '03	350		
Jan 27	Taken by pirates in Venezuela			

Because the *Carrie D. Knowles* was the last of the Knowles whaling ships to sail out of Provincetown, Carrie Knowles Cook remembers much about this vessel and her father's business. She tells this story. "When my father decided to build a new vessel after the loss of the *Mary Curren* and the *Ellen Rizpah* in the hurricane of 1887, he chose James and Tarr shipbuilders of Essex, Mass. When the ship was ready and he had decided to name it for me, we went by train to Essex where Mr. James met us. On a lovely sunny day we stood on the river bank and watched men take away the props. The *Carrie D. Knowles* slid down the ways into the water and floated majestically down the Essex river. A beautiful boat and a beautiful sight.

"For many years the *Carrie D. Knowles* was equipped at Knowles Wharf and my father gathered her crew, both Americans and Portuguese, in Provincetown and New Bedford. She had many very successful voyages, bringing in 3,865 barrels of sperm oil, until January 1904 when she sailed from Provincetown bound for southern waters.

"Everyone expected to hear from Captain Collin Stevenson when he arrived in Dominica in the West Indies. No message came and my father was very worried, as was Mrs. Stevenson.

"Five years went by; Mrs. Stevenson was to be remarried and my father, George Osborn Knowles, had died. Word suddenly came that one of the men aboard the *Carrie D. Knowles*, an Elisha Payne, had arrived

in Kingston, St. Vincent's, British West Indies. He told this story to the authorities and to Captain Stevenson's daughter who lived in St. Vincent's, where her father was born.

"The vessel was running for the island of Dominica when it was blown far off course by a storm that swept the Atlantic. As it approached the shore of Venezuela, pirates boarded her and took the captain and the crew prisoners. They were put in a rocky dungeon jail and not allowed to talk together. One sailor finally escaped; this was Elisha Payne, who made his way to Trinidad. Before further information could be learned of the crew, Payne disappeared again.

"The authorities in Washington were contacted by Georgie Knowles (my mother, George Osborn's wife) and everyone tried to help but it proved useless. Mrs. Stevenson gave up her second marriage for she felt that her husband was still alive, and the Knowles family lost a beautiful and paying vessel."

Mrs. Carrie Knowles Cook was very sad at this loss and she speaks of other hardships her friends experienced. She remembers Captain Johnnie Cook's wife, Viola, who was on a whaling voyage in the arctic with her husband. She had left at home with grandparents her tiny baby girl, and was counting the days when the frozen ice, which had kept them in the arctic for 3 years, would melt enough for them to sail for home. When they awakened on the morning they were to leave, the ice had frozen again overnight so that they had to stay

another year. Viola Cook's mind snapped, and even when she reached Provincetown she was never the same.

She also remembers Mrs. MacMillan, the mother of the famous arctic explorer. Her husband went to sea and was long overdue. Every afternoon for years she would take her little son Donald by the hand and climb to the high hill overlooking the harbor to see if her husband's ship was sailing home around Long Point, which it never did.

At the time of the loss of the *Carrie D. Knowles* and with the discovery of petroleum, the flourishing Cape Cod whaling industry came to a close.

In 1877 sperm whale oil sold for \$1.13 a gallon, and in 1904 it had dropped to .52 cents a gallon. Whale oil went from 52 cents to 36 cents a gallon at the same time.

In 1905 only two schooners sailed from Provincetown, while in 1881 there were 13.

In the last half of the last century 175 whalers hailed from Provincetown; but beginning in the early 1900's there were fewer and fewer whales in the Atlantic waters, the ranks of the old ship masters had thinned, and no longer did young men seek the glamour of whaling.

The whaling industry taught men and boys skills, self reliance and valor, but took its toll in violence, physical hardships, mutinies and dangerous living.

Time has blurred many of the hardships, leaving remembrances of romantic voyages on far away seas and records of a lucrative industry of which George Osborne Knowles was a part.