


Greetings from Cape Cod

- 1957 -



Looking Back Over The Years Into Cape Cod's Colorful Past

By Gustavus Swift Paine

Mr. Paine will welcome comment, information or questions addressed to him in care of The Advocate.

From Mr. George Woodbury of Bedford, New Hampshire, author of John Goffe's Mill and The Legacy of John Goffe, two delightful books, I have received an 1878 Provincetown whaling log. George Soper, aged 19, of Provincetown kept it on the schooner Express, 70 tons, Captain Richard Smith. In a terrific 1859 winter storm, Provincetown people, watching a wreck go to pieces without apparent survivors, saw a floating box, in which they discovered an infant. This infant Captain Samuel Soper adopted and named George. The boys always thought that he was Portuguese. Later he became the beloved and cantankerous tax collector in Bedford, New Hampshire. Here are some extracts from the log. The schooner sailed March 11th for the Cape Verde Islands.

Thursday, March 21st. Today we commenced to grind the irons

and get everything ready for whales if we see any.

Tuesday, the 26th. Struck porpoise so that we have a change of food; liver for dinner and porpoise balls for supper.

Thursday, the 28th. I washed today for the first time on the vessel. (He probably meant he washed his clothes.)

Monday, April 1st. More porpoises last night. They are close to the vessel making a noise like an elephant. One kept throwing himself out of the water and several times came near coming on board.

Monday, the 8th. Last night I raised a light on our lee. It proved to be a full rigged ship. For a time we headed for each other, and we had the cheek to keep on our course and make her turn out for us. She was large enough to run right over us like an egg-shell.

Wednesday, the 10th. This morning at half past four we were called out and got our breakfast and had hardly got done when there she blows . . .

After a short time the captain's boat got fast and killed him in about three hours.

Thursday, the 11th. Today we have been all day the time cutting in. We have been in grease up to our eyes, the whale will make about forty barrels . . . (At the Cape Verde Islands) There was a lot of Portuguese alongside getting all the lean meat that they could get, six boats full of meat.

Wednesday, the 17th. At noon we got our first drink of goat milk and some sweet potatoes, there are plenty of fish alongside when there is a whale cutting in . . . giving us a change of food, some of them called blue backs that look like a mackerel make a splendid chowder.

Wednesday, the 1st of May. As we were butting the whale up for mincing horse when the captain saw a cow and a calf we lowered and the mate got fast and killed him. . . After a while although it ran a good way from the schooner and there was three boats off from the shore and helped tow it up to the schooner . . . The whale lay on top of the water head down waiting for the boat and when he was struck lifted his tail and it struck the harpooners oar and struck it into four or five pieces knocked rowlock and split the gunnel of the boat.

Friday, May 17th. Some of the

boys tried to run away. They came on board about eleven (P.M.) with a shore boat to get their clothes. They got everything in the boat but they had no rowlocks. One of them went aft to get some of his boots, made some noise and the captain was sitting up with a headache heard him, sent the mate on deck. He saw what was up. Just as quick as the boys saw that they was found out they run and jumped two of them into the boat and shoved off from the vessel before the rest could get in. The after guard all came on deck with three pistols and commenced firing like everything. Finally they lowered the boat and as the boys had nothing to pull with soon came up with them. One of the boys had nothing and the other had a boat hook. He used it so well that they came on board and got all men striking at him and only knocked him down once while he knocked down one of the boatswains so that he is not able to do any work, took an oar away from the second mate knocked three or four of them down before they got him on board.

Those boys of the crew were doubtless all teen-agers. They appear to have quieted down at once, and to have come home to Provincetown with the rest. The copy of the whole log fills 34 typed pages.