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# Scrimshaw Observer

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## Scrimshaw Market Report

### Summer Breezes—Blown Away

by Andy Jacobson

The past two months provided 'way more material than this column could handle. The result is a quick select review of the truly whirlwind three-week burst of Cape & Island auctions. These are, indeed, different days.

Eldred's two-day July 2018 Marine Sale started strong, featuring the final session of the Kobacker Scrimshaw Collection, the Carl and Sonia Schmitt Collection, and some high quality separate consignments. The narrative will be limited to a few teeth, crimpers, and panbone. All prices include the buyer's premium.

The first two lots were non-Kobacker. Lot 1, the intellectually interesting but nearly universally reviled pair of Eli Bangs teeth, was quickly passed and forgotten. From then on it was hell for leather and all bets off. Lot 1a, the Map tooth, which was sold two years ago on Nantucket for \$48,000, underwent serious study and thanks to John Rinaldi's research emerged as part of the seminal Mylert Armstrong collection that formed the basis of both the Flayderman collection



Lot 1a, Map Tooth \$168,000

and Flayderman's book, *Scrimshaw and Scrimshanders*. This time it sold for \$168,000 to a buyer who was at the original sale.

By acclaim, the sale favorite was Lot 11, attributed to the Britannia Artist. As you are probably well sick of reading, until Paul Vardeman's scholarly revelation Mr. Britannia's work had been attributed to his Nantucket contemporary, Edward Burdett (fl. 1818-1833), America's first

scrimshander. After Vardeman, quite a few collectors woke up to find their Burdetts were now attributed to some anonymous Limey. Actual Burdetts became fewer and scarcer. A slew of other teeth, mostly of British subject matter, were now in search of not only an artist but also a price structure. That structure fluctuated wildly from \$7,000 to \$50,000.

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## Ivory Legislation: Update

by Mark Jacobson

### Massachusetts

In early August 2018, news came from Beacon Hill that pending legislation, brought before the Massachusetts House and Senate in 2016 to restrict the trade of elephant and rhinoceros ivory and bone, had failed in House committee, similarly to its 2015/16 counterpart. As with the

earlier legislation, the new bill was deemed too broad and by inference too restrictive on marine mammal artifacts (and mammoth and mastodon)—the former of which had been deemed to be adequately protected by the Federal 1972 Endangered Species Protection Act.

At that time, seemingly reinforced with the failure of the most recent bill, the

committee thought Massachusetts should continue to use the 1972 Federal Endangered Species Act to drive policy in the Commonwealth.

This newly defeated legislative bill was actually a followup to the earlier piece of legislation. It had been written to provide proposed specific and particular protection to the restriction of elephant

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## Scrimshaw Observer

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Our mission: To promote and protect the trade, collection, and study of antique scrimshaw, the historic and culturally important folk art of the whaler.

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The next meeting of the Antique Scrimshaw Collectors Association will be held on Saturday, May 11, 2019, at the New Bedford Whaling Museum during Scrimshaw Weekend.

## Scrimshaw Market Report, *continued*

Concerned collectors can now relax; “Great Art” has saved your lily whites. All who bought the art as opposed to the name have been vindicated. Even you guys who purchased a name are winners.



**Lot 11 Britannia/Whaling \$192,000**

Back to Lot 11. “The Ship Charles of London/Whaling” is small—5.5”—like virtually all Britannia examples. The front is decorated with a starboard portrait of the British-flagged *Charles*. However, the back is a total game changer. There is a deeply carved, almost intaglio pod of sperm whales. The central image is a sperm whale stoving his tormentors’ boat. It is a striking visual contrast unique to this artist in the scrimshaw canon. The above-water tail crushing the whaleboat is blackened. The below-water body is Moby Dick white. This two-tone whale is transformative. It is graphically overpowering and one of the great visual and emotional images of the art form. This is a masterpiece of true utilitarian “folk art” and a precursor of modern art.

Although few at the preview were able to articulate their feelings beyond “I love it,” the reaction was visceral. Estimated at \$30-\$50K, a Britannia record \$192,000 was needed to take it home.

The well-deserved leap into six figures Burdett territory for the Britannia Artist also marked the emergence of a new appreciation for the art of scrimshanders who until now lacked the name recognition of Burdett, Myrick, Roderick, or Finney. This new price clearly confirms what was already common knowledge: the Britannia Artist, both by his large body of work and its pure artistic quality, has entered the top rank of the finest of 19<sup>th</sup>-century scrimshanders.

Lot 36, the \$396,000 Naval Monument Engraver, was probably the sale’s most startling result. As the buyer of record of the second-most expensive sperm whale tooth ever publicly traded, I never saw this coming.

Some background and context might be useful. Abel Bowen’s 1816 *The Naval Monument* was illustrated with 25 woodcut engravings of memorable War of 1812 naval engagements. A shipboard and popular favorite, it was reprinted in 1837. Scrimshanders widely copied the plates. Bowen did most, but not all, of the original art. In this instance, although the “Return...” side was a Bowen original, the “Blockade...” side was after M. F. Corne. The condition, color, and contrast are much better than all other recent examples.

The two pieces in the Mittler Collection were lesser examples. The better (Eldred, July 20, 2017, Lot 24), a large 8.5” “President vs. Endymion/Enterprise vs. Boxer” sold for \$34,800. The lesser sold for \$6K and was reoffered at Osona’s on August 4, 2018 as Lot 184 where it was passed at \$8,500.

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Initially, I thought the tooth could be acquired for around \$35-\$40K. The client correctly disagreed. After further consideration, \$75K seemed a workable price to me. Once again, the client correctly thought otherwise.

The market clearly had a considerably different view. From my vantage point there were at least four determined bidders chasing the tooth. All of the visible bidders were sophisticated, well prepared, advanced collectors. Eventually the field narrowed to three, with another dropping out and then jumping back to become the underbidder.



**Lot 36 Naval Monument Bowen \$396,000**

There were three opportunities to acquire decent-to-fine examples by the Ceres Artisans.

Lot 72, a 6.25" example of Mom, Dad, and the entire mutant brood of eight, stared at the viewer from a fairly standard living room. The back held a three-quarter-bow view of a ship. Inscribed in a different, sepia hand were the initials "WLP" and the date 1830. Presale chatter thought that the brood would soar well beyond its \$20-\$30K estimate. However, it sold for a respectable \$26,400. Perhaps the unsettling stare or the added inscription held it back.



**Lot 72 Ceres Artisan Mutant Family \$26,400**

Lot 73, the next Ceres example, was the 5.75" more mundane Happy Couple/Domestic Happiness vignette with a picture of a whaling scene on the wall above the couple and a single child. Estimated at \$10-\$15K, it sold for \$13,200.

The final Ceres example, Lot 143, a William Gilpin attributed pair, was not from the Kobacker Collection. It sported an interesting back story of a reunited pair, a local family, and market-fresh provenance. It didn't hurt that this pair was

exactly what one would want from a non-domestic Ceres set. The polychrome 5.75" pair had all the desirable motifs: Hope, eagles, banners (Virtue, Liberty and Independence / Free Trade and Sailors Rights), anchors, shields and flags, along with excellent color, contrast, and patina. Estimated at a reasonable \$15-\$20K, they sold for \$96,000.



**Lot 143 Pair, Ceres Artisan Polychrome \$96,000**

The Mittler Collection had a similar, slightly smaller polychrome "Free Trade & Sailor's Rights" pair, Lot 23, that sold for \$28,800 on Oct. 15, 2016. The 5.25" pair was illustrated in Carpenter's 1987 book *The Decorative Arts of Nantucket*, plate LIV. To these tired eyes, these teeth have a better form and a tad better patina, but does that truly add \$67,200 to the value?

Another crowd pleaser was Lot 213, the non-Kobacker, market-fresh female pirate Alwilda. The tooth came with a superior example of the *Pirates Own Book* book that was the image source. Estimated at \$12-\$15,000, this polychrome example soared to \$102,000.

Apparently the full-page illustrations in the 1844 *Pirate's Own Book* of Alwilda and Fanny Campbell struck an erotic chord among whalers stuck on long voyages. Examples of both ladies are fairly common, but few had color, and no other offered a hint at the probable background of both Alwilda and the scrimshander. The back of the tooth has a full figure portrait of what's most likely Alwilda in traditional period Scandinavian dress. She was Danish, and that costume-specific knowledge could indicate that the artist was of Scandinavian origin.



**Lot 213 Alwilda \$102,000**

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## Scrimshaw Market Report, *continued*

Joining the ranks of freshly identified objects from the Meylert Armstrong trove was this 9.5" marked "NH250" polychrome, star- and diamond-inlaid, 7-fluted wheel crimper. Lot 60 was far and away the best of the multi-wheel crimpers. It sold for \$21,600.



Lot 60 ex-Armstrong Collection \$21,600

Snakes abound in both the crimper and cane mediums. Lot 10, a well-proportioned 6.5" whale ivory, mother-of-pearl and abalone-inlaid crimper with innocent snake eyes and an unusual scaled handle, sold for \$20,400.



Lot 10 "Snake Eyes" \$20,400

Lot 64 Hippocampus, 6.75". Est. \$7-\$10,000. Since the Hippocampus pulled Neptune's chariot, one might believe it a common subject. Although the New Bedford Whaling Museum has one, I can't recall a similar example coming to market. It brought \$10,200.



Lot 64 Hippocampus \$10,200

### The Great Panbone Mystery

Does a cutting-in scene, fancy border, and better condition make a \$48,000 difference? Lot 17, 7.75" x 14" + frame, a tad of polychrome, damage to the lower edges not extending to the active whaling scene, est. \$8-12,000, sold for \$9,600.



Lot 17 \$9,600

Lot 171, 8" x 16" + period frame, est. \$12-18,000, brought \$18,000. "A Whaling Scene in the Indian Ocean" had a hairline crack running the entire length along the shoreline.



Lot 171 \$18,000

Lot 173 8.5" x 18.75" Bordered by British flag topped columns connected with a foliate device enclosed a detailed "cutting-in" scene and whaleboats engaged with sperm whales. Estimated at \$12-\$18,000, it brought a strong \$66,000.



Lot 173 \$66,000

This was a sale full of punchy offerings including some fine whalecraft and pretty good art. The immediate takeaway was a strong sale that had an unusual healthy middle and a weak bottom end. The Kobacker segment realized \$1.49 million for a \$2,119,000 collection total. It's a modified refrain of the same old story in that a new appreciation for some second-tier artists is now evident.

### Rafael Osona Americana, Fine Art, Marine Auction

On August 4, 2018, the show moved to the "Gray Lady" for Rafael Osona's annual cavalcade of scrimshaw, Nantucket art, assorted marine antiques such as "woolies," and a wide variety of American and European do-dads.

It has been long asserted that Nantucket is an insular market relatively unaffected by the outside world. That means that it is possible for recent, previously sold mainland material to appear on Nantucket as fresh to the market. This observer believes that when top-shelf material emerges, the same top collectors vie for ownership no matter the location. We will not dwell on this theory, but be aware that the quick flip did not perform up to expectations this time. There is "institutional memory" along with an audience's innate sense for "fresh" material.

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Eldred's overpowering sale sucked a lot of energy and dollars out of the market. We are now so spoiled, post Kobacker and Mittler, that when a perfectly solid array of scrimshaw is offered it seems underwhelming.

Rafael Osona managed to cobble together what in ordinary times was a more than presentable sale. Despite a few too many familiar objects and around sixteen passed lots, the results were strong. Approximately one hundred scrimshaw lots were offered and around eighty-four sold for \$355,680.

Case in point was the top-selling tooth. Lot 182, a polychrome portrait of a Victorian lady above a Union shield, came to Eldred's by way of Australia as part of a pair that was sold separately. In the 2013 Marine sale, it was Lot 623 and sold for \$16,520. Five years later, it brought an impressive \$60,000.



Lot 182 \$60,000

A striking inlaid box, Lot 54, first appeared as Lot 12 at Skinner's Nov. 19, 2016 Americana Sale. The box had a warped lid and was missing quite a few inlays. It sold for \$9,840. It underwent a sensitive, thorough restoration and this time brought \$22,800.



Skinner before restoration \$9,840



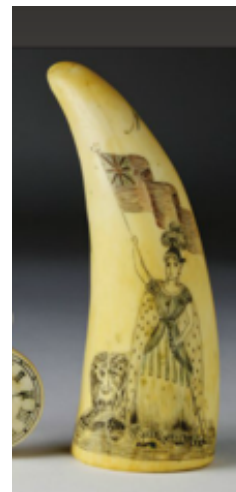
Osona after restoration \$22,800

The finest cane was Lot 92, a 34.5" architectural example that brought \$21,600. The whale ivory knob had a half-round top and a fluted base over a series of geometric abalone, mother-of-pearl and baleen inlays. The most interesting section was the open work fluted columns enclosing a central twisted baleen segment.



Lot 92 \$21,600

Lot 90 was my whimsical favorite. The 5" polychrome tooth featured a demure Britannia waving a Union Jack. A seemingly tame lion is crouched beside her. The back is decorated with a "Hope" above an anchor vignette at the tip. The main scene is a transition side-wheel steamship under full sail. There was a minor expected age crack to the back; otherwise the color contrast and patina were fine. It sold for a bargain \$2,040.



Lot 90 \$2,040

These auctions may be summarized by the same old refrain: expect the unexpected, fresh great material does extremely well, and all else falls where it may. This leaves plenty of opportunity for the prepared collector.

*Andy Jacobson is the owner of Andrew Jacobson Marine Antiques in Ipswich, MA, selling a full line of quality marine antiques for 40 years. He also provides auction consultation services and qualified appraisals of collections and estates.*

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# The Fijian Tabua, William Sizer, and the Methodists<sup>1</sup>

by Stuart M. Frank

The *tabua* (pronounced *TOM-bwa*, in two syllables, not three) is a ceremonial object traditionally made and cherished by Fiji islanders: a whole sperm whale tooth, highly polished, characteristically crudely incised and pigmented with letters from the Latin alphabet, and always with piercings drilled at each end to attach a necklace of braided sinnet fiber. The tooth thus hangs horizontally when worn by a Fijian man on ceremonial and ritual occasions. The typical *tabua* is inscribed with what appear to outsiders as random, haphazard sequences of letters: their significance or meaning, if any, is evidently unknown even to the Fiji Museum or its renowned former curator, Fergus Clunie, who catalogued the collection and has been the outstanding authority on the indigenous arts and weaponry of Fiji and Tonga.<sup>2</sup> The polished, incised tooth is routinely darkened to a soft amber or sienna color by the application of oils and allegedly further darkened and patinated by repeated exposure to traditional council fires. Traditionally, the *tabua* is the single most valuable Fijian possession, signifying wealth and position, a trade commodity used as collateral for all manner of transactions, as a dowry for a marriage, for the purchase of property or livestock, and as a reward for valor in warfare or some extraordinary service to a Native of high standing.



*Tabua* on its indigenous sinnet-fiber necklace. Fiji, 19th century. Kendall Collection, New Bedford Whaling Museum #2001.100.1937 (Frank, *Ingenious Contrivances*, Fig. 1:8a).

The Fijians were not whale hunters themselves, so prior to contact with British and American visitors to the Pacific whale teeth were presumably extracted from stranded and drift carcasses. But beginning in the late 18th century and throughout the 19th, they were typically acquired by barter from British and especially American whalers and China traders. Whalers, by the time they reached Fiji, could be counted on to have some whale teeth already on hand. For

China traders, whale teeth were a means of procuring *bêche-de-mer* ("sea cucumbers") and sandalwood in Polynesia that could be traded on the Canton market for Chinese silks, porcelain, and tea.<sup>3</sup>

There are myriad stories of *tabuas* being presented to outlanders for services rendered and to dignitaries on account of their exalted status. Unfortunately, there is no record of how a tooth scrimshawed with a female portrait by William G. Sizer (1801-1840)—formerly known as the *L. C. Richmond* Engraver until his identity was established a decade ago—was converted by a Fijian artisan into a traditional *tabua* (Peabody Essex Museum). Perhaps the artist swapped it away himself in Fiji; or perhaps it was among his personal effects when he died in Fiji in 1840 and it simply remained there; or perhaps a shipmate bartered it, knowing that whale teeth, with or without scrimshaw, were the most valuable barter objects in Fiji. This one has a pasted-on label with the holograph inscription, "Tabua given to me by Hon. W. S. Carew, S. M. Comm. for Colo East, Fijl. in 1894." According to Fergus Clunie, Walter Sinclair Carew was a New Zealander who came to Fiji as a cotton planter in 1868, was appointed Resident Commissioner of Native Lands for "Colo East" (Tholo East, a province of Viti Levu on Great Fiji Island) in 1874, and was later a magistrate and a member of the governing Executive Council. But how the *tabua* found its way to a senior British Colonial administrator a generation after Sizer's death remains unexplained.



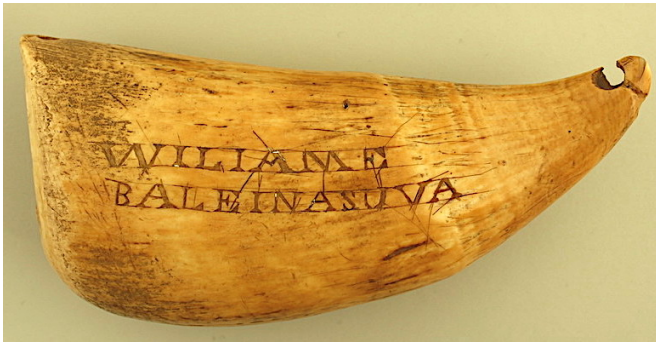
Sperm whale tooth polychrome engraved by seaman William Sizer (1801-1840) of Chester, Mass., aboard the whaleship *L. C. Richmond* of Bristol, R.I., circa 1835, and later converted to a *tabua* by a Native Fijian, who drilled the ends and inscribed it with the letters "PIVD." Peabody Essex Museum of Salem, Mass.

Previously, in 1826, Nantucketer William S. Cary (1804-1883) was shipwrecked in Fiji, the sole survivor of the massacred crew of the whaleship *Oeno* of Nantucket. He was rescued by a Native chief and soon formed an *ad hoc* partnership with fellow-Nantucketer David Whippy (1802-1871), who had been abandoned there by a trading vessel in 1824. The partners imported and accumulated whale teeth, exported sandalwood and especially *bêche-de-mer* for the China trade, and functioned as intermediaries, translators, barter merchants, retailers, and mercenaries for visiting

*continued on next page*

mariners, taking a portion of their payment in the form of sperm whale teeth. Cary returned to Massachusetts in 1833, but Whippy continued on alone in Fiji until the end of his days.<sup>4</sup> This would have made a plausible conduit for the Sizer tooth to fall into Fijian hands.

Two other *tabuas* are certainly remarkable and may be unique. One is an uncommonly large specimen—in fact, an unusually broad tooth, 7½ inches (9.5 cm) in length, making it among the largest and heaviest *tabuas* on record. Rather than being haphazardly incised with random letters, it is actually boldly chiseled and cut with the name “WILIAME BALEINASUVA” in serifed Latin capitals.<sup>5</sup> In the Romance languages *baleine*, *ballena*, and *baleia* (in French, Spanish, and Portuguese, respectively) are the words for *whale*—though not including the sperm whale; and *beleinier*, *ballenero*, and *balleiro* mean *whaleman* or *whaler*, irrespective of the species hunted. *Suva* (a common Fijian surname) is the principal town, principal port, and administrative capital of Fiji. The implication is that this *tabua* was made by one of the many Fiji Islanders who served in the crews of American, British, Australian, French, and Hawaiian whaleships and that the inscription is the Fijian owner’s adoptive name, the surname being a combination of the word for whale (*baleine*) and the name of Fiji’s principal town (*Suva*), meaning *William the Whaleman from Suva*.



***Tabua* inscribed “WILIAME BALEINASUVA.”** Fiji, 19th century. Kendall Collection, New Bedford Whaling Museum #2001.100.2265 (Frank, *Ingenious Contrivances*, Fig. 8:23).

It is extremely rare that a *tabua* be so explicitly inscribed; that the letters be so well and clearly formed; that the inscription be so deeply carved—actually sculpted; and that there be a presumed maker, a Fijian who adopted the name William (on Fiji it would also be rendered *Wiliame* or *Viliame*) and shipped on a whaling cruise (probably as a seasonal hiring who came aboard in the Islands), whence he obtained the oversize tooth and decorated it handsomely with his occupationally derived moniker. As such, this *tabua* is virtually unique; the only other ever reported is a much lesser example by one Ravono (see below).

The whaling documents do not reveal anything about the Fijian man at issue: the *tabua* is the only evidence available. But the record from Fiji is somewhat more informative. Years after the Yankee whalers were mostly gone from the Pacific, a William AKA Wiliame Baleinasuva—probably the man himself but possibly a namesake son or nephew—was a Protestant minister, a member of the Australasian Methodist Ministerial Conference. During 1887-94, he represented the Koroalau Creek district of Cakandrovu

(Cakaudrove), on Vanua Levu (the second largest island in Fiji), and beginning in 1895 he was at the Navuloa Methodist Church, an important center of Methodism in Fiji that until 1907 was the seat of the Methodists’ Theological College for Ministers and Bible School for Catechists.<sup>6</sup>



***Tabua* inscribed “RAVONO.”** Fiji, 19th century. Rafael Osona Auctions, Nantucket, Aug. 5, 2017, #23.

A lesser specimen tends to corroborate the rare subgenre: an otherwise conventional *tabua*, clearly inscribed “RAVONO” and “SAWAKASA”<sup>7</sup>—another highly unusual departure from the customary Fijian practice of engraving *tabua* with an arbitrary or nonsensical series of ill-formed Latin characters. *Ravono* is a Fijian name, and *Sawakasa* is a district on the island of Fiji, north and slightly east of Suva. Thus, this *tabua* appears to have been inscribed according to the same principle as the analogous one by Wiliame Baleinasuva: a Fijian named Ravono from Sawakasa was presumably hired on for a seasonal circuit in an unidentified whaling vessel. His whaling exploits have not been identified further. On shipboard he may have been known by some kind of Anglicized name (for example, “William Gordon” and “William Taber” were “Feejee” Islanders in the crew of the New Bedford bark *Pioneer* in 1873), or he would have appeared on the books merely as Bill Kanaka or Charley Hawaii (whether or not he was actually from Hawaii) or something of the sort.<sup>8</sup> In light of Wiliame Baleinasuva or a kinsman with the same name having been a Fijian Methodist missionary in the 1880s and ’90s, it is worth noting that an Elimotana Ravono from Sawakasa was one of 55 Methodist missionaries—Fijian, Samoan, Rotuman, German, Scottish, Irish, and English—who arrived on the island of New Ireland (in modern-day Papua New Guinea) in the ship *John Wesley* in August 1875, whence Ravono was posted to the village of Kabanut.<sup>9</sup>

#### FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Extracted and revised from my *Biographical Dictionary of Scrimshaw Artists*, MS in progress © 2018.

<sup>2</sup> *Fergus Clunie, Fijian Weapons and Warfare*, Bulletin of the Fiji Museum No 2, 1977.



*continued from previous page*

<sup>3</sup> See my “The Origins of Engraved Pictorial Scrimshaw,” *The Magazine Antiques*, 142:4 (New York, October 1992), pp. 510-521.

<sup>4</sup> The *Oneo* had “struck a coral reef and ran aground on the remote Fijian island of Vaoa. A raiding party of Fijian warriors... killed all of the twenty-one members of the crew but Cary, who survived by hiding in a seaside cave for two days. A Vatoan head-man discovered the stranded sailor, took pity on him, and welcomed Cary to his village” (Edward D. Melillo, “Making Sea Cucumbers Out of Whales’ Teeth: Nantucket Castaways and Encounters of Value in Nineteenth-Century Fiji,” *Environmental History*, 20, April 2015, p. 450). Whippy was a seaman in the merchant brig *Calder* whom Captain Peter Dillon “deposited [him] on a Fijian beach to gather tortoise shell, mother-of-pearl, and sandalwood for sale at the bustling entrepôts of Canton and Manila” (*Loc. cit.*). Leaving a man or even an entire boat’s crew for later pickup on some remote island or another to gather marketable goods was a common practice in the hunting-and-gathering trades at the time and became fairly standard in the sealing business of New London and Long Island. However, Dillon failed to return to Fiji for *thirteen years*, “leaving Whippy to fend for himself”: in 1826 he had discovered the wrecked ships of the missing French explorer La Perouse on the island of Vanikoro and had sailed with the news to Calcutta; and so on (*Loc. cit.*). By that time, Cary had left Fiji in the schooner *Tybee* of Salem (*Ibid.*, p. 464). His narrative, based on his journal, was published as *Wrecked on the Feejees: Experience of a Nantucket man a century ago, who was sole survivor of whaleship “Oeno” and lived for nine years among the cannibals of South Sea Islands* (Nantucket in 1922 and 1928).

<sup>5</sup> Frank, *Ingenious Contrivances* (Boston and New Bedford, 2012), Fig. 8:23.

<sup>6</sup> Martin Dyson, *Australasian Methodist Ministerial General Index*, 2nd Edition (Melbourne: E. Whitehead & Co., 1896), p. 10.

<sup>7</sup> Osona, Aug. 5, 2017, #23.

<sup>8</sup> The New Bedford Free Public Library whaling crew database has 386 voyages listed for seamen pseudonymously surnamed “Kanaka” and its variants, 47 for the names “Maui” and “Mohee,” and 34 for “Tahiti.”

<sup>9</sup> Margaret Reeson, *Pacific Missionary George Brown 1835-1917: Wesleyan Methodist Church* (Canberra: Australian National University, 2013), pp. 83f.

*Stuart M. Frank is the founder and director of the Scrimshaw Forensics® Laboratory, founder and organizer of the annual Scrimshaw Weekend at the New Bedford Whaling Museum, and author of Ingenious Contrivances, Curiously Carved and several other books and monographs about nautical art, including Classic Whaling Prints and the forthcoming Dutch and Flemish Old Master Paintings in the New Bedford Whaling Museum.*



## 31<sup>st</sup> Annual Scrimshaw Weekend May 10 – May 12, 2019

by Judy Lund

The date has been set, and it’s time to put it on your calendar. The 31<sup>st</sup> Annual Scrimshaw Weekend will be held May 10-12, 2019. The symposium precedes Brimfield, but it’s unavoidable because of other museum scheduling. Tell your family to have a surprise Mother’s Day celebration a week early. Mother will not anticipate this!

The Nautical Antiques Show will go as usual on Friday, and lectures will be held on Saturday followed by dinner in the evening. We have a list of program possibilities, but so far none are confirmed. We are also working on a Sunday field trip, so stay tuned.

### Program Prospectus

#### Friday Events, May 10

- 10th Annual Nautical Antiques Show (Friday)
- Keynote Address (Friday evening)

#### Saturday Plenary Sessions, May 11

- Scrimshaw Collected By the Fishermen Themselves
- Important Fragments: Newly Discovered Features of Classic Masterworks
- The Old Curiosity Shops: Scrimshaw at Retail, Early to Mid 20th Century
- A Major Private Collection (shown for the first time)
- Collectors’ Choice: Favorite Pieces of Scrimshaw
- Collectors’ Spotlight: Highlights of a Few Private Collections
- Auction Preparedness: How to Deal with Auctioneers
- Annual Market Report
- Annual Report of ASCA (Antique Scrimshaw Collectors Association)
- Buffet luncheon
- Cash bar
- Banquet and evening program

#### Sunday, May 12

- Optional Field Trip (TBA)



## More Critter-Head Swifts

by Richard Donnelly

Last May during Scrimshaw Weekend at the New Bedford Whaling Museum, I gave a presentation on 19<sup>th</sup>-century swifts with “critter” head clamps. I had uncovered nine of them, three in public collections—the Heritage Museum in Sandwich, MA; the Cape Cod National Seashore Museum in Eastham, MA; and the Nantucket Historical Association’s Whaling Museum—and six in private collections. I determined that five of the nine were attributable to a single, unidentified maker, likely originating in Cape Cod or Nantucket.

Since this presentation, I have heard of two additional examples. The first was from a report by Chuck DeLuca of York, Maine, who said that he owned one with a similar animal head clamp that also had a carved eagle. Chuck was unable to find a photo by press time. Another was discovered in a collection in central Connecticut that had been purchased more than forty years ago, provenance unknown.



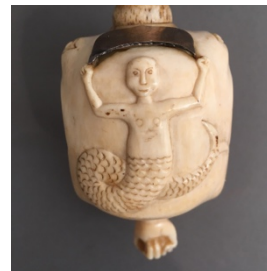
The carved whale ivory clamp differs from all others, having an earless, fork-tongued, almond-eyed creature and, on the back of the head, a mermaid (or perhaps merman) holding a coin silver banner. It is likely that the banner was meant to be engraved but was not completed. After removing the silver plaque, I was able to see that it was made from a 19<sup>th</sup>-century Spanish Milled Bust silver coin, which were minted in

denominations up to eight reales at eight South and Central American mints between 1771 and 1825.

It’s good to share images of your scrimshaw . . . it often leads to the uncovering of additional information or examples.



Critter-head clamp with forked tongue, almond eyes, and a fist-turn screw.



Clamp back, with mermaid holding a silver banner.



Reverse of the silver banner next to an example of a coin from which it was fashioned.

## Mystic Seaport Museum Announces Grant to Support Curatorial Expansion

Award of \$735,000 Will Fund New Collections Installations, Research, and Related Public Programming

Mystic Seaport Museum announced it has received a \$735,000 grant from the Henry Luce Foundation to support the curation, development, and installation of three new collections and related programming. These projects will provide new perspectives on the art and ensure the continued preservation and refinement of the collections while also promoting public access. Through this initiative, the museum will reimagine the artistic merit and educational potential of its permanent collections of decorative, folk, and self-taught art.

These objects—not always considered as works of art and hidden from public view—will be placed on display so they can be appreciated and freshly studied by scholars, artists, and curators.

The proposed installations and associated research and public program activities will encourage new scholarship relating to the themes of “The Sea as Muse,” “The Sea as Studio” for folk art such as scrimshaw, and “The Sea as Commons.”

The grant will support a guest artist-curator and two scholar-curators, emerging career professionals who will gain from interaction with museum staff while also introducing new voices to the museum. The grant was inspired in part by a two-day “think tank” hosted at the museum earlier this year and sponsored by the Luce Foundation and the Chipstone Foundation of Milwaukee, WI. The event brought together museum staff with scholars from several disciplines to consider how the museum’s collections could be reinterpreted for future audiences.

The three installations are scheduled to open on the museum’s McGraw Gallery Quadrangle in 2019 and 2020.

## **Ivory Legislation: Update**, *continued from page 1*

and rhino trade in the Commonwealth. At first, this legislation had the widespread support of lawmakers throughout the Commonwealth, despite there not being statistical proof that elephant and rhino poaching was a demonstrable issue in Massachusetts.

However, your ASCA Board and other museum leaders and experts raised several key concerns about this bill, especially after discovering the absence of exclusionary clauses to specifically call out the bill not being applicable to marine mammal or extinct mastodon and woolly mammoth bone. It was argued that this lack of specificity could have allowed the bill to be selectively or arbitrarily applied to scrimshaw, antiques, and legitimate art forms that utilized or contained these types of ivory/bone.

While all these efforts led to an initial amendment to specifically exclude marine mammals, materials/artforms/products from extinct species, mastodon and mammoth ivory were left without an exclusion in the bill. The reasoning presented by bill proponents this past spring on this specific subject was that in their opinions there were insufficient industry expertise and testing sites to distinguish mammoth and mastodon bone from elephant.

It was noted that many scrimshanders in the state have been using both forms of the extinct species' ivory in their artform work—in an effort themselves to help to protect elephants and rhinos. Had this most recent legislation passed, this would likely have rendered their businesses inoperable.

Ultimately our industry experts were successful not only in sensitizing legislators to the impact this bill would have on the scrimshaw and antiques art form and trade but were also able to provide strong evidence that the process of distinguishing the three different types of bone was relatively easily accomplished, and that both mastodon and mammoths, being extinct species, needed no protection.

ASCA Director Andrew Jacobson, Gordon Spencer (a true driving force behind the opposition to this bill), and James Russell (currently Gosnell Executive Director of the Nantucket Historical Association) led the lobbying efforts first to have the bill modified and ultimately to have it defeated. More than any museum official, Mr. Russell used the influence of his positions at the New Bedford and Nantucket Whaling Museums to decisively rally and influence the political world.

In the end, by early August, notice had been received that the bill had indeed failed in committee. Nevertheless, promises were quickly made by bill proponents to draft another piece of similar legislation for consideration in the next session.

ASCA has, accordingly, launched discussion about the possible drafting of a preemptive bill that will protect our art form and industry in Massachusetts on a more permanent basis. ASCA Director Andrew Jacobson is in contact with his state representatives about this and to date has been met with positive feedback on the concept of possibly working together to draft a preemptive bill template for consideration that would provide protection for truly endangered species but would also include clear exemptions for the restriction of legitimate

antique marine mammal, mastodon, and mammoth ivory trade in the Commonwealth. If this could be accomplished, this legislative draft could be shared with antiques industry leaders in other states facing similar challenges.

ASCA wishes to thank all those that communicated their concerns about the bill. Once again, our voices were heard and ultimately helped win the day. Specifically, the ASCA Board thanks Director Andrew Jacobson for his vocal and persistent leadership on behalf of the association in making legislators aware of the inaccuracies and risks associated with the now defunct bill. His work, with leadership from Mr. Spencer and Mr. Russell, was clearly pivotal in the ultimate agreement that this bill was not appropriate and would endanger businesses/livelihoods, public/private institution collections, and indeed the unique art form that is such an important part of our nation, area, and state's rich history and culture.

### **Illinois**

In a recent ruling that differs from Massachusetts and Rhode Island decisions, Illinois has passed a bill that will restrict the antique (and otherwise) ivory trade.

Specifically, the State of Illinois recently created and passed legislation to create the *Ivory Ban Act*. This new law will make it unlawful for any person to import, sell, offer for sale, purchase, barter, or possess with intent to sell, any ivory, ivory product, rhinoceros horn, or rhinoceros horn product. The act stipulates that these provisions do not apply to specified antique weapons or musical instruments. The new act also establishes penalties for violation. Additionally, the Illinois Department of Natural Resources may permit, under terms and conditions as the department may adopt by rule, the import, sale, offer for sale, purchase, barter, or possession with intent to sell, of any ivory, ivory product, rhinoceros horn, or rhinoceros horn product for bona fide educational or scientific purposes, unless this activity is prohibited by federal law. Lastly, the act provides that the department may adopt any rules necessary for the implementation of the act.

As such, Illinois now joins California, Hawaii, Nevada, New Jersey, New York, Oregon and Washington as states with highly restrictive ivory ban laws.

### **How to get updates on pending legislation**

1. Go to <https://legiscan.com>.
2. Click on "Search" near the top right corner of the page.
3. When the Search page opens, look at the search box at the left side of the page. Select your state, and enter a search term (e.g., "ivory") in the box entitled "Full Text Search."
4. Click on the Search button below that box.

A page will appear with search results. If your search yields bills that have been introduced, you'll see them listed. You can then click on any bill to get details, see who is sponsoring the bill, the bill's status, and other important information.



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