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Scrimshaw Observer

Winter 2019

A publication of the Antique Scrimshaw Collectors Association

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Nantucket Historical Association Scrimshaw Book to be Published in 2019

In summer 2019 the Nantucket Historical Association is scheduled to publish *Scrimshaw on Nantucket: The Collection of the Nantucket Historical Association*, a lavishly illustrated catalogue of its sumptuous scrimshaw collection, compiled with comprehensive historical, biographical, and contextual annotations by Stuart M. Frank, author of *Ingenious Contrivances*, *Curiously Carved*, and featuring more than 500 photographs by Jeffrey S. Allen.

One of the chief virtues of the collection is that some pieces are remarkably early, created before scrimshandering became commonplace, then nearly universal aboard Yankee whaleships, and long before New Bedford overtook Nantucket as the epicenter of sperm whaling. Highlights of course will include significant works by scrimshaw pioneers Edward Burdett and Frederick Myrick of Nantucket, the first known Americans to engrave pictures on sperm whale teeth, and by several earlier and lesser-known makers of



Polychrome panbone plaque panoramic sperm whaling scene. 6 x 12 in. (15.25 x 30.5 cm). Nantucket Historical Association Collection, bequest of Winthrop Williams. 1991.101.235. All photographs by Jeffrey S. Allen, Nantucket.

“built” scrimshaw. Another particularly endearing virtue is that, uniquely among scrimshaw collections in major

museums, the majority of NHA scrimshaw is local, firmly anchored to the home port.

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Robert Hellman: Voyage of a Life

Bob Hellman, an authority on the history of whaling and noted collector of whalecraft, died on October 23, 2018, in Nantucket, where he lived with Nina, his wife and partner in all things nautical and life. In their Nantucket home built in 1795, Bob displayed and curated a cache of harpoons, lances, spades, and other implements of the whale hunt. If you knew the collection but not the collector, you would be forgiven for misunderstanding the man. Although he collected these tools, he was an

ardent conservationist and lover of whales, indeed of all animal species.

Bob’s whalecraft collection is unique not only for the quantity and quality of artifacts, but also for his meticulously detailed research notes and the beautiful, hand-drafted illustrations he made of the tools. He was as much artist as scientist and historian, and his collection represents in important ways the craft of collecting itself. His scholarship and observation skills enabled him to decipher makers’ marks, ships’ marks, and other hand-wrought markings. By decoding and illuminating these marks, Bob shined a

light on otherwise anonymous authors of the story of whaling.

Robert Edward Hellman was born on June 4, 1930 and raised in Brooklyn, NY, the first-generation American son of Theodore Hellman of Russia and Gladys Rauch of Austria. It was in the libraries of Brooklyn where Bob’s love of animals and his collecting habit began. He learned how to catch and study snakes, frogs, salamanders, and turtles under the tutelage of a noted zoologist of the Staten Island Institute of Arts and Sciences on trips to the Pine Barrens of New Jersey.

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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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To learn more about the organization or to become a member, please visit www.antiquescrimshawcollectors.org or write to info@antiquescrimshawcollectors.org.

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.



31st Annual Scrimshaw Weekend and 10th Annual Nautical Antiques Show

The date has been set, and it's time to put it on your calendar. The 31st Annual Scrimshaw Weekend will be held May 10–12, 2019.

The Nautical Antiques Show will go as usual on Friday, and lectures will be held on Saturday followed by dinner in the evening. We are working on a Sunday field trip, so stay tuned.



Program Prospectus

Friday, May 10 – Noon to 5pm

- 10th Annual Nautical Antiques Show

Friday Evening, May 10 – 8pm

- Scrimshaw Collected "by the Fishermen Themselves"

Saturday Sessions, May 11 – 10am to 6pm

- Outstanding Scrimshaw Tools
- Important Fragments: Newly Discovered Features of Classic Masterworks
- Collector Focus: Inside a Private Collection (shown for the first time)
- Collectors' Choice: Favorite Pieces of Scrimshaw
- Collectors' Choice: Favorite Pieces of Scrimshaw in Museums
- Collectors' Spotlight: Highlights of a Private Collection
- Foster at Last!
- New Books and New Online Resources
- Annual Market Report
- Annual Report of the Antique Scrimshaw Collectors Association
- Buffet Luncheon

Saturday Evening, May 11 – 6pm to 10pm

- Cash bar
- Banquet
- Evening Keynote: What to See and Do on Nantucket

Sunday, May 12 – 8am to ±8pm

- Optional Field Trip (TBA)

NHA Scrimshaw Book, *continued from p. 1*

Nantucket was a company town where everyone's livelihood was somehow linked to whaling and thus to Nantucket vessels, thus to Nantucket mariners working and commanding vessels out of New Bedford and such American outposts as Hudson, NY, and even London and Dunkirk. NHA scrimshaw was not so much *purchased* at auction as *accumulated* by generous benefaction, a legacy of gifts received from the heritage holdings of local families, adoptive residents from the mainland and abroad, and heroic philanthropists; hence it is intimately connected to Nantucket itself, with an unusually large proportion having local origins and explicit local provenance.

Among the American scrimshaw artists of the Golden Age who are either known by their names and careers or are identified through renowned bodies of work, there are representative productions by the Banknote Engraver, the Ceres B Artisan, Manuel Enos, the *George Clinton* Artisan, William A. Gilpin (the "Ceres A Artisan"), the hitherto little-known *Oliver Crocker* Artisan and Joseph Palmer Sylvia, and the Eskimo masters Joe Kakajook and Billy "Billiken" Komonesek—in addition to more than 40 others who were hitherto unknown but whose names and careers came to light in the course of research for the book. British scrimshaw artists and the London South Sea whale fishery are handsomely represented by the Britannia Engraver, several "Wahinee" teeth by George O. Hiliott, the largest-ever panbone plaque by the Panbone Engraver, and a world-class tooth by the great William L. Roderick. Even so, some of the finest and most compelling objects are the anonymous works that grace the collection in almost every category: swifts, spool racks, boxes, canes, sailors' tools, carpentry tools, and implements for the kitchen and sewing room, as well as pictorial sperm whale teeth, walrus tusks, and panbone plaques. Additionally, each of the 18 chapter headings has a frontis illustration selected from the NHA's fine assortment of paintings and drawings, including works by John Singleton Copley, Eastman Johnson, and other artists who flourished contemporaneously on Nantucket. A veritable feast of whaling art.

The hardcover 11-by-9-inch, 350-page book will launch at the Summer Antiques Show on August 1, 2019. The deadline for inclusion on a recognition page is March 1, 2019. Contact James Russell at jrussell@nha.org or call 508-228-1894 X121 for more information.



Tooth depicting a woman in a reverie, by the Banknote Engraver, copied after "Night" in the souvenir book *Friendship's Offering*. 4¾ in. (12.1 cm). Nantucket Historical Association Collection, gift of Mildred V. Brainard and Mrs. Donald C. Webster. 1984.48.80.



Trifold watch stand. 11⅛ x 6½ in. (28.25 x 16.5 cm). Nantucket Historical Association Collection, gift of Frederick H. Gardner. 1985.135.1.



All photos on this page by Jeffrey S. Allen, Nantucket.

Tooth depicting a figure of Hope, by William A. Gilpin. 5 in. (12.7 cm). Nantucket Historical Association Collection, bequest of Everett U. Crosby. 1963.56.1.

Robert Hellman, *continued*



Bob earned a bachelor's in herpetology from the University of Florida under the mentorship of Archie Carr, the naturalist who started the movement to protect sea turtles. When Bob was on a field research trip to the West in 1953, an agitated rattlesnake sank one fang into his right forefinger, the other into his left, thus injecting the poison into his bloodstream, with two pathways to his heart. He survived the ordeal and documented it in writing at a level of detail characteristic of articles he published, even as an undergraduate, in science journals such as *Copeia*.

After brief employment as a fish and game warden, Bob was summoned by his father, back from the swamps of Florida to the cityscapes of New York, to enter the family electrical contracting business. Over forty years, he built a highly successful career lighting the parks, streets, and airports of New York City.

Bob married Nina in 1955. They made a home and raised a family in Westchester County, NY. While working in the contracting industry, Bob continued to collect his favorite species until Nina put her foot down and said no more snakes and frogs in the house. That's when he turned his focus to whales . . . not the living creatures, of course. He began by making whale carvings.

Soon afterwards, Bob spotted his first harpoon. No longer catching animals in the wild, Bob could nonetheless hunt for the tools employed in the historic whale hunt. He studied the history of whaling and learned to decipher the markings on whalecraft much as he had read the markings of reptiles and amphibians.

It was actually Bob who got Nina into marine antiques. Bob was known to say in jest that Nina was his biggest competitor. In fact, he was her greatest asset, and vice versa. Nina scouted for Bob. And if Bob spotted something that would have been redundant in the collection, he tipped her off. You can in fact find the occasional note in Bob's collection database that says, in reference to a particular harpoon or other implement, "trade to (or from) Nina."

After retiring in 1997, Bob moved full time to Nantucket, where Nina had opened her marine antiques shop in 1983. On the island, Bob devoted himself to the Nantucket Historical Association, where he gave lectures, researched and wrote articles for *Historic Nantucket*, and documented the museum's whalecraft, scrimshaw, and related objects. When the restored museum opened in 2005, Bob was instrumental in recognizing the significance of Edward Sanderson to the creation of the original collection. In addition, Bob advised and lectured at the New Bedford Whaling Museum, the Kendall Whaling Museum, and elsewhere. He contributed to the studies of English whaling by Arthur Credland of the Hull Museum. He published in antiques journals and inspired numerous collectors.

Bob was an avid world traveler. He and Nina sojourned the globe, learning about nature, culture, and history on seven continents. Closer to home, he faithfully took his dogs, Ishmael, Quince, and Barney, twice daily to the seaside Tupancy Links until he could no longer walk due to illness. At home, Quince was fond of sitting by his side and, unsolicited, holding Bob's paw.

Bob will be remembered as the lifelong partner and loving supporter of Nina; as hero to his children, Gary, David and Chip, and his granddaughters, Jordan, Devon, Lainey, and Casey; by his daughters-in-law, Bebe, Hiroko and Melissa; indeed by all who knew him, as the very definition of a gentle and good man.

Donations in Bob's memory may be made to the Nantucket Historical Association at nha.org/join-give/giving/ways-to-give/ or to the Gift Fund of the National Institute of Neurological Disorders in support of their research of neurological diseases at: NINDS; Financial Management Branch; NSC Building, Room 3280; 6001 Executive Boulevard, MSC 9531; North Bethesda, MD 20852-9531.

Rare Subject Matter for Scrimshaw: The California Gold Rush

Mike Gill, longtime scrimshaw collector living in East Hampton, NY, wanted to share a tooth in his collection that depicts a rare (unique?) subject matter: the California Gold Rush of 1849. Mike purchased this tooth from Nina Hellman c. 1995. Following is the description of the tooth from Nina:

The California Gold Rush Tooth

Scrimshaw tooth engraved on obverse with a man astride an elephant. He wears a conical hat and is smoking a pipe. A sack over his shoulder is marked "GOLD DUST." Above him are 4 running deer, one with antlers, with a flying fish behind them and one in the lead. Also a turtle and a flock of 5 birds (or flying fish) are ahead of the deer. Near the tip of the tooth on this side is a fanciful fish/sidewheeler with a smoke stack with trailing smoke. A man in a tall hat and long coat tails is astride this fish/vessel. Another man with long flowing hair is holding on to the coat tails and is flying behind. Above this scene is inscribed: "WHEW for the DIGGINS." The reverse of the tooth has a rider on what appears to be a camel, wearing a high-crowned peaked cap and with a rifle over his left shoulder. In his right hand there is a buggy whip. A stack of 3 boxes in graduated sizes is piled behind him, and the lowest one is faintly inscribed "California GOLD." A dog carrying a sack in its mouth is walking underneath the camel's body. Behind the legs of the elephant and camel is a saw-toothed mountain range which encircles the tooth. The elephant and camel are moving eastward, leaving with their gold, and the other creatures are heading west to the digging. Ca. 1849, California Gold Rush. 6 inches tall.

eight Gold Rush illustrations with an elephant in the center. According to an article in *Historic Nantucket* published in summer 1999, here is what was found:



J. S. Holiday, in his first book on the Gold Rush, *The World Rushed In: The California Gold Rush Experience*, explains the significance: "Life on the trail discouraged some goldseekers. If they gave up and headed home, they were said to have 'seen the elephant.' This special phrase, used by almost every Gold Rush diarist, had been a part of the American language before 1849; but it took on poignant meaning for the tens of thousands who experienced getting to California and then life in the mining camps. As the gold seekers' moods and expectations changed, so they used 'the elephant' in different ways, but the essential idea remained dominant as revealed in the story from which the expression is presumed to have originated. By 1837 circus parades commonly included one or two elephants. The story goes that a farmer who had heard of elephants, but had never seen one, longed to do so. When a circus complete with elephant came to a nearby town, he loaded his wagon with eggs and vegetables and started for the market there. En route he met the circus parade led by the elephant. The farmer was enchanted but his horses were terrified. They bucked, pitched, overturned the wagon, and ran away, scattering broken eggs and bruised vegetables over the countryside. 'I don't give a hang,' said the farmer. 'I have seen the elephant.'

"As a universal expression of the Gold Rush, 'seeing the elephant' symbolized the great adventure of going to California to dig a golden fortune. On the way 'the elephant' revealed itself in many unexpected difficulties and dangers that beset the goldseekers, and 'to see the elephant' became the expression for suffering a severe ordeal, facing one's worst expectations, overcoming the meanest realities; in a word, knowing the Truth."

If anyone knows of another California Gold Rush tooth, let us know and we'll share it with Mike.



So, the big question here is: "What is the meaning of the elephant?" As we know, there are no elephants native to California. Coincidentally, the NHA found a curious entry in its database, "Gold Rush Stationery." The artifact included

Baleen Hearth Broom and Walking Stick

by Donald C. & Mary W. Boger

While we were living in Southern California, we would come east to attend the Scrimshaw Weekend or the Whaling Symposium at the Kendall Whaling Museum in Sharon, Massachusetts. These trips were always an opportunity to search for maritime antiques, primarily scrimshaw, in New England. In 1990 we stopped to visit John Newton Marine Antiques in Wiscasset, Maine. One item immediately caught our attention: an unusual and truly beautifully made hearth broom.

The broom was 48 inches tall, topped by a whale ivory disc-shaped knob, with a wooden shaft covered by a continuous $\frac{1}{4}$ inch-wide baleen ribbon, or band, wound round the shaft. This ribbon of baleen was then decorated with three equally spaced macramé rings composed of very thinly split and braided baleen. The all-baleen brush that completed the broom was shaped and topped by a tightly applied macramé cap and two braided rings. The broom promptly became a part of our collection.



1a. Entire broom.



1b. Top knob with macramé ring, baleen ribbon with space showing internal wooden shaft.



1c. Baleen brush with macramé cap and rings.

Upon returning home and doing some research we were delighted to find the broom in Everett Crosby's book, *Susan's Teeth and Much About Scrimshaw*. Currently there are three macramé rings encircling the shaft, but there were four rings around the shaft when the broom was photographed for the book, which was published in 1955. The site where the missing macramé ring was originally located can be identified visually. The internal wooden shaft can be identified at the site where the long baleen ribbon is loosening near the whale ivory knob (Figure 1b), as well as the site of the missing macramé ring where there is a break in the baleen ribbon. We proudly hung the hearth broom hung alongside the fireplace in our California home.

Years later, retirement brought us to Massachusetts and allowed us close proximity (20 minutes) to the New Bedford Whaling Museum and to be more active participants in the study of scrimshaw and related maritime art. It also brought us proximity to the excellent auctions that take place here. In August of 2018 we attended the Osona Auction on Nantucket. (We highly value this event because a gracious host invites us to gather with other scrimshaw collectors for conversation the night before the auction.) We had a special interest in the auction this year: a walking stick that demonstrated remarkably similar construction to our hearth broom. This walking stick was 37 inches long and was described in the catalogue as "circa 1840, polished ivory ball and collar grip, with $\frac{1}{4}$ inch baleen wrapped tapering shaft having 5 thin macramé rings evenly spaced along the shaft, ending with a whalebone ferrule."



2a. Entire walking stick.



2b. Bone ferrule on walking stick.

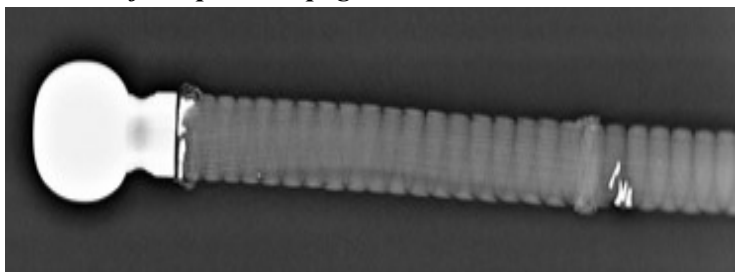
The macramé rings are identical in appearance to those on the hearth broom, again composed of thinly stripped braided baleen, which creates $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch wide rings. Spacing of the rings on this shorter shaft is different from the spacing on the longer broom. The core of the walking stick is wood, and the ball and collar grip is attached in the same manner utilized for the attachment of the disc-shaped knob of the hearth broom (post and cup technique). Figures 3b, 3c, and 3d are X-ray images that show the small wooden posts (these are the darker or gray areas within the ivory or bone, which is white in the X-ray image) that extend from the wooden shaft into the cuplike cavity cut into the ivory or bone end pieces (see Figures 3b, 3c, and 3d below). The internal wooden shaft is visible through a small break in the baleen ribbon just distal to the second macramé ring (Figure 3a). Tiny nails or brads were also used to stabilize macramé rings or the baleen ribbon in both items, which are displayed on the X-ray images.



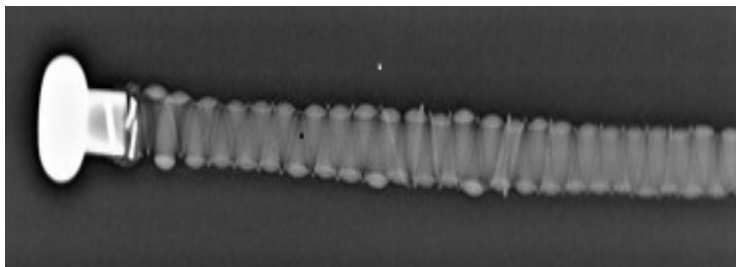
3a. Small break in baleen ribbon just to the right of the second ring of the walking stick.

Neither a search of our scrimshaw-related library and multiple years of maritime art catalogues nor consultation with experts and knowledgeable collectors has lead us to any other baleen-wrapped scrimshaw pieces. We believe the broom and the walking stick were made by the same unknown scrimshander.

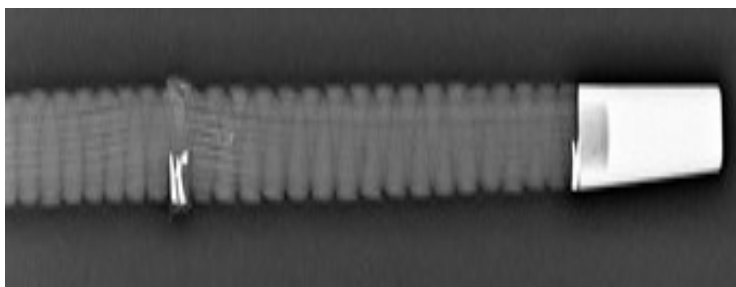
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3b. X-ray of the knob of the walking stick.



3c. X-ray of the knob of the hearth broom.



3d. X-ray of the ferrule of the walking stick.

We hope that the unknown scrimshander, wherever he might be, is happy to know that his broom and walking stick have been reunited and are being admired and appreciated.

Donald C. Boger, M.D. is a semi-retired radiologist and 50-year scrimshaw collector. He is a volunteer at the New Bedford Whaling Museum and a member of the Scrimshaw Forensics® Laboratory group. The Hon. Mary Boger is a retired California public school trustee who has joined with Don in collecting scrimshaw for the past 40 years.

NOTICE: We are now accepting advertising in order to defray costs and to continue to produce and mail printed issues of the *Scrimshaw Observer*.

Advertising Rates

Full page	\$400	Half page	\$225
Quarter page	\$120	Eighth page	\$ 70

ASCA members receive a 25% discount.

Content: Ads can be for auctions, antique dealers, and collectors buying or selling antique scrimshaw, appraisal services, repair services, auctions, shows, or seminars.

Advertising dimensions and specification are available on request. Ad deadlines will be 30 days prior to publication date. Payment by check is due with ad submission.



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Scrimshaw Market Report

Back to the Future: Eldred's Marine Sale

November 15, 2018

by Andy Jacobson

Eldred's November 2018 marine sale featured the Phoenix-like resurrection of the market for Frederick Myrick's iconic "Susan's" teeth. The "Susan" market has been somewhere between a wobbly decline and a free fall for years. Prime and other examples were found in pretty much all collections of note. As those collections ripened and came to market, there seemed a more than abundant supply.

The room was stunned when telephone bidders pushed the 7" Lot 92 to a mind-boggling \$192,000 (\$160K hammer). The last "Susan" to hover in the \$200,000 range was at Northeast Auction's August 2010 Gosnell Collection sale where Lot 662, a Sept. 1, 1829 example, sold for \$200,600.

"The Susan on the coast of Japan," signed by Myrick and dated Sept. 2, 1829, featured the usual array of standard Myrick characteristics: a ship portrait cutting-in scene, a homeward-bound portrait, the E-Pluribus Unum eagle, signature and date at the tip, and the "Greasy luck" legend. The tooth had been authenticated in 2002, but it was too late to have been included in the Frank-Ridley Myrick catalogue raisonné. In addition to being market fresh in this century, it had a strong provenance dating from the 1960s. It also featured an extremely mottled surface that encompassed the entire piece. An anonymous phone bidder is the new owner.



Lot 92. "Susan's Tooth" scrimshaw whale's tooth by Frederick Myrick, dated 1829. \$192,000.

A crowd favorite was Lot 169, two monumental whalebone blocks that had intact rope work. These had to be seen to be fully appreciated. They first emerged in 1983 as Lot 415 in Part IV of the Barbara Johnson Sale where they realized a then-remarkable \$16,500. That's the equivalent of \$41,675 in today's dollars. These powerful objects sold for \$21,600 to a bidder in the room.



Lot 169. Pair of exceptionally large whalebone double blocks, 19th century. \$21,600.

Tousey two . . . well, it's actually three. Lot 137, a 6.25" view of "River Silwund in Persia" backed by the Chinese temple at "Virginia Waters" signed "C. E. Tousey" brought \$24,000. New research by Dr. Stuart Frank revealed that Charles G. Tousey was an American seaman. By his repeated Asian and British colonial subject matter, Mr. Tousey was assumed to be English. This new biographical information, along with the quality of the market-fresh work, was reflected in the price. Tousey's scrimshaw seldom comes to market. However, as often seems the case, this was the third to appear in the last two years. The first appeared on Nov. 16, 2017 as Lot 47 in Eldred's Kobacker sale. It was a 7" example with the more typical "Hyndoostan" subject matter. It sold for \$26,400. Next was Lot 148 in Eldred's July 2018 marine sale. This 7.25" example had another version of the "Virginia Waters," and \$18,000 took it home.



Lot 137. Scrimshaw whale's tooth by C. G. Tousey, mid-19th century \$24,000.

Crimpers that have folding testing forks are few and far between. Once again we've been treated to two examples in a short time. Lot 103, a 7.25" architectural example from the MacCormack Collection had open columns and a stepped top surmounted by the distinctive folded fork. The mildly fluted wheel had open-heart sections. It sold for \$9,000. In all probability this piece was made by the same hand as Lot 18 from Eldred's November 2017 sale of the Kobacker Collection. That crimper was the first appearance in memory of the folded-fork device. It was mounted atop a superbly designed geometric, open-work shaft with an extremely delicate wheel. It sold for \$39,000.

continued from previous page



Lot 103 Nov. 2018
\$9,000



Lot 18 Nov. 2017
\$39,000

The day of the true utilitarian turned crimper with a fluted wheel often called the “Nantucket” style has clearly passed. This form was made for Mom’s apple pie. These traded for \$350- \$500 for decades.

Lot 33, a 7” turned and fluted example sold for \$192.



Canes

Lot 63, a 34.5” octagonal stepped-top whale ivory and baleen-banded cane with an oak shaft sold for \$330.



Lot 65, a 34.5” “C” form whale ivory cane with baleen bands and a wooden shaft sold for \$300. This traditional form is usually a reasonable trade.



Lot 68, a lot of three canes with whale ivory tops and hardwood shafts sold for \$420.



Bargains galore

Lot 49, a pickwick, eggcup, and a covered bowl, sold for \$540. It wasn’t that long ago that pickwicks sold for between \$1K and \$2K.



Durable, geometrically interesting, and as utilitarian-as-laundry-day clothes pins sold for \$125 apiece for decades. They are at least as interesting as simple bodkins and a great entry-level object.

Lot 52, a variety of 5 clothes pins \$300. \$60 each.

Lot 53, a variety of 12 clothes pins \$330. \$27.50 each.

Lot 79, a variety of 14 clothes pins \$390. \$27.85 each.



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

“Foster” At Last!

by Stuart M. Frank

At the very first Scrimshaw Weekend, at the Kendall Whaling Museum in 1989, a distinguished British gentleman then living in Quebec Province identified a tooth in the museum collection that has a sperm whaling scene as virtually identical in every respect with one that descended in his wife’s family—including not only the scene itself but the manner of draftsmanship and the very white color and high polish of the ivory. He explained that around 1900 the tooth had been presented as a gesture of gratitude to the wife’s grandfather, a chaplain to fisherman in the herring fishery of Grimsby, Lincolnshire, by a fisherman named Foster, who was forty or fifty years old at the time and had inherited that tooth and several others from his father, a fisherman and former whaler in the South Sea sperm whale fishery who had done scrimshaw in his youth. Nothing further was known about Foster the whaler or Foster the son; and ever since, a dozen or more teeth have been rightly and wrongly attributed to that same hand. And, of course, over the years a few self-appointed experts have expressed doubts about the truth of the yarn, or that such a fellow named Foster ever existed at all.

Comparisons conducted in consultation with Janet West and the late Donald E. Ridley at the Kendall in 1990 resulted in the attribution of several other teeth (in the Hull Maritime Museum and Scott Polar Research Institute in England; and in the USA at Mystic Seaport, Nantucket, the Kendall, and elsewhere, including Flayderman, p. 71, top right) and possibly also a busk (Lady Lever Art Gallery, Merseyside, England). Some are monochrome; others have subtly applied color. This quest led to the provisional identification of similar work by a different hand, whose monogram signature on a specimen in the Penobscot Marine Museum identifies the artist only as “IWY.” In fact, although the workmanship on the type-specimen Foster teeth is of very good quality, the images are so generic, simple, and straightforward that any further attributions have been tenuous at best. For example, an anonymous artist whose scrimshaw is stylistically and conceptually similar to Foster’s is the so-called Naval Engagement Engraver, with whose work the resemblance includes the overall layout and design of nautical scenes, the simplicity of draftsmanship, with uncrowded deployment of the ships and other images on the teeth, and the techniques employed in shading the sails and the sea.

After years of searching, it turns out that the sometime whaler who produced the Grimsby Tooth (and at least some of the others) was almost certainly Charles Foster (1829-1865), born in Margate, Kent, England, the son of William and Sarah Foster. He was whaling out of Hull and probably London in the 1840s and ’50s. At Hull in 1854 he married Margaret Dewick, who bore him a daughter and three sons before her death in 1859. By the time of the 1861 UK Census (and perhaps earlier) Foster was a fisherman living in Great Grimsby and had already married for the second time, to a widow with the improbable name Kezia Slater Kate Patey Wakeham (1835-1885), a native of Brixham, Devonshire. She bore Charles a son and three daughters before he died at Caistor, Lincolnshire, in 1865. Kezia soon married, for her third time, to a younger man, Edward Horton (1843-1876), a fisherman who

presumably helped to raise Charles and Kezia’s children for the few years he had remaining. There is little doubt that Charles was the Foster mentioned in the Grimsby Tooth provenance. What is in doubt is whether he engraved all of the teeth that have been attributed to him.



The tooth by Foster of Grimsby in the Kendall Collection (NBWM # 2001.100.1086), identified as such in 1989. Lightly monochrome engraved on one side only: a sperm whaling scene with a larboard broadside view of a full-rigged ship underway and three whaleboats in pursuit of two sperm whales. The back is polished and undecorated. Length 7¹/₈ inches (18.1 cm). See also Flayderman, p. 71.

Stuart M. Frank is the author of Ingenious Contrivances: Scrimshaw in the New Bedford Whaling Museum and is currently preparing an illustrated catalogue of the scrimshaw in the Nantucket Historical Association as well as a comprehensive Biographical Dictionary of Scrimshaw Artists to include more than 1,250 biographical sketches and notices.

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.

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Scrimshaw attributed to the
Naval Monument Engraver
Sold for \$396,000 July 2018



Bone Ship Model
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Ralph E. Cahoon, Jr.
Sold for \$156,000 August 2018



"Ships That Pass" by Montague Dawson
Sold for \$84,000 July 2017



Scrimshaw by Edward Burdett
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