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Scrimshaw Observer

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Dossier on Captain Crary B. Waite

by Stuart M. Frank

As a curator and sometime collections manager, I have found that compiling dossiers on an individual artist or object is often an effective means to analyze the provenance and historical context and to provide clarity when assessing their significance and worth. In the hope that a sample of the results might not only be interesting but also helpful and perhaps instructive for our constituents, we present this dossier on a comparatively minor but mainstream scrimshaw maker whose example should resonate with the objectives of any collector who seeks to reveal the backstory behind the scrimshaw.

Crary B. Waite (1818-1892) was a midcentury New Bedford whaling master who made a rather conventional cane. Though he may have done other scrimshaw, no other piece by his hand is known. The cane has a panbone shaft with a whale ivory handle carved in full round in the traditional shape of a clenched right fist holding a bolt or wand. The ivory cuff is inlaid with baleen dots to represent buttons; the other side has the same kinds of dots arranged to form the maker's initials, "C.B.W.," and a very nautical circumferential band of baleen strands resembling a *monkey's fist* or *Turk's-head knot* is tied around the lower portion. The initials notwithstanding, Captain Waite reportedly gave the cane to a friend of about the same age, one Neverson Newton (1818-1890), a native of Broome County, N.Y., who in childhood moved with his parents to a Midwestern farm and became a farmer

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Cased daguerreotype photograph of Captain Crary B. Waite (1818-1892) of New Bedford, holding a daguerreotype portrait of his wife, Emily née Hill. *Skinner, Nov. 5, 2011.*

Collection of Scrimshaw and Canes Sells Strong at Sworders Auction

Stansted Mountfitchet, UK—A collection of scrimshaw walking canes assembled by a local gentleman sold for a total of \$55,485 at Sworders on March 12, 2019. Marine ivory and baleen canes such as these, typically worked by American and European sailors for personal use or as gifts for loved ones at home, have long been popular, particularly in the UK and in North America. Many now appeal beyond the cane collecting community and into the folk art world.

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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.

Ivory Restriction State Legislation Update

by Mark Jacobson

The Antique Scrimshaw Collectors Association continues to monitor pending federal and state legislation nationwide to alert members of possible threats to private and public antiques collections containing all or a portion of ivory. California, Hawaii, New Jersey, and New York have all previously passed restrictive ivory laws that provide little or no exemption for legitimate antiques, including scrimshaw and other antiques that contain all or part marine mammal products. Today, in these states, it is essentially illegal to trade in any forms of ivory—new or antique. In recent months, other states, including Illinois and New Hampshire, have passed restrictive laws that include narrowly defined exemptions for some types of antiques. Other bills, in Florida and Arkansas, were defeated or died in committee.

ASCA continues to stand with all communities and states in promoting strict enforcement of existing laws that have been enacted to address poaching and any other form of illegal trade, which have been enacted in an attempt to protect elephants and rhinoceros. And we stand firmly in our support of actions being taken by state and federal authorities against those that have violated the Endangered Species Act of 1973. Recent news of narwhal tusk poaching was met with horror. These types of abhorrent activities make it more difficult for all of us who share the passion for legitimate protection of any endangered species while also seeking ongoing exemptions from ivory restriction bills that impact legitimate antiques containing ivory from marine mammal and/or extinct species.

Many state legislative committees, including Massachusetts, continue to defer to the protective measures already in place via the 1973 Endangered Species Act to help inform state policy. Defeats in states like Massachusetts for bills providing little or no protection for museum and private collections containing legitimate antiques have driven sponsors of anti-ivory bills in several pending state bills to provide specific restrictions on elephant and rhinoceros ivory.

Currently, nine states and the District of Columbia have pending bills before committees and legislatures: Delaware, Iowa, Maryland, Michigan, Montana, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, and Washington, DC. Some of these state bills have been defeated in committee, but there is high likelihood that subsequent, redefined bills may soon be re-introduced.

ASCA recommends members individually monitor the status of bills in their own states and encourages all to continue to promote the legitimate antiques trade and protect private and public collections that are important parts of preserving our regional and national history.

CONNECTICUT

HB 5398, a bill to restrict trade in elephant and rhinoceros ivory, remains pending in the Connecticut legislature. The bill, which as written has the endorsement of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, provides for exemptions for legitimate antiques and musical instruments. It passed by committee in January 2019 and went to public hearing on February 15.

Many of those in the antiques and arts trade, as well as public institutions with invaluable collections, intensely lobbied for the passage of the bill in its current form. Rep. Mitch Bolinsky, co-sponsor of the bill, reported that at the close of the session, both the proponents of HB-5394 as written and animal rights activists who had previously lobbied for the removal of any/all exemptions agreed on pursuing a bill that protects both endangered species and the antiques trade. A follow-on meeting is to be scheduled again on an unspecified date.

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Captain Crary B. Waite, *continued from p. 1*

himself in Somonauk, Illinois. The circumstances of their acquaintance are not known. Crary was from New England and never lived in New York or Illinois. Perhaps they had been shipmates, but no record has been discovered of any Neverson Newton going to sea, with or without Crary Waite.



Cane attributed to Captain Crary B. Waite (1818-1892). It has a plain panbone shaft and a whale ivory grip in the form of a fist holding a bolt or rod, and the shirt cuff inlaid with dots representing buttons and on the other side forming the initials "C.B.W." Waite reportedly gave the cane to his friend, Neverson Newton (1818-1890), a native of New York State who was a farmer in Illinois. It was recently found in storage at the Marie Louise Olmstead Museum in Somonauk, IL.

The cane was discovered a few years ago in storage at the Marie Louise Olmstead Museum in Somonauk, accompanied by a photographic portrait of the maker (which unequivocally matches up with photographs of Crary B. Waite in NBWM) and an obituary clipped from an unidentified newspaper dated 1892 (reported by museum trustee Bevin R. Wold). The clipping erroneously identifies the man as *Clary* rather than *Crary* Waite, born in Tiverton, R.I., in 1818—which may be accurate, as both of his parents were born in Tiverton; but the Vital Records of New Bedford list his birth in New Bedford on July 24, 1818, and those of Westport, Mass., adjacent to Tiverton, record him born in Westport in April 1819. In any case, he was the son of Peleg Waite and Ruby Howard of Tiverton, and a few years later the family moved to New Bedford, where Crary's younger brother Benjamin eventually became a dry goods merchant and invested in ownership shares in whaleships and other vessels.

Falkland Islands, but Starbuck and Lund report her safely returned to New Bedford in June 1836 with a hefty cargo of oil. On his next outing, Waite *was* shipwrecked, in the New Bedford bark *Elizabeth* at Pico, in the Azores, in September 1836 (Lund I:182 lists the voyage with no catch but does not mention the shipwreck). He was afterwards a boatsteerer in the ship *Virginia* of New Bedford (1838-40) and then served in the German ship *Augusta*, sailing out of Bremen on a whaling voyage or possibly even two (circa 1840-43). In fact, New Bedford merchant John Avery Parker, whose son-in-law Christian A. Heineken was a whaling merchant and sometime producer of innovative harpoons in Bremen, was the managing agent for Waite's next voyage, in the New Bedford ship *Trident*, in which Waite was probably third mate (1843-46). After that, he was three voyages in the bark *Hope*, as second mate (1847-50), first mate (1850-53), and captain (1853-54). Between voyages in 1853, on the eve of his first command, he married Emily Hill (1820-1877), after which he was ashore and away from whaling for a couple of years, then accepted command of the Mattapoisett whaleship *Brewster* (1857-60). Part of his compensation was a 4/32nds ownership share in the *Brewster* both on his own voyage and the subsequent one—a measure of the owners' recognition of his past triumphs and favorable expectations for his future success. On his next outing, as captain of the New Bedford bark *Robert Morrison* (1861-64), he brought his family along and they narrowly escaped being captured by the Confederate commerce raider *Alabama*. That voyage was his last.

In 1864, he purchased a grocery business in New Bedford from which he was retired by 1870. Photographic evidence suggests that in the 1870s he may also have had an interest in his brother Benjamin's retail dry goods and carpeting store in New Bedford, in which their brother Stephen and Stephen's namesake son were also associated. Crary's son Charles became manager of the Norfolk [Virginia] National Bank.

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Bark *Elizabeth* sperm whaling: three whaleboats are in pursuit, one under a gaff-rigged sail, two being rowed, with one of the latter fast to a spouting sperm whale and laying on with a lance and the bark under sail in background; inscribed below in fancy scrollwork "Elizabeth." On the other side is a portrait of the whaleship *Sarah* of London, which made a whaling voyage to the Indian and Pacific Oceans during 1832-35, coinciding almost exactly with the Pacific Ocean voyage of the bark *Elizabeth* of Westport (actually sailed from New Bedford) under the scrimshaw-making Captain Ray Green Sanford. Crary Waite was in the *Elizabeth* crew on the next voyage, which ended in shipwreck. 5 1/4 inches (13.3 cm). NBWM 1973.35.46.

Crary himself made his career at sea. He sailed on his maiden voyage in April 1835 as a green hand in the whaleship *Frances Henrietta*. His obituary claims that the vessel was wrecked in the



Waite Family Portrait: "Dry Goods and Carpeting Store of Benj. H. Waite - 38 Purchase St., New Bedford in 1870-1877." The three Waite brothers stand at center right: Benjamin (proprietor), Crary, and Stephen, flanked by their wives and families. NBWM 2000.100.89.1.2.41.

Captain Crary B Waite, *continued from previous page*

One mystery that cannot be resolved here concerns the clenched fist grasping or clutching a stick or rod: it is a common motif, appearing on scrimshaw canes, crimpers, bodkins, pointers, backscratchers, jewelry, and in folk art of many types, but in this instance, as elsewhere, its symbolic significance is unspecified; so too the significance of whether such a device be a left or right hand. One can only wish that the whalers had written down some of their motives and intentions about their scrimshaw.

Panbone busk by Cyrus E. Clark, Jr. (1826-1858), bearing the initials “C C” deployed vertically, accompanied by a handwritten paper label, “Corset bone, Mrs. B.P. Clark.” Cyrus was the namesake son of a surveyor, justice of the peace, state legislator, and postmaster in North Fairhaven; his mother was Sophronia Wood, the daughter of whaling captain Zenas Wood. He had previously been captain of the New Bedford bark *Tropic Bird* (1855-56) but may already have been ailing when he signed articles in May 1857 to go as first mate under Captain Crary B. Waite in the Mattapoisett ship *Brewster*. He may never have gone aboard, and he died of consumption in June 1858. Length 14 ¼ inches (36.2 cm). NHA 1985.0135.020.



Inlaid wooden workbox made by Warren Akin (1804-1886) whose son, Warren Junior (1835-1907), served as second mate in the Mattapoisett ship *Brewster*, commanded by Captain Crary Waite, 1857-60. 5 ¼ x 12 x 9 inches (49.5 x 30.5 x 22.9 cm). NBWM 1958.6.

Legislation Update, *continued from page 2*

UNITED KINGDOM

Although UK legislation has no direct impact on U.S. museums and private collections, Parliament has enacted legislation to be implemented before the end of 2019 that will place heavy restrictions on the ivory trade in the United Kingdom. The new law provides narrow and carefully defined exemptions to the ban for:

- Items with only a small amount of ivory. Such items must be comprised of less than 10% ivory by volume and must have been made prior to 1947.
- Musical instruments. These must have an ivory content of less than 20% and have been made prior to 1975.
- Portrait miniatures. A specific exemption for portrait miniatures, which were often painted on thin slivers of ivory, made before 1918.
- Sales to and between accredited museums.
- The rarest and most important items of their type. Items of outstanding artistic, cultural, or historic significance and made prior to 1918. Such items will be subject to the advice of specialists at the UK's most prestigious museums.

Scrimshaw Weekend May 10-12, 2019

NEW BEDFORD, MA—Scholars, artists, historians, and scrimshaw collectors will converge on the New Bedford Whaling Museum May 10 through May 12, 2019 for the 31st annual Scrimshaw Weekend. The weekend begins with the 10th Annual Nautical Antiques Show on Friday, May 10, and continues on Saturday and Sunday with presentations and an optional field trip to Nantucket. The Whaling Museum is located at 18 Johnny Cake Hill, New Bedford, Mass. For more information visit whalingmuseum.org or call 508-997-0046.



Pagoda Artisan sperm whale tooth showing New York Harbor. George Hail Free Library Collection, Warren, RI.

The Nautical Antiques Show features high-quality antiques from some of New England's most respected dealers. The Nautical Antiques Show runs from noon to 5 p.m. on Friday, May 10, with an early-bird bonus hour beginning at 11 a.m. The show and its early-bird session are free for Scrimshaw Weekend attendees. Admission to the show is free for museum members and with regular admission to the museum for non-members. Early-bird admission is available to museum members and non-members for an additional \$5.

Scrimshaw Weekend officially begins Friday, May 10, with an evening presentation entitled “Scrimshaw Collected by the Fishermen Themselves,” by Stuart M. Frank, Senior Curator Emeritus for the New Bedford Whaling Museum. Two full days of discovery, learning, and stimulating talks follow. Weekend highlights include presentations on the resolution of a 30-year old scrimshaw mystery, scrimshaw tools, newly discovered features of masterworks, highlights of a private collection and from a number of museum collections, and new books and online resources. The weekend also features a report on the scrimshaw market, the Antique Scrimshaw Collectors Association (ASCA) report, and a cocktail reception, banquet, and keynote address on Saturday evening entitled “What to Do and See on Nantucket.”

Registration for Scrimshaw Weekend is \$340 for Whaling Museum members, \$395 for non-members, and \$85 for students. Registration includes regular admission to the Nautical Antiques Show, all sessions Friday through Saturday, and dinner on Saturday evening. Tickets for the Saturday dinner and evening program can be purchased separately for accompanying guests at \$85 per person. Tickets to the optional Sunday field trip are separate and in addition to the fee for the weekend.

Sworders Auction

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Although some scrimshaw canes are relatively simple, the best examples reflected many hours of work: carving to the shaft with spiraling and crosshatching, tortoiseshell inlay, and careful carving of a marine ivory pommel or handle. The most sophisticated example in this collection, sold in nineteen lots, had a Turk's-head knot pommel and a shaft with a series of carved octagonal and square sections, some inlaid with both tortoiseshell and white metal pieces. The hammer price was \$11,426.

A similar cane with a Turk's-head knot over a baleen disc above fluted, cross-hatched and spiral-turned sections sold for \$1,795, and another with colored line inlay, a spiral-turned shaft with baleen stringing, and a silver plaque engraved with crowned H took \$3,259. The canes formed part of Day One of Sworders' two-day sale of Fine Interiors on March 12-13, 2019. Prices with buyers' premiums were converted from British pounds to U.S. dollars at the time of editing. For additional information, visit www.sworder.co.uk.

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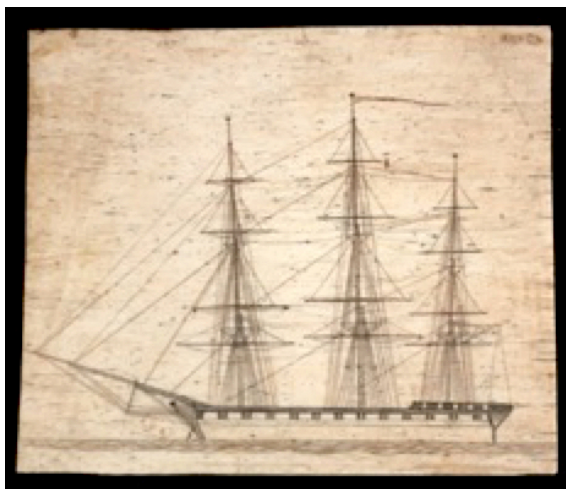
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Scrimshaw Market Report

Quiet Winter, Strong Summer Coming

by Andy Jacobson

This was the winter of our scrimshaw discontent. Here in the Northeast, the frozen ground was bare in January and most of February with alternating light snow washed away by heavy wind-blown rain. It wasn't till the bitter end of February and the lion-like start of March that we had any true New England-style snowfall. Dearth of snow, dearth of scrimshaw.



The winter offerings were paltry at best. The highlight of Skinner's March 2, 2019 Americana Sale was Lot 184, a 4" x 4.5" almost-square remainder from a larger piece. It was a finely rendered, nothing-special, port view of an anchored ship. However, Skinner has conjured an almost mystical pull on panbone bidders. The small plaque realized an inexplicably strong \$2,583. Unless I was hibernating, that was this winter's scrimshaw highpoint in these parts.

Freeman's April 30, 2019 Americana Sale's Lot 98 is a 7" U.S.S. *Constitution* signed on the reverse "J.H.B. 1887." The tooth is cataloged with an erroneous Barbara Johnson Whaling Collection, Part 1, Jan. 28-31, 1981 Lot 971 provenance. The first Barbara Johnson session was Dec. 11-12, 1981, and there was no Lot 971. Perhaps it was sold in the Jan. 28-31, 1981 Americana Sale.



For longer than I've been around, there has been an ongoing discussion about size and condition. Collectors reach far for the big and perfect. Reality often forces difficult choices. Every once in a while an item pops up that tests that theory. Can a deeply flawed but once-magnificent object rise above its defects or does it sink under the weight of its current condition? Buried in Eldred's Nov. 18, 2017 Americana sale was Lot 65, a 3.75" damaged patriotic tooth. It was no sleeper. It had a strong \$2,000- \$3,000 estimate based on its bold color and primitive charm.

The damage was substantial. There was a significant chip to the left side that ate right through the saw-tooth border and chewed into the hex sign on the side. A lengthy age crack extended upward from the base to the top of the back eagle's wing.

However, the beautifully formed mini-tooth was decorated with a variant of the Great Seal of the U.S.—an eagle with an upright American flag in its beak perched atop a Union shield. The back and sides had floating five-point stars, vines, the hex sign, and a downward-soaring eagle. The polychrome color was bold and the patina exquisite. It was the most admired non-five or six figure scrimshaw object. It took up almost no shelf space and it nearly vibrated with color. After frenzied bidding, the flawed beauty sold for \$5,100.



There's plenty to look forward to this summer. Eldred's July Marine sale will feature the collections of the late, lamented Sam McDowell and the presently celebrated Paul Vardeman.



McDowell Collection 6.5" Fid and Sailor's Farewell

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These collections are notable for their owners' well-developed sense of beauty, deep study of the material, and long, patient collecting skills. Interestingly enough, the collections complement rather than compete.

There are obvious “trophy” examples by Roderick, Albro, and Phinney. Perhaps the most intriguing aspects are the copious number of outstanding midrange objects in almost every category, including a high number of patriotic teeth and some fascinating crimpers, bodkins, seam rubbers, and other slightly offbeat items. These holdings reflect good taste and a wide range of individual interests. They have a very different feel than either the superb Mittler or Kobacker collections, which were heavily influenced by the skilled, refined eyes of their advisors along with the collectors’ deep pockets.



Osona Whalebone Puzzle Box with Inlaid Tortoiseshell Heart.



Vardeman Collection Patriotic Tooth and Naughty Knee Crimper.

The inscrutable Mr. Osona has some interesting reticulated baskets and an array of other material on his website touting his annual August Marine sale.



Osona Reticulated Whalebone Swing-Handle Basket.



Osona Scrimshawed Baleen, Wood, Whalebone, and Whale Ivory Sewing Box. Body and lid of the box are veneered with very fine visible scrimshaw depicting St. Peter's Church, St. Paul's Church, a lighthouse, a federal building, a steam sidewheeler, a frigate with American flag, and more.

Once again, after a quiet “off season,” summer will bring a trove of fine fresh scrimshaw that will tempt all levels of collectors.

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.

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

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Scrimshaw snuff boxes

Whale teeth mounted in silver and pewter for presentation

by Stuart M. Frank

One frequently encounters scrimshawed sperm whale teeth in metal mounts (usually silver) with hinged lids, and thus made into snuff boxes. Most exploit the natural hollow of the tooth to hold the snuff; on these, the mounts can be merely a rim and cap to hold in the snuff. On others, the mounts are more elaborate and can actually increase the volume of storage. We hope that the following taxonomy will be useful in distinguishing among the various different manifestations of whale-tooth snuff boxes.

Some are excellent scrimshaw, but they were not originally *intended* as snuff boxes and were mounted in silver ashore as a kind of celebratory afterthought. Two of these are counted among the most historically significant teeth, which is probably why latter-day hands decided to crown them in precious metal. The most familiar is one of the three-dozen Susan's Teeth by Frederick Myrick of Nantucket [Fig. 1]; another is one of several teeth engraved aboard HMS *Beagle* by J. A. Bute of the Royal Marines on the famous Darwin voyage 1831-36 [Fig. 2].

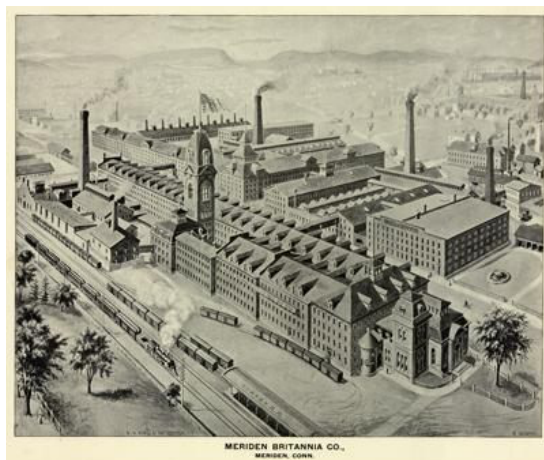


[1] Susan's Tooth by Frederick Myrick (1808-1862) of Nantucket, dated Feb. 23, 1829, inscribed "The Susan boiling and killing sperm whales" and "The Susan on the Coast of Japan" (Ridley & Frank, 29-02-23, p. 20). *Dietrich American Foundation; exhibited at Mystic Seaport.*



[2] *Beagle* Tooth: One of several teeth engraved aboard HMS *Beagle*, circa 1831-36, by James Adolphus Bute (1800-1877), a private in the Royal Marines. This was the momentous voyage commanded by celebrated Royal Navy lieutenant Robert Fitzroy, on which passenger Charles Darwin assembled the materials that formed the basis for his *Origin of Species* (1859). The scrimshaw has two vignettes, one on each side, respectively inscribed "Canoe Indians Beagle Channel Tierra del Fuego" (shown here) and "Queen's Island Tahiti." *Bonham's Knightsbridge, London, August 2010.*

By contrast, some worthy antique snuff boxes are made out of whale ivory but are not really scrimshaw because they were produced by commercial artisans ashore, whether in some cottage-industry workshop or in an actual factory [see Fig. 3]: JFK Museum, Boston;ⁱ Barnes 1964, p. 118; Tennants;ⁱⁱ Skinner, Mar. 4, 2017, #112;ⁱⁱⁱ and (as of early 2019) one in the Vallejo Gallery, on which the silver mount is inscribed, "E.W. MILLS / P.N.Y.C." (Royal Port Nicholson Yacht Club on Clyde Quay in Wellington, New Zealand).^{iv} Close analogues are the myriad snuff boxes made in England out of horse's hoofs with hinged silver mounts.^v



[3] Meriden Britannia Factory, circa 1879. Meriden Britannia were successors to the Rogers Bros. Manufacturing Co. and Rogers, Smith & Co. of Meriden, Connecticut, whom they bought out piecemeal during 1862-69. From that time to the end of the century their large inventory of products included snuff boxes and other smallish items made out of polished but undecorated sperm whale teeth and a variety of metal components, often bearing the hallmark " (e.g., Burley Auction Group, Jan. 21, 2012, #37). Their source for whale teeth has not been ascertained.

Another kind of antique, artisan-made snuff box is carved out of a whale tooth but without a silver mount; these usually have a whale ivory or panbone lid—including one by John Joseph Mechi (1802-1880), an Italian immigrant cutler in London who manufactured dressing cases, needle cases, boxes, razor strops, and gentlemen's requisites (reported in a private collection); and one that has a relief-carved rendition of a crowned British recumbent lion.^{vi}

As one might expect, many whale-tooth snuff boxes are bogus in one sense or another. Some are outright fakes—modern scrimshaw-like productions masquerading as original whalers' work, on which the engraving of the tooth is deficient or modernistic or both, and the metalwork (whether silver, brass, or bronze) tends to be shoddy and slipshod. One superficially respectable-looking silver-mounted tooth, featuring a crude but convincing sperm whaling scene, tricked out as a snuff-box, is rife with contradictory defects (Bonham's London, Sept. 16, 2009, #56).^{vii} The scrimshaw itself may be authentic whaler's work, but the fancy silver mount is doubtful. A circumferential inscription around the rim reads, "FRANKLIN ARTIC [sic] EXPEDITION. PRESENTED TO MR JOHN MORRISON," but the auctioneer fails to identify Morrison or to provide any rationale for the relevance of such a presentation; the badly proportioned silver mount is itself an

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impediment, obscuring two parts of the whaling scene, at each end of the tooth; and *Arctic* is misspelled. Not very convincing. Also, by the way, and importantly: there are no sperm whales in the Canadian Arctic, where Sir John Franklin and his two ships were last heard from in 1847. Scrimshaw on sperm whale teeth is irrelevant to and historically incompatible with the Arctic, and, Franklin notwithstanding, cannot legitimately have come from an Arctic voyage. Such pathetic shortfalls stigmatize the piece as not even a plausible relic of a Franklin search expedition, of which there were many. While the scrimshaw itself is possibly authentic, the ill-fitting silver mount, with its defective inscription and the Franklin association it mendaciously proclaims, are incongruous and fatally flawed.



[4] McDowell Tooth. Each side has a portrait of a full-rigged ship underway wearing plain sail, one a larboard broadside view on a port tack, the other a starboard broadside view on a starboard tack, both flying British merchant ensigns at the spanker. Rather than (as in most cases) utilizing the natural hollow of the tooth as the primary container, with a shallow rim and hinged metal lid affixed to the broad end, here the silver mount is a larger, deeper, and nicely ornamented hinged container that provides more storage space than the typical whale-tooth snuff box. *Collection of Sam McDowell, Carmel, California. Photo by Donald Boger.*

There are a handful of modest examples of authentic whalers' scrimshaw that were later mounted in silver to become snuff boxes, but whether the original artist originally intended them as snuff boxes is doubtful. An explicitly American example in the Bowers Museum (Santa Ana, California) is a competent polychrome rendition of an American patriotic spread-eagle, but the silver is tinny, poorly crafted, and in battered condition, unworthy of restoration.^{viii} Conversely, a mediocre British monochrome copy of an undistinguished and unidentified fashion-plate image is on a tooth rather charmingly mounted in silver with professionally engraved designs on the hinged lid.^{ix} Better is an anonymous Yankee whaler's depiction of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, with Eve picking an apple from the Tree of Life, along with a conventional fashion-plate image of a woman and child copied from *Harper's Monthly* or *Godey's* or some other popular magazine, on a tooth that has a nicely engraved silver base with a professionally monogrammed hinged lid (Vallejo Gallery).^x Best of all is a substantial tooth in the McDowell Collection with two very nicely rendered ship portraits and a much-larger-than-average, gracefully ornamented silver container (presumably for snuff) that, rather than merely capping or enhancing the natural hollow of the tooth, is itself the actual snuff box, to which the tooth is affixed as an integral ornament [Fig. 4].



[5] Mawer Tooth. An oversize, highly polished specimen featuring a detailed starboard broadside view of a British bark, hove-to, with most of the sails furled or clewed up, cutting-in a blanket-piece of blubber to starboard with a sperm whale tethered alongside. The mount here is pewter, with a hinged lid professionally engraved, "D.K. Mawer / Presented by his Brother / South Sea Whale Fishery / 1859." The maker, whalerman Elijah Mawer (b. 1830), and his older brother David Kirkby Mawer (1825-1893), a London cabinetmaker and victualler (provisioner), were originally from the northern shire town of Lincoln. *Kendall Collection, New Bedford Whaling Museum.*



[6] Mawer Tooth (detail). The inscription on the lid is in a fine graver's hand and was certainly done by a seasoned professional, probably the artisan who made and fitted the pewter mount.

Only very few whale-tooth snuff boxes are actually authentic whalers' productions with scrimshaw of high quality that were undoubtedly intended to be made into snuff boxes, rather than being converted afterwards. The outsize Mawer Tooth [Figs. 5-6] is the only one that can be attributed to an individual whaler-artist: Elisha Mawer evidently did the scrimshaw, and upon his return to his home-port of London from a whaling voyage in 1859 he commissioned the pewter mount as a dedication to a favorite older brother. The Drysdale of Leith Tooth is from Scotland—actually a tooth fragment, the pointy end, with evocative vignettes of Leith (seaport precinct of Edinburgh) and a silver mount that has a handsomely engraved lid [Figs. 7-12].

The Mawer Tooth is in the New Bedford Whaling Museum—permanently, I expect. The Drysdale of Leith Tooth is still out there somewhere in private hands and may or may not come up at auction sometime. But the McDowell Tooth has been consigned to be sold at Eldred's this summer.

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[7] Drysdale of Leith Tooth. A snuff box made from the outboard (pointy) end of a tooth, with a very fine hinged lid of silver. The antiques dealer who offered it for sale described it as a “Fine Late 18th Century [sic] Silver Mounted Scrimshawed Horn [sic] Snuff Box”—but of course it’s a sperm whale tooth, mid 19th century, and undoubtedly Scottish. *Kahn Fine Antiques, Chatham, Massachusetts.*

[8] Drysdale of Leith Tooth (detail). The hinged lid is professionally engraved “Rob^t Drysdale / LEITH.” Absent any further information, there is no way to ascertain which one of the several men named Robert Drysdale in 19th-century Leith is the fellow to whom the piece is inscribed. One was a merchant seaman born circa 1821 in Kincardine, Perthshire; another was for many years a prominent grocer. Either one was in a position to have received such a gift from a local South Sea whaleman.



[9] Drysdale of Leith Tooth (detail). Leith, the port-city of Edinburgh, was an Arctic whaling hub of some stature and the home of mariners of every type in virtually every trade. The faded polychrome vignettes are accordingly nautical, such as this full-rigged ship underway in the loch, passing the downtown waterfront.



[11] Drysdale of Leith Tooth (detail). This is the old Nor’ Loch [North Loch], a former waterway separating the Old and New Towns of Edinburgh, showing men fishing and the old North Bridge, with its five stone arches (built 1763-72; replaced 1896). The Loch was gradually drained and filled

in (1830-76), and today railway lines and the Princess Gardens occupy the site.



[12] Drysdale of Leith Tooth (detail). This is the Heriot School and Hospital, built in 1692, one of the great public buildings of Edinburgh. No ensemble of illustrations of Edinburgh and Leith in the Georgian or Victorian era would have been complete without it.

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 Masters Paintings in the New Bedford Whaling Museum.

ENDNOTES

ⁱ <https://www.jfklibrary.org/asset-viewer/archives/JFKMUS/JFKMUS-MO-1963-858/JFKMUS-MO-1963-858>

ⁱⁱ Tennants Auctioneers, Leyburn, North Yorkshire, England
https://www.pinterest.com.au/pin/355925176_7920_74819/?lp=true

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.skinnerinc.com/auctions/2985B/lots/112>

^{iv} Vallejo Gallery, Newport Beach, California.
https://www.vallejogallery.com/item_mobile.php?id=187

^v https://www.google.com/search?biw=1235&bih=672&tbm=isch&sa=1&ei=6hiVXMjrDc6Oggfa6YCw_Ag&q=hoof+snuff+box&oq=hoof+snuff+box&gs_l=img.3...30419.30419..30652...0.0..0.54.54.1.....0....1..gws-wiz-img.magLyuiasrE

^{vi} Antiques dealers Hansord, Lincoln (England); and Finch & Co., London.
http://www.hansord.com/index.pl?isa=Metadot::SystemApp::AntiqueSearch;op=detail;id=111558;image_id=264410

^{vii} <https://www.bonhams.com/auctions/16919/lot/56/>

^{viii} <https://www.bowers.org/index.php/collection/collection-blog/up-to-snuff-smokeless-tobacco-bottles-from-around-the-world>

^{ix} Tim Taylor Antiques, Taunton, Somerset (England), #6352.
<https://www.timtaylorantiques.com/scrimshaw-snuff-box>

^x https://www.vallejogallery.com/item.php?title=Scrimshaw+Whales+Tooth+Snuff+Box+with+Initialed+Silver+end.&artist_id=&artist=&id=2360



[10] Drysdale of Leith Tooth (detail). Another nautical view is this bustle of a ship and small craft in the main waterways of the city. Way in the background (far right) is the Old Saughton Bridge, which “crossed the Water of Leith. The book *Old and New Edinburgh* describes the bridge as consisting of three arches with massive piers, and having a square panel bearing the date of repairs, 1670” (www.edinphoto.org).



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