Whaling Logbooks: Colonial Knowledge Acquisition in the Pacific World

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Whaling Logbooks:
Colonial Knowledge Acquisition in the Pacific World

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Senior Essay in History
April 1st, 2024
Advisor: Paul Sabin
Word Count: 12,456

Robert Tate. Connecticut (ship) of New London, Conn, 1832. Whaling Logs Collection. Manuscripts and Archives, Beinecke Library, Yale University Library
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Introduction: Forgotten Names

Sometime in 1846, the cooper onboard the whaling bark *Acushnet* used the final pages of his sea journal to write up a list of the workers onboard the ship. The cooper, who was called Resolvid W. Bowles, appears ninth on his list, which he titled “Crew and Officers on Board Ship Acushnet Sailing from N.B. July 17th, 1845 - for the Pacific Ocean.” Bowles appears to have modeled this crew list off the official crew lists that were signed at the start of whaling voyages – a contract that both ensured the crew members’ share in profits from the whale oil harvest, and legally bound them to the vessel for the duration of the voyage.¹ At first glance, not much distinguishes Bowles’ hand written list from the official crew list – as in the official list, he organizes it by rank, and makes a point to divide the officers from the crew, and notes the hometown of each man. What sets the list in Bowles’ journal apart is his inclusion of the names of seven men who are absent from the official crew list. These men, who were placed at the end of the list, signifying their position at the very bottom of the hierarchy onboard the ship, are from the South Pacific. They are not listed under their own names but under formulaic nicknames: “Jack Tonga,” “James Kanaka,” “Thomas Bay,” and “Johhny Whaler.” Their homeports are Tahiti, Honolulu, Tonga, or simply “unknown.” These men worked in the borderlands of growing U.S. commercial venture in the Pacific world. Because they joined the vessel during the middle of the voyage, they would have been rendered invisible in the historical record, had Bowles never made his list. These undocumented workers, occupying last pages of Bowles’ journal, are a testament to growth of U.S. industry in the Pacific world in the 19th century, and the encroachment of these industries into Pacific nations.²

Record keeping was a fixture of the 19th century whaling industry. On a voyage, latitude and longitude were recorded each day at midday in the official logbook, along with detailed notes on the weather, ship sightings, deaths, and desertions. Small ‘slop books’ kept track of supplies purchased by the crew from the ship’s chest, that functioned as a of maritime ‘company store’ and was charged out of their end of voyage wages. Other books kept track of the ships’ expenditures – supplies purchased at different ports of call, listing everything from barrels of potatoes to live animals. Clearance papers were written up at every U.S. port the ship stopped in.

In the whaling industry, record keeping was not just a matter of business, but a deeply ingrained part of the industry’s culture. Whaler’s hand-carved stamps in the shapes of whales to keep account of the animals they harvested and boiled down into oil. Private journals like Bowles were written after the style of a formal ship’s log, to the point where they are usually functionally indistinguishable. Today, accounts of an estimated 1/4th of all the voyages in its near two-hundred-year history are preserved in archives around the globe.

The names in the back of Bowles’ journal reveal the relationship between power and this project of record keeping in the whaling industry. Crew lists, made at the start of a voyage, recorded the age, race, birthplace, rank, and percent share of each man in the ship’s final profit. After a legal act for the protection of sailor’s rights was passed in 1803, keeping such crew lists was mandatory onboard all American flagged vessels, ensuring that all U.S. born crew would receive their proportioned share of the ship’s capitalist venture. The Pacific Islanders on

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4 Ibid. 

Bowles’ lists had no such guarantee, and indeed, no legal identity at all. Even in Bowles list, they are not truly recorded – the U.S. crew on the *Acushnet* transformed their names to fit a western framework.

Bowles’ journal reveals how the whaling industry both collected information on the Pacific world, and how that information was controlled by colonial frameworks. While there were many simultaneous processes of record collection occurring onboard whaleships, whalers’ logbooks and journals provide the clearest example of the relationship between information and power. The extent and minute detail of the information collected in whaling logs raises many questions. Why was the form of logbook keeping such a central part of whaling life, that it was so closely emulated in private journals? What assumptions and cultural perceptions shaped the information recorded by whalers? What information – like the identities of Pacific workers – was omitted? How was this information used, and where did it go?

In the broader historiography of the Yankee whaling industry, logbooks and private journals have often been studied as diaries, in order to tell social and cultural histories of life in the industry. Historians of the whaling history have often expressed frustration with the formulaic style found in logbooks and journals. Rhys Richards, an early historian of Pacific whaling, wrote in 1970 that “It is very rare indeed to locate a logbook entry of a descriptive nature, which can be used, for example, in local historical research,” and compares “the monotony of logbook entries” to “the reading of a dictionary.” 7 In the decades since Richard’s publication, historians seeking information on maritime culture, or the relationships between

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whaling ships and indigenous communities in the Pacific have come up against this issue. Historian Henry Mond, in his 2000 book *Light Airs from the Pacific*, noted “whaling logs are among the most unrewarding materials for historians, as their compliers possessed an understandable fixation on details of wind, weather, and the whales themselves.” Despite these obstacles, some historians, like Nancy Shoemaker in her 2015 book *Native American Whalemen and the World*, have used logs to parse the complex relationships of culture and race that developed on this ocean frontier, although Shoemaker does remark that logbooks “not given to self-reflection” Most recently, historian Liza Wadewitz, in a 2022 anthology focused on the history of Pacific whaling, described whaling logbooks as “some of the most mind-numbing primary source materials of all time.”

While whalers occasionally used whaling logbooks and journals for narrative accounts and personal reflection, they are not truly diaries, and were never intended to record personal reflection. Historians of colonial maritime exploration have highlighted the role of logbook keeping in the process of colonial documentation. In the 2013 text “Expert Records: Nautical Logbooks from Columbus to Cook,” historian Margaret Schotte argues that information recorded in logbooks is driven by utility. She describes logbooks as a “epistemic genre,” and argues that the logbook form is “a specialized way of writing down knowledge.” In a study of the use of logbooks in the British East India Company and the Dutch VOC, Schotte emphasizes that logbooks were intended to be public documents, transmitting information on the maritime world

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back to a metropole. In the whaling industry, logbooks had the same function. Through the whaler’s logbook, it is possible to map out the movement of knowledge in the Pacific whaling industry. Case studies reveal how the data collected by whalers was used to make sense of the Pacific world, from the creation of oceanographic maps to the publication of popular travelogs based on whalers’ writings. Whalers’ logbooks and journals can be understood as tools in a project of colonial knowledge acquisition.

**Background: The Whaling Industry in the Pacific World**

Understanding the process of knowledge collection in that occurred in whaler’s logbooks requires an understanding of the broader relationship between the whaling industry and the Pacific world. We can see the effects of the whaling industry on Pacific communities from the Arctic to the South Pacific. As an illustration, in 1819, the Yankee whaleship set anchor in a Hawai’ian port. Less than a generation later, in 1854, the U.S. government was petitioning the Hawai’ian king, Kamehameha III, to annex the islands to the U.S.12 The first Yankee whaleship sailed for the Pacific Arctic in 1848; by 1878, thirteen thousand Arctic whales had been harvested, over half of the whole species population.13 Thousands of men and women in Pacific communities from Tongatapu to Utqiagvik became engaged in the business of commercial whaling. In 1846, maps of the Pacific world were still filled with blank spaces, and yet in 1856, the U.S. institute of hydrology released ocean charts with complete with detailed ranges of

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13 Bathsheba Demuth, *The Floating Coast: An Environmental History of the Bering Strait*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company)
different whale species. The efficient collection and organization of information in the whalers’ logbook has played a part in increasing Western hegemony in the Pacific.

As US presence increased in Pacific islands the whaling industry served to create footholds of U.S. commerce and residence in major ports like Honolulu. Pacific historian Mat Matsuda notes that “Whalers especially had a significant impact in places like Lahaina and Honolulu […] American whalers came to the islands simultaneously with Hiram Bingham’s missionaries, and so contributed to the changes and upheavals taking place in Hawaiian society.” Whaling historian Nancy Shoemaker argues that while the whalers had primarily commercial goals in the Pacific, it was in line with these commercial goals to have an increased U.S. presence in the Pacific islands, in whatever form that took. In her 2015 book *Native American Whalemen and the World*, she states that “Because all among the crew depended on island and coastal peoples to supply the ship with basic provisions, every laborer living and working on an American whaler […] could be considered participants in the gradual spread of American influence into distant places.” In terms of both the flow of goods and ideas, the whaling industry had become a part of the Pacific world.

The islands and coasts of the Pacific were becoming increasingly important sights of resource extraction, from guano in southern Samoa, to seal furs in the northern Pribilofs. Pacific whales were central among the resources sought by U.S. ships. The 12,000-mile-wide ocean

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14 “Manuscript map showing part of the Bering Island or Komandor Islands,” 1846. Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; Matthew Maury. *Whale Chart*. Published 1852 by United States Hydrographical Office. Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

became the industrial world’s main source of whale oil – lighting house and street lamps, oiling sewing machines and industrial looms. Bathsheba Demuth, historian of Yankee whaling in the Bering Sea, notes in her 2019 book *The Floating Coast,* that “behind the whalers came the state.”

17 Emphasizing the importance of the industry in the U.S. imagination, she quotes a naval secretary, who wrote in 1836, “No part of the commerce of this country is more important than which is carried out in the Pacific Ocean … it is, to a great extent, not a mere exchange of commodities, but the creation of wealth, by labor, from the ocean.” 18 The whaling industry exemplified the intersection of expansion and commerce in 19th century America.

While naval officers and business men may have celebrated the whaling industry as a beacon of U.S. industry, the lived experience of ordinary whalers like Resolvid Bowles was far from romantic. The *Acushnet* left New Bedford on July 17th, 1845, and made landfall in Honolulu in March of the next year. Over the course of the next three years, the crew of the *Acushnet* harvested eight hundred barrels of generic whale oil and five hundred barrels of valuable sperm oil. 19 Bowles’ journal records the months of unceasing labor required for this harvest, and its many frustrations. The ship could be at sea for months at a time and would rarely see more than one whale a week. During the seven months of the voyage, they harvested only eleven whales. Bowles frequently complains of the cramped conditions and of boredom, writing on February 21st, 1847, that “All the difference between being here and being in State Prison is the name of being a jail bird.” His ill mood seems to have been shared by others on the vessel, as Bowles notes, two days after, the captain, William Rodgers, had a psychotic breakdown and

17 Demuth, *Floating Coast*, 29.
18 Ibid.
remained “in a deranged crazy state” for several days. The only respite from the monotony of life at sea came when the ship returned to Honolulu or another Pacific Island for provisions. In these ports, Bowles records them restocking food supplies, fresh water, and, on occasion, hiring labor.

While Yankee whalers such as Bowles were a part of this larger process of growing U.S. imperial power in the Pacific world, his journal reveals concerns of the day-to-day kind. There are a few moments of self-expression, including a poem, which may be his own work, about a traveler who misses home: “Blow gently gales and swiftly waft/ the banks to my native shore,/ For there I left long time ago,/ The one I still adore.” Bowles’ writings line up with the assessments of historians like Johnson, who argue that the whaling industry was chiefly a commercial venture. It is clear from his notes in daily entries that his primary concerns are financial, and often describes things in terms of cost and value, including different animal species. He drew a sketch on the opening page of depicting a right whale and sperm whale, under which he notes “note the difference in the shape of the spout. Sperm whale oil more valuable.” His writing frequently returns to the concern that the ship would not make profit, such as in the entry on July 1st, 1846, he writes “Disagreeable weather, blowing a gale of wind from the East, here we are, 12 months out with about 400 bbls and half of it right whale oil it is enough to make a man crazy.”

Bowles’ narrative, in addition to giving insight into the everyday hardships of a whaler, highlights the ways whale ships relied on Pacific communities for support during their years at sea. It also demonstrates the presence of U.S. missionaries in Pacific nations, and the role played by missionaries in supporting U.S. commercial ventures. Historian Donald Johnson notes in his 1995 text *The United States and the Pacific* that the rise of U.S. settlements and political power in Pacific islands did not necessarily correspond to a centralized project but was rather “a matter
of private enterprise” where a number of distinct industries and private organizations like church missions converged on the region during the same time period.  

20 Scholars have noted that missionaries and whalers were indeed often at odds with each other, as the presence of the whaling industry encouraged businesses like prostitution and alcohol.  

21 Despite these differences, whalers and missionaries tended to want the same thing – access to the resources and people of the Pacific world.  

Bowles’ journal makes it clear that the missionaries were a source of support for whalers, describing an incident on March 17 1846 when missionaries provided medical care for an injured crew member, and two incidents where missionaries organized a funeral for crew on the Acushnet – one died from drowning, the other falling from the mast.  

22 Demuth argues that missionaries and whalers, despite their surface level differences, shared an ideology of U.S. expansion. Demuth writes in Floating Coast, “being a whaling nation made the United States an imperial one, in the Pacific –an empire that saw civilization as having commercial potential, and commerce as having the potential to civilize. Whaling exemplified both, by introducing missionaries to ‘new spheres of usefulness.’ […] whales and their killers made manifest destiny maritime.”  

23 The combined presence of missionaries and whalers pushed the U.S. government towards an increasingly colonial approach in the Pacific world.  

While many U.S. industries sprung up in the Pacific basin, whaling had by far the largest range, and, by extension, and expansive impact on U.S. foreign policy as it pertained to the Pacific world. While other extractive industries based in the Pacific, such as gold mining on the

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20 Johnson, United States, 77.  
22 Bowles, Log of Acushnet.  
23 Demuth, Floating Coast, 29.
North American coast, the collection of guano in the South Pacific, or fur harvest in the Arctic, were limited by the geographic range of a particular resource, the harvest of whales occurred throughout the entire ocean. The whaling industry was truly a trans-Pacific industry. It was made up by the movement of people and energy through a vast space. The crew of a whaleship would move through climate extremes, in an environment that was continually changing, and controlled by vast atmospheric and oceanic systems. Bowles describes both the snow-covered mountains of southern Patagonia – with men being swept across the deck by huge seas in hypothermia-inducing temperatures – and the burning heat of the equatorial tropics. The whaleship itself was a strange compression of this vast geography – crew members from North America, Europe, the Arctic, and the South Pacific lived and worked in often overcrowded conditions. Unlike geographically fixed industries, whaleships were continually moving into new waters, pushing the borders of U.S. charts westward and northward, searching for new sources of whale oil and human labor. Where whaleships went, missionaries and state officials such as consuls were soon to follow. In general, the growing whaling industry was both driving and driven by US colonial expansion in the Pacific. Whaling logbooks, like Bowles’ serve as a first-hand record of the expansion of this industry. Not only can we better understand this story from the whaler’s perspective, but considered as collective, whaling logbooks offer an avenue for understanding the role of knowledge acquisition in the rise of U.S. imperialism in the Pacific.

**Literature Review: Colonial Knowledge Acquisition in the Pacific**

In academic thought, the concept of ‘colonial knowledge collection’ or the ‘coloniality of knowledge,’ originates in post-colonial theory. Peruvian scholar Anibal Quijan emphasizes the

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importance of two features of colonial knowledge collection: that it is based in the translation of indigenous knowledge into new frameworks, and these frameworks are structured to establish hierarchies of “superiors and inferiors.” 26 Historian Philip Wagoner argues that the scholarship on the relationship between the spread of colonial power and different knowledge systems dates to scholars of anti-colonial movements, such as Gramsci and Foucault. Wagner writes, “to these scholars we owe the rich development of the insight […] that European conquest was dependent […] on the power of knowledge.” 27 Wagner argues that “colonial forms of knowledge… have not simply described an objective reality, but rather have called that objective reality into being.” Wagner emphasizes that colonial consolidation of knowledge and power often operates as a singular, self-perpetuating cycle.

The process of colonial knowledge acquisition has a long relationship of dependence with indigenous communities. In the South Pacific basin, knowledge had long dictated survival. Geographic knowledge, as well as being contained in visual records, was contained in oral traditions. 28 The South Pacific had already been mapped. Part of the colonial knowledge project was the translation of this pre-existing knowledge into a western format that could be reproduced and propagated back to the colonial metropole. David Turnbull, writing in a 1996 article, “Cartography and Science in Early Modern Europe,” writes that “the cartographical process is the assemblage of local knowledge.” 29 Historian John Short, puts this idea in a specifically colonial context in his 2009 book Cartographic Encounters, states, “Europeans needed

27 Wagoner, “Precolonial Intellectuals,” 3.
geographical knowledge. They lacked the spatial information necessary to move around in and to map this new land. The indigenous peoples had sophisticated spatial knowledge and cartographic abilities.”

30 Short is here referring specifically to early British colonists in Eastern North America, but later amends his statement to a general commentary on the processes by which colonists depend on indigenous communities for knowledge, writing, “In order [for the Europeans] to find their way around and move around the unfamiliar landscape, they relied upon the indigenous people to provide information, advice and guidance.”

Early forms of colonial knowledge collection in the Pacific Basin closely follow Short and Turnbull’s theory. Perhaps the most famous example of this form knowledge collection in the South Pacific is the ocean chart recorded by explorer James Cook, who was one of the first European sailors to document the Pacific. Called “Tupaia’s Chart,” this chart is a rough map of the Pacific islands, created from an account given by Tupaia, a navigator from Tahiti. This chart demonstrates how the knowledge of local navigators could be transformed into a reproducible format with the potential to aid European colonial or financial interests. 32 While during the 19th century, and the height of the Yankee whaling industry, the Pacific basin had already been well recorded in European maps, whalers were directly informed in this sort of cartographical knowledge collection in the northern and arctic Pacific, including what is now called Alaska.

The term ‘knowledge collection’ by itself may be somewhat misleading. It is not the collection of abstract knowledge, but the way in which knowledge is shaped during its translation into a mass-accessible form, that has the most visible repercussions. Historian Bronwen Douglas, in his 2010 paper Racial Geography in the ‘Fifth Part of the World,’ argues

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31 Short, Cartographic Encounters, 56.
32 Ben Finney, “Nautical Cartography, 442.
that U.S. geographies of the Pacific Basin were shaped by ideas of race, and that the
categorization of place was fundamentally shaped by the categorization of people.\textsuperscript{33} He argues
that even a seemingly ‘neutral’ project such as geographic mapping was influenced by fantastical
ideas of the last ‘unknown lands’ of the world. In 18\textsuperscript{th} century Pacific cartography, created in the
aftermath of exploration voyages by figures such as Magellan, racialized caricatures were often
included on the published maps themselves, suggesting to the viewer that the discovery of land
came part and parcel with the discovery of a new kind of people. The land itself became deeply
racialized, as did the process of naming and classification of these places and peoples. This
process, Douglas notes, was deeply influenced by pre-existing ideas of race and civilization.
These western mapmakers attempted to fit the Pacific basin into a familiar hierarchy, that placed
white westerners at the top.

The final stage of colonial knowledge acquisition comes in the form of its wider
propagation to the public. Historian Greg Fry, in the 2019 anthology *Power and Pacific Agency*,
considers the ways in which knowledge gathered about the Pacific world was received back in
the North American metropole, and in what format this sort of knowledge became available to a
wider public audience.\textsuperscript{34} Fry points to texts such as the 1772 *A Voyage Around the World*, that
popularized narratives of the Pacific. Part of the appeal of this and later text, Fry suggests, was
sensationalized portrayals of Pacific peoples, which were described not as a group of
interconnected sovereign nations, but rather as people living isolated in a wilderness. Fry notes
that these text accounts became wrapped up in wider 18\textsuperscript{th} century discourse around ideas of the

\textsuperscript{33} Bronwen Douglas, “‘Terra Australis’ to Oceania: Racial Geography in the ‘Fifth Part of the World.’”

\textsuperscript{34} Greg Fry, “The ‘South Seas’ in the Imperial Imagination,” *Framing the Islands: Power and
“state of nature” and racist ideas of the noble and ignoble “savage.” Fry also connects the widespread publication of such accounts with the growing missionary interest in the area.

In the broader historiography of processes of colonial knowledge collection in the Pacific world, historians have often focused on the work of state funded exploration projects, such as the voyages of James Cook and Magellan. However, by the 19th century, voyages with industrial and commercial goals began to play a large role in collecting geographic, oceanic, and even anthropological information, in a far more decentralized way. Logbooks recorded data on atmosphere, ocean, ecology, and more. When U.S. whalers began to sail into the Pacific, they engaged in a continual process of recording and storing information. As the U.S. fleet spread into the Pacific world, every ship’s log and sailors journal became part of a process of knowledge collection, a tool for gathering data on world largely unknown to western mapmakers. Pushed as to maximize their harvest and their profits, whalers slowly began to map and record the Pacific world. While it was often recorded for the purpose of in the moment navigation, this information would go on to have many afterlives. By understanding the role whaling logbooks played in organizing and propagating information about the Pacific world, it is possible to see how U.S. industries-imposed ideas of race, environment, and civilization on to their interpretations of the Pacific world.
The Logbook: Navigational Tools, Navigational Records

Recording Data

Figure 1: Milton Bulkley. Milton Bulkley Journal, 1862. Milton Bulkley Papers Manuscripts and Archives, Beinecke Library, Yale University Library. An example of informal knowledge collection in a sailor’s private journal – showing a sketch of Cape Horn and the track of the ship based on daily latitude and longitude.

In 1821, the ship Huron sailed south on a sealing expedition from the port of New Haven, Connecticut. Sealing and whaling were closely linked industries, with many Arctic and Antarctic whalers becoming opportunistic sealers, harvesting them for both oil and pelts. The Huron’s voyage proved difficult, with many falling sick, and harsh weather conditions. The ship sailed to Deception Island, a part of the South Shetland Island group in the Drake Passage, and a three-day

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sail from the southernmost tip of South America. It was a popular ground for sealers and whalers alike.36 Below the Antarctic convergence in highly ecologically active waters, this volcanic island provided habitat for blubber rich elephant seals and thick pelted fur seals. However, even after harvesting a hundred and nine seal pelts in one day, the captain, Davis, felt Deception Island offered too little and made the decision to continue south. The next day, Davis reached a new coast. It was February 7th, 1821, a Wednesday, and the first recorded landing on the Antarctic continent. Davis seemed unimpressed with his find. He notes in his log that there were “no signs of seal,” and that they were “attended with snow and a heavy sea.” Following a more detailed description of the weather conditions, he finishes his logbook entry with the note “I think this southern land to be a continent.” The next day, Davis returned to the South Shetland Islands, never returning to Antarctic, perhaps due to the underwhelming amounts of seals. 37

Davis’ landing on the Antarctic continent reveals how incentives of profit and a practice of daily record keeping could combine to create the conditions for the collection of geographic knowledge. While the data gathered in logbooks could be used in larger contexts, it began as a means to keep track of the movement of a ship during the voyage itself. On the 19th century whaleship, the logbook facilitated all methods of navigation. In the early 15th century, the logbook had been developed in part as a tool for dead reckoning – navigation based off the boat’s direction and speed. This role of the ‘log’ is even present in the entomology of the word ‘logbook’ – which stems from the log that was thrown in the water to calculate the boat speed. As navigational technology developed in the 15th, 16th, and 17th centuries, the function of the

logbook developed alongside it.\textsuperscript{38} Logbooks were used to record latitude and longitude, calculated from star, moon and sun sights. The development of technology such as the chromometer, that allowed for the accurate calculation of longitude from sights, only increased the need for reliable records of navigational routes.

The importance of accurate record keeping in all aspects of the maritime world can be seen by comparing the kinds of records kept in whaling journals and in whaling logbooks. Journals often followed the traditional format of the logbook, even though, unlike the log, they were not legal records. The similarities between journals and formal logbooks perhaps suggests that the logbook format goes beyond a industry convention, and indicates something of the way whaling crews interpreted and understood the world around them. In his 2017 book, \textit{O'er the Wide and Tractless Sea}, whaling historian Michael Dyer writes, “Logbooks and journals fundamentally served the same basic purposes: they were records of the events of a day’s voyage.”\textsuperscript{39} Logbook keeping was often a very formal process. Through the nautical ‘day,’ key information – latitude and longitude, wind, course, weather and sea state – were recorded on a chalk board, and then entered in the logbook around midday. The information was usually reported in a formulaic order – often beginning with “Remarks on board,” or “Remarks on this day,” then the date, a note on the weather, a longer narrative on the day’s events, and finishing with then “so ends this day.” \textsuperscript{40} Journals were overwhelmingly written in this style. An example of the ubiquity the style can be found in the journal of Robert Strouse, which begins as a

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{38} Schotte, “Expert Records,” 280.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
memoir-like narration of the voyage, but quickly transforms into short entries in ‘standard’
logbook style.

There are multiple ways of understanding the prevalence of day-to-day knowledge
collection onboard whaleships, and the prevalence of the formal style of logbook keeping in
journals. The strict conventions can be understood as being rooted in the relationship between
reliable navigation and survival. If a navigator lost track of the ships position on a long-haul
voyage, and the ship missed its port of call, it would result in starvation and death for the crew.
Ships that lost track of their location could end up literally lost-at-sea, such as the famous 1765
voyage of the British merchant ship *Peggy*, that ended in starvation and mass cannibalism. 41
Indeed, before the invention of the chronometer, which allowed for the accurate calculation of
longitude, voyages into the Pacific world were not possible for westerners, who lacked the
understanding of Pacific wind patterns, currents, and geography so familiar to navigators from
the Pacific islands. Keeping an accurate log allowed for western sailors to keep track of their
position and keep track of any inaccuracies in their chronometer. Keeping records let sailors
build their understanding of the oceanic systems they sailed in. Many logbook keepers, such as
whaler Aurther Gibbons in his 1910 logbook of the bark *Margaret*, used the log to keep track of
issues with chromometer readings, with Gibbons lamenting the continual loss of time, and
increasingly inaccurate readings. 42

In the logbook and in private journals, it becomes evident how navigation and nautical
record keeping permeate almost every part of life. The daily record of latitude and longitude was
not only a matter of survival, but the only way sailors onboard these ships could mark out their

41 Cheaster G. Hern, *Tracks in the Sea: Matthew Fontaine Maury and the Mapping of the Oceans*,
Manuscripts and Archives, Beinecke Library, Yale University Library.
movement through the ocean. This environment was described by whaler and novelist Herman Melville who described offshore sailing in his novel *Typee* as “the wide rolling Pacific - the sky above, the sea around, and nothing else.” Milton Buckley, a sailor who kept a private journal on a 1859 voyage, sketched a map of Cape Horn on a loose page, in order to keep track of the incremental movement of the ship across the map. This was for Milton’s use alone, and had no practical value, illustrating how mathematical navigation was not just a tool for getting from point A to point B, but rather an integral part of the way 19th century sailors like Milton contextualized the world around them.

Historian Richard White, in his 1995 book *The Organic Machine*, argues that workers come to “know nature through labor,” that is, they come to understand their environment through the process of working in it. A river fisherman, for example, comes to know the strength of the river through rowing against it. Other scholars, such as Thomas Andrews in his 2010 book, *Killing For Coal*, argue that the environment, has a deep impact on the way workers understand the world more generally, and suggest environment can impact social structures and cultural consensus. Andrews introduces the concept of a “workscape” as a physical place that workers inhabit and know through the processes of their labor. On the 19th century ship, an understanding of the ocean environment through the labor of whaling is evident. The continual record, in official logbooks and in private journals, of the weather, rain, snow, burning heat

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43 Herman Melville, *Typee*, (Generic NL Freebook Publisher, 1998).


reflects the culture of precise navigational record, and the ways the environment shaped the day-
to-day labor experience of whalers. Sailors understood the force of the winds, how current and
wind could interact. 47

Onboard a whaling ship, workers were near continually exposed to the physicality of the
ocean. In rough conditions, the deck of a ship could become completely submerged under
breaking waves. Crew could easily be washed overboard. The logbooks record the motion of the
ship in more ways than the narrative account. In an entry from the Brig George during an 1852
voyage, the effects of a storm in the Straits of Magellan appear in physical log. The logbook
keeper’s handwriting becomes erratic and jagged, and a long ink stain blots out many words.
These are records of the erratic plunging motion of the ship through the sea. This voyage in the
Southern Ocean in mid-July, the middle of austral winter, came at a huge physical cost to the
crew and the ship. On the first day of the storm the logbook keeper writes “close reefed the main
topsail. Ship labors strained + shipping large quantities of water on deck.” The script becomes
even more erratic the following day, and another indication of the conditions can be seen in the
fact there is no latitude and longitude recorded. A fix could only be made with a clear view of the
sky. The logbook keeper noted “Gales and dangerous seas. Ship laboring + straining badly and
shipping much water on deck.” 48

Navigation and record keeping were not only necessary for survival, but a central part of
the way sailors made sense of the world. Even for a sailor like Buckley, who was not at all
involved in making navigation decisions, navigation could be used to impose order onto the
disorder of sea life. Buckley notes that the sketch he made in his journal lacks accuracy, but

47 Asher Gibbons, Log of Ship Margaret, 1910. Whaling Logs Collection. MS 540, Box 1, Folder 1.
Manuscripts and Archives, Beinecke Library, Yale University Library.

48 Brig George Log, 1852. Shipping Collection. MS 543. Box 2, Folder 5. Manuscripts and Archives,
Beinecke Library, Yale University Library.
states that it was the best way to represent the voyage on paper. “The dots,” Buckley writes, “represent each days work, or rather where the ship was each day at 12’o’clock […] although the lines from one dot to another are represented as strait, it was by no means so in reality, for almost always in doubling this cape […] you have continually head winds, so that every on of these strait lines is made up of such a number of crosses up and down and backwards and forwards that if they were deciphered it would take a Philadelphia lawyer to decipher them.”49 Buckley’s remarks on the prevailing winds around the Cape demonstrates how interest in wind and weather patterns were not limited to cartographers such as Maury but were deeply linked to experiences of day-to-day work in this marine industry. Logbook keeping was at once a formal and an informal project of knowledge collection.

In 1853, the United States bureau of hydrology released a maritime chart titled “A Chart Showing the Favorite Resort of the Sperm and Right Whale.” The chart highlights regions chiefly populated by the right whale, such as the Bering Sea, in blue, and regions chiefly populated by sperm whales, such as the South Pacific, in red. Sea occupied by both species such as the upwelling zone in the Humbolt current on the coast of South America, appears in purple. The chart reveals much about the world of 19th century Pacific whaling. As reported by the first Yankee whalers who entered the Pacific in the 1790’s, it is evident the Pacific holds the majority of concentrations of both species. The chart is even centered on the Pacific, a rarity in western mapmaking. However, more than corroborating contemporary accounts of the Pacific’s vast

50 Johnson, United States, 48.
whale populations, the chart reveals the processes of knowledge collection driven by the whaling industry. The chart is the amalgamation of data from thousands of whaling logbooks and was created for the use of whaling captains. It is, in a sense, the real-world manifestation of the self-perpetuating cycles of knowledge collection described in post-colonial theory. In a more concrete way, this whale-range chart demonstrates the broader impact of the thousands of whalers engaged in the day-to-day process of logbook keeping.

In the mid-19th century, Matthew Maury, a Lieutenant in the U.S. Navy, revolutionized ocean-going navigation, and the whaling industry. Maury, a die-hard Confederate, might seem a strange candidate for the revolutionizing of a Yankee industry. However, Maury’s work allowed for Yankee ships to sail further afield and target their prey with increased accuracy. This work was in essence, the formal organization of the kinds of ocean-going knowledge that had been slowly collected by decades of American navy, merchant, and whaling ships. Maury’s work was part of a larger revolution in navigational technology in the period, a revolution that play a huge role in the expansion of the U.S. fleet in the Pacific world. Ships logbooks, including thousands of whaling logbooks, were the direct link between Maury’s work and the broader technological innovations in navigation. Maury’s work transformed the logbook from a navigational tool to a navigational record. However, while Maury’s work made the process of colonial knowledge collection far more efficient and organized, logbooks and journals had arguably formed the backbone of more informal kinds of knowledge collection in the Pacific for half a century before.

The influence of shared knowledge on the expansion of the whaling industry into the Pacific world can be traced in landing data. SADs, or shipping arrivals and departure lists, for

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51 Hern, *Tracks in the Sea.*
Pacific ports show a distinctive pattern in the first half of the 19th century, a pattern that indicates the efficiency of the dissemination of knowledge between whalers, even without a third party collecting and publishing the information. Where one whaler found whales or safe harbor, dozens more were sure to follow. The port of Honolulu provides a salient example: the first whaler arrived in 1820, and by 1822 over a hundred ships were arriving yearly. Tahiti has similar patterns of shipping arrivals, going from just 14 whaling ship arrivals in 1834 to sixty in 1835. Tonga likewise goes from thirty visits in the year 1832 to a hundred and fifteen in 1834. 52 This data alone illustrates that whalers were not only collecting knowledge but actively sharing it. While it is not entirely clear what role logbooks played in spreading the word of new whaling grounds, it can certainly be assumed that they would at least be used as references for sharing information related to latitude and longitude for these new ports of call.

It is possible that whalers shared information related to wind and current patterns, and other systems of geography that were recorded in logbooks. This is evidenced in particular in accounts of Yankee whalers in the Pacific Arctic. The Bering Sea and the coast of what is now called Alaska underwent the same boom of whaling as the south Pacific between 1858 and 1860. 53 Historian Bathsheba Demuth writes that the whaling fleet learned as a collective to navigate Arctic conditions, something described by whaler Herbert Albert, meaning knowledge around navigating certain specific environmental conditions was being shared ship to ship. Shared knowledge was a highly valuable tool. Demuth writes “In the early 1860’s, such navigation converted over four thousand more bowheads to oil barrels.” 54

53 Bathsheba Demuth, Floating Coast, 47.
54 Bathsheba Demuth, Floating Coast, 48.
One of the most salient examples of the ways whalers shared navigational information in logbooks can be found in 19th century newspapers. Shipping news columns, and trade specific publications like the *Whaleman’s Shipping List*, make extensive use of logbooks in their publications. An example can be seen in an 1838 article in the *New York Commercial Advisor* that published an excerpt from a logbook to warn mariners about an uncharted shoal in a passage in the Philippines, that the ship Argyle had run up on. 55 These reports were fairly common. A similar publication in the Honolulu newspaper *The Friend* in 1844 reported the ‘discovery’ of an island by a Captain Pell. *The Friend* cites the captain’s journal and discusses his use of lunars and a chromometer to fix the location of the island. They note, “we make these remarks on the authenticity of a nautical gentleman,” suggesting the extent to which whalers logbooks were held as respected sources of information. 56

While Maury revolutionized the way logbooks were used, the sporadic publication of logbook data in newspapers, and the suggestion of informal sharing of logbook information, demonstrate his charts were not the first use of logbook data for charting. In 1823 American newspaper editor J.N. Reynolds wrote extensively on the impact of the whaling industry in connection to the U.S. colonial project in the Pacific, what he described as “the discoveries of our enterprising and careful navigators in those seas.” Nantucket resident Obed Mavey, writing in 1835 stated that, “It must appear obvious, that our whaleships are exploring, in a more effective manner than twenty vast ships ever could, every part of the vast Pacific. They have discovered many, islands, reefs, and shoals, which navigators, sent out expressly for exploring

purposes, had passed unseen.”

In another sense, Maury’s charts can be seen as a new level of knowledge consolidation, as he is perhaps the first to formally track the oceanographic and biological data stored in logbooks, as opposed to just using the geographic information.

Maury’s work reveals a connection between the collection of what might be considered ‘scientific’ knowledge and commercial ventures. Using logbook data he charted the ranges of sperm whales and right whales. This allowed for ships to take a more focused approach when targeting species – as described by Resolvid Bowles in his log, sperm whale oil was “most valuable.”

Scientific knowledge development came out of a commercial need. Maury’s work drew on a large number of merchant, naval, and whaling logs stored in the Depot of Charts and Instruments. These logbooks may have been collected for reference but had never been surveyed as a whole. Maury used the difference between a vessel’s theoretical position, based on wind direction and boat speed, and the actual position recorded in the latitude and longitude to calculate currents.

While meteorological and oceanic patterns had long been understood and followed by Pacific Island navigators and even to an extent, western whalers, Maury’s work allowed for a great increase in the predictability of voyages.

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58 Resolvid Bowles, *Log of the Acushnet*, Bienecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.
59 Azadeh Achbari, “Building Networks for Science.”
Maury’s whaling charts and other publications and distributions of information within logbooks illustrates the role whaling logbooks played in the U.S. imperial project in the Pacific World. The collection of knowledge was not an abstract process, but rather the result of the movement of thousands of American ships into the Pacific. As early as the 1820’s, at least two hundred ships a year, crewed by up to forty men each, were sailing into the Pacific. Logbooks did not only record latitude and longitude, boat speed, and whale catch. They also recorded the communities and places they encountered. And like nautical data, this information as propagated to a wider audience through the vector of the logbook.

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60 Richards, “Pacific Whaling 1820 to 1840.”
Although often sparse and formulaic in character, the information collected in logbooks and sea journals went beyond bare bones navigational material. The second afterlife of the whaler’s logbook was in popular publication. Throughout the 19th century, public interest in the Pacific world, its peoples and places, put whalers accounts in the pages of newspapers and popular anthologies. In 1841, Francis Allen Olmsted published a lengthy written account of an 1839 whaling voyage to the Pacific Ocean. Entitled, *Incidents of a whaling voyage, to which are added observations on the scenery, manners and customs, and missionary stations of the Sandwich and Society Islands*, the book also included Olmsted’s own illustrations of whaling life, as well as scenes of Pacific islands, particularly Hawai‘i.  

Olmsted based the book of off his sea journal, made evident by editorial notes made in the journal’s margins, including notes of where he wanted to place chapters. The book was popular with the U.S. public and was advertised as providing an accurate account of the Pacific and its peoples. An 1841 article in the *New York Evangelist* highlights the growing interest in the Pacific world in the continental U.S., stating that Olmsted’s book “embraces sketches of the scenery, manners, customs, and Missionary stations of the Sandwich and Society Islands, and is beautifully illustrated [...] from the author’s drawings, of various scenes and objects of the voyage.” Reviews highlight the “accuracy” of the book as a central selling point. The book was popular with the U.S. public, to the point that it became a point of reference for other writers when describing the Pacific world. An article published in the *Newburyport Morning Herald* discussing the spread of

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62 Francis Allyn Olmsted, *Journal of a Voyage Around Cape Horn*, 1840. General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.  
63 *Newburyport Morning Herald* (Newburyport, Massachusetts), October 19, 1841: 2. Readex: America's Historical Newspapers.  
64 *New York Evangelist* (New York, New York), October 2, 1841: 2. Readex: America's Historical Newspapers.
Christianity in Hawai‘i, described a church “as lithographed in young Olmsted’s *Incidents of a Whaling Voyage.*” Olmsted’s text, and its success, illustrates how writings in journals and logbooks on the Pacific world were propagated to the wider U.S. public.

As U.S. industry grew in the Pacific, and as more settlements were established throughout the Pacific basin, sailors sought to justify the expansion, and contextualize this expansion into the Pacific in familiar terms. Historian Brain Rouleau, in his 2010 article “Maritime Destiny as Manifest Destiny: American Commercial Expansionism and the Idea of the Indian,” argues that many of the constructions of racial superiority of white westerners over Pacific peoples began with the “working-class men laboring aboard ships,” and notes that “American seamen carried with them a host of assumptions concerning savagery, civilization, and the boundary between the two.” 65 Rouleau highlights that sailors’ writings, recorded in “Diaries, logbooks, and other accounts,” reveal that western sailors sought to frame Pacific peoples in term of the idea of the “Indian.” Rouleau argues that sailors’ used terms like “Indian” and “native,” and made frequent direct analogies between indigenous North Americans, as a means of making sense of Pacific Islanders, and as a way to construct a racial hierarchy between white sailors and Pacific Islanders. As Rouleau notes, “Racial theorizing, for many people living in antebellum America, served as an analytical tool.” 66 Sailors sought to categorize the peoples they encountered in much the same way they might categorize whale or bird species. Racializing Pacific Islanders in this way allowed for sailors to frame their interactions by the rules of a familiar playbook.

66 Ibid, 384.
There was no specific government policy shaping whalers’ attitudes to Pacific Islanders, there did not need to be. These attitudes were developed through a share cultural consensus. As Shoemaker in, *Native American Whalemen and the World*, “Standing on the decks of their whaleships, gazing on the verdant volcanic peaks, coral reefs, and sandy bays of a Pacific island, many Americans had in their heads a narrative that borrowed its content from the distant past, when Christopher Columbus, Samuel de Champlain, and John Smith encountered “Indians” on a beach and opened up the Americas to European settlement.” Shoemaker’s text focuses on the experiences of North American indigenous whalers in the Pacific world. She notes that even whalers who came from East Coast indigenous nations like the Quinnipiac or the Wampanoag, who in many cases where were not legally citizens under U.S. law, used this racialized language when describing Pacific Islanders in their sea journals. Shoemaker writes, “They depicted the people they encountered on the beach—called variously Indians, natives, and Kanakas—as primitive, exotic, naked, heathen (or newly missionized naive Christians), savage, and dark skinned.” Much like the development of U.S. industry in the pacific, the racialization of Pacific Islanders was a decentralized project.

As much as whaling was a commercial venture, whalers described their encroachment into the Pacific world and into Pacific communities in terms of civilizing mission. A whaler who shipped onboard the ship *Samuels* out of New Beford made detailed, near anthropological observations concerning South Pacific communities in his logbook, describing them with terms such as ‘natives,’ and ‘savages.’ He notes an island port they visit has “established is the use of money as a commonwealth the realm of which the natives have become very well acquainted with. The place was once inhabited with hordes of ferocious cannibals […] with the multitude of

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seamen touching here for supplies they have become practically civilized.” 69 This whaler demonstrates how many whalers conceptualized their commercial work in the Pacific as part of a colonial, civilizing mission. The logbook keeper on Samuels demonstrates how deeply rooted racial perceptions of Pacific islanders the way whalers reported on interactions between ships and shore in the Pacific. In many ways, whalers were dependent on Pacific communities for provisions and safe harbor. Particularly in the Arctic, Yankee whalers’ survival depended on local knowledge and whaling expertise.70 However, logbook keepers sought to reframe this relationship dependence into one of paternity.

While they were rarely as successful as Incidents of a Whaling Voyage, many logbooks and whalers accounts were published as a form of popular travel fiction. As historian Michael Dyer notes in his text on Yankee whaling artwork, whalers would sometimes decorate their logbooks in the style of a published book or pamphlet, and often titled their journals as if they were public rather than private documents. A whaler on an 1853 voyage wrote his ‘title page’ in pen and ink, mimicking the elaborate typeface “suggestive of the type of advertising broadsides from the period.” He gave his logbook the grand title “Where Liberty Lies There is My Home: William Ann Folgers Journal Onboard the Montello of Nantucket.” Also present in the hand-drawn title page is a banner emblazoned with the U.S. national motto “E plubus unum.” This, as Dyer argues, hints that Folger not only saw logbook keeping as potentially leading towards the production of a publishable document, but that he is framing the voyage itself as a patriotic act.

Among the most popular of the whalers’ accounts of the Pacific world was Herman Melville’s *Typee*. Although Melville’s later *Moby Dick or; the Whale*, would stand the test of time as a book of literary merit, *Typee* was by far the most commercially successful work Melville produced in his lifetime. It was read widely across the U.S and received positive reviews. The New Orleans Weekly Delta raved that the text was “as fascinating as De Foe’s ‘Robinson Crusoe,’” 72 and the *London Critic* wrote that “the picture he has drawn of Polynesian life and scenery, is incomparably the most vivid and forcible that has ever been laid before the public.” *Typee*, while noted as unusual by critics at the time for its prose and extensive philosophical interjections, is in many ways a classical example of the logbook-literature that came out of the whaling industry during the 19th century. The book, based of Melville’s year as a 'beachcomber’ in the Marquesas, after deserting the whaling ship he had shipped on, depicts a vivid image of Marquesan life. He opens the book with a rather lengthy reflection on the relationship between Pacific Islanders and whaling vessels: “Within the last few years, American and English vessels engaged in the extensive whale fisheries of the Pacific have occasionally, when short of provisions, put into the commodious harbour which there is in one of the islands; but a fear of the natives, founded on the recollection of the dreadful fate which many white men have received at their hands, has deterred their crews from intermixing with the population sufficiently to gain any insight into their peculiar customs and manners.” 73

Despite having spent years in the Marquesas Islands, Melville’s writings often sensationalize the Pacific world. The character of Queequeg in *Moby Dick* exemplifies this


73 Herman Melville, *Typee*, (Generic NL Freebook Publisher, 1998), 3.
tendency. Queequeg merely represents the other, the indigenous, the “savage”. Queequeg is Polynesian, but he carries a tomahawk, a North American ax. Queequeg worships an idol god, but Ishmael calls his worship “Ramadan.” Queequeg’s blurred identity is a poignant manifestation of the constructed vision of indigenous identity in the 19th century whaling industry. As represented by Queequeg’s tomahawk, a certain idea of the ‘native’ connected individuals from cultures as geographically removed the Great Plains of the Americas and the island chains of Polynesia.

These generalized ideas of race and identity present manifest in the character of Queequeg had many real-world repercussions in the way indigenous workers experienced the whaling industry. Shoemaker, in Native American Whalemen and the World, argues that the labor experience of East Coast indigenous whalers can be understood in terms of disjuncture: while indigenous whalers’ work onboard these ships was closely tied to colonial stereotypes around their whale hunting abilities, indigenous whalers used the industry as an opportunity to move beyond the restrictions typically placed upon them by colonial society. 74 Like Queequeg, who can harpoon a speck of whale oil on the surface of the New Bedford harbor, indigenous whalers from around the world were seen as ‘natural’ hunters. A missionary who was transported onboard a whale ship in 1831 wrote that, “Indians are first rate whale catchers, for it is in their nature to pursue the game.” 75 As Shoemaker describes, these racial stereotypes were self-fulfilling prophecies, with indigenous whamen often shunted into the role of boatsteerer and harpooner.

74 Shoemaker, Native American Whalemen, 195-6.
75 Ibid.
Power and Record: Logbook Keeping as Testimony


In the spring of 1861, the United States had broken out into civil war, a war that would become one of the most violent conflicts in the short history of the nation, and a war in many ways driven by conflicting ideologies of racial supremacy. The whaling bark *Cleone*, on a voyage from Hawai’i to the Bering Sea, had missed the news entirely. However, the crew of the *Cleone*, including twenty-five-year-old Robert Strout, were embroiled in a conflict of their own. They were stuck, for the next two years, onboard a small whaling bark, with a sadistic first mate and an incompetent captain. The story of the *Cleone* is recorded in Robert Strout’s logbook. Strout was a man of the whaling world and understood the power inherent in the act of documentation. He kept his logbook in secret, planning to use it as evidence against the captain and first mate when the ship returned to Hawai’i, in a sense inverting the typical power structure associated with knowledge collection in the industry. Through keeping this log, Strout reveals how logbook keeping could be employed as a tool of agency by whaling crews. Moreover, his
account of the conflict onboard the ship reveals how Pacific Islander workers onboard the ship and the communities they encountered in the Arctic bore the brunt of the violence doled out by the captain and mate. Strout’s narrative suggests that while the whaling logbook could be used as a tool to challenge the built-in hierarchies of the industry, this tool was not available for those who were not themselves part of the system of documentation, like Pacific Islander crew members.76

Short of mutiny, a worker on a whaling voyage with an abusive captain or officer could do very little. Whaling ships were organized like merchant and navy vessels of the same era: according to a strict hierarchy that placed officers in a position of complete control over the crew. Historian Briton Busch’s 2014 book *Whaling Will Never Do For Me*, compares the operation of a whaling ship to a well-run prison.77 Discipline was kept through flogging, or through putting men in irons, that is, restraining them on or below deck for sometimes days at a time.78 The only appeal a crew member might have to what might be called rights came from American consuls. Starting in the 1790’s, consuls were intended to mediate conflicts onboard vessels. However, they were often biased towards captains, particularly if a crew member had attempted to desert the ship, as that broke the legal contract the crew member signed at the start of the voyage. In the remote whaling grounds of the Pacific Arctic, seeking a consul was impossible, and even in a port like Honolulu, captains would do their best to prevent crew from reaching one. Busch relates an incident onboard the whale ship *Louisa Sears*, where a man was

78 Ibid.
flogged for making a request to meet with one. If a crew member was not recognized as an American citizen, like most members of indigenous North American nations, and all Pacific Island workers, they had no legal protections at all.

While whaleships were, in technicality, a meritocracy, that merit was often determined by colonial ideas of race. Onboard the Cleone, the official crew list records fourteen of the nineteen crew as “Dark skinned, dark haired.” However, almost all the men in positions of authority are white New Englanders. Historian James Farr, in a comparative study of shares onboard whaling ships, notes that black and indigenous New Englanders were not necessarily paid less than white whalers. However, they tended to be shunted into jobs that they were perceived to have a “natural” aptitude in. Indigenous whalers from New England were often pushed into jobs such as harpooner and boatsteerer, as they were thought to be more gifted hunters than white men. Black whalers were often pushed into service jobs like cook or steward, which, like harpooner, paid higher than the regular ‘man before the mast’ but offered little to no room for upward mobility within the vessels’ power structure. Farr quotes a whaling captain who wrote in 1836 that, “There are two men now at sea, who are fully qualified for masters of vessels, and first-rate whale men, but are obliged to serve as common sailors because of their color only.” Within the wider whaling industry, and onboard the Cleone, power was divided by lines of race.

Strout, as second mate on the Cleone and a white New Englander, existed at the top of the hierarchy of rank onboard the ship. Despite this position of relative power, he was unable to escape the problem of an abusive superior. His logbook records his growing frustration with the

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79 Ibid., 28.
80 Busch, Whaling Will Never Do, 66.
captain, Simmons, and the mate, Mr. Chase. Strout took particular distaste in the fact that Mr. Chase was an outsider to the industry, writing that Mr. Chase was “a man whose only recommendation was a merchant mate,” and that “he was no more use aboard the ship then a calico merchant from the country.” Strout, at several points in the log, indicated that he viewed the mates’ incompetence a worse flaw that his cruelty. Strout found himself threatened with irons after an incident where he accused the mate of treating him like a boatsteerer, or, in other words, being instructed to perform duties belonging to someone beneath Strout in the labor hierarchy. Strout was then confined to a small room below deck for three days. It was then he began the task of the careful documentation of the mishaps of the captain and mate, writing that he saw it as his duty “to vindicate my character and warn the whaling community against such men.”

Strout’s account reveals a disproportionate impact of the captain and mate’s abuses of power on Pacific Island workers, and likewise his own apathy towards this violence. He notes that the mate would “discipline” these workers out of what seems to be boredom, Strout noting “He would knock down a Kanaka or two and make a pass at two or three more… this was just to show the Capt. S. that he was just the man he told him he was.” Where Strout is clear to explicitly state his disproval at the disciplining of white crew members, it is clear that while he viewed it as unpleasant, he did not view the mistreatment of Hawai’ian men in the same way as the mistreatment of white men. He even notes “I told him if he was going to abuse them men who came from home in the ship, he would get himself into trouble … he took my advice and never struck a white man while he was in the ship.” In the whaling industry, abuse towards Pacific Islanders was commonplace. Historian Gregory Rosenthal argues that white whalers justified violent treatment of Pacific Islanders by constructing ideas of the Hawai’ian worker

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83 Robert Strout, Robert Bruce Strout Journals, Mystic Seaport.
84 Ibid.
being prone to idleness, although, as he notes, often the violence needed no justification at all. Although Strout does note that he attempted to warn Chase against hitting the Hawai’ian workers, he describes the mate’s treatment of Pacific Islander crew as evidence of his erratic behavior, rather than cruelty.

In a similar way, Strout records, but does not condemn, the mistreatment of members of Yupik villagers at the hands of the captain. Strout describes, in explicit terms, that he views Yupik as his inferiors. Even while depending on Yupik hunters for information on the movement of whales, he dismisses their hunting techniques, writing “They trust to luck a great deal and it is a miracle how they live.” He criticizes their religious beliefs, as well as their manner of dress, writing. In relation to his testimony against the Captain, Strout tells a story of another side of the whaling industry’s relationship with the Yupik villages, a story of sexual exploitation. The captain, Strout relates, purchased a young girl from her parents for forty dollars, and proceeded to keep her confined in his cabin for the whole season. Strout’s purpose in relating this story is to emphasize the captain’s moral failings and infidelity to his American wife, writing “what a beautiful sight for Mrs. Simmons #1 to have seen them.” Strout demonstrates that within the social mores of the whaling world, rape was acceptable, where infidelity was not.

Strout, from his relatively high position within the hierarchy of the whaling world, was able to use the whaling logbook as a means to vindicate himself and hold the Captain and mate accountable for their mis-management of the ship. A few months out of the Arctic, once the ship had reach Honolulu, Strout went to the American Consul. Strout wrote at the end of his journal that captain Simmons accused him of attempted desertion, and insisted that he be jailed, but after Strout provided his account, the Consul ordered Simmons to give him his discharge. After he

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85 Rosenthal, Beyond Hawai’i, 60.
86 Robert Strout, Robert Bruce Strout Journals, Mystic Seaport.
was absolved of Simmon’s charges in Hawaiʻi, Strout continued his career in the maritime sector, going on to become a captain himself in the West India trade. Strout did not forget his whaling days, or the power inherent in record collection. In his old age, he used the accounts stored in his logs in another way, touring around New York State delivering lectures on his experiences as a whaler. His obituary noted that “his audiences were quite large” and were “deeply interested […] in the capture of great sea monsters” that he described. 87

**Conclusion: Rescripting Knowledge Collection**

During the winter of 1876, two whalers overwintered in the Inupiat community of Utiqagvik. Charles Kealoha of Hawaiʻi and Kenala, from Tahiti, were the only two survivors of nineteen Hawai’ian mutineers, who had turned against their New Englander captain onboard the ship *Desmond* at the start of the winter. After the ship became stuck in the ice, the captain had ordered the crew to trek to land. The Hawai’ian whalers refused. Keloha, who would go on to publish an account of his experience in the Hawai’ian language newspaper *La Lahui Hawaiʻi*, recalls that they had hoped to still navigate the ship out of the ice, but ultimately failed. Keloha and Kenala made the decision to make for land on their own. After a long journey across the ice, they eventually reached Utiqagvik. Keloha described being taken in by an Inupiat family for the duration of the winter. Kenela was taken in by another family, and the two appear to have had a positive experience, although they struggled with the harsh weather conditions and the language and cultural barrier. At the end of the winter the families they stayed with persuaded Inupiat boatmen from the village to take them to a passing whaleship. The story of Keloha and Kenala demonstrates how, towards the end of the 19th century, Pacific peoples began to adopt and

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87 Robert Strout, Robert Bruce Strout Journals, Mystic Seaport.
transform tools of knowledge collection, refashioning the whalers’ logbook and the whalers’ narrative in a way that challenged colonial hierarchies.  

While whaling logbooks have preserved the perspectives of thousands of U.S. whalers, on the daily level, throughout the whole of the 19th century, there has been an unequal recording of the perspective of the other “side of the beach,” of how Pacific peoples understood the encounter between the whaling industry and the Pacific world. Charles Keloha’s published account of the mutiny on the *Desmond* and his stay in Utiqagvik, as well as the lost journal where he initially recorded his recollections, demonstrate how indigenous whalers could take up and transform the tools of knowledge collection. Historian Susan Lebo notes that the greatest difference between Hawai’ian accounts of the 1876 disaster, in newspapers and in official testimonies, and western accounts, is that Hawai’ian record keepers used these stories to emphasize a sense of Hawai’ian identity. On returning home to Hawai’i a few months later, Keloha writes that he sung a *mele* when he saw the shore for the first time, which ended with the lines: “I have arrived returned from death, and again breathing the fresh air of my birth land.”

Keloha’s narrative reveals how, as the nineteenth century drew to a close, the tools of colonial knowledge collection were rescripted by Hawai’ian whalers to serve their own projects, creating their own narratives of life in the Pacific world. While the vast majority of Pacific Islander who labored in the whaling industry remain undocumented, like those recorded in the back of Resolvid Bowles’ journal, stories like Keloha’s illustrates the many ways the power of knowledge collection could be utilized. Hawai’ian language newspapers, although not utilized in

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89 Shoemaker, *Native American Whalemen*.
90 Lebo, “Two Hawaiian Documents,” 279.
this study, likely contain other records of Pacific Islander whalers who utilized knowledge collection.

Following the arrival of the first Yankee whaleship in the Kingdom of Hawai’i in 1819, the Yankee whaling industry drove the expansion of U.S. imperial power on an ocean frontier. A century of industry left behind permanent marks. From Cape Horn to the Bering Sea, whaling fleets depleted the Pacific its whales,’ driving many species to “commercial extinction” by the end of the century. In ecological terms, whales are K-selected species, long to live and slow to reproduce, biologically incompatible with the intensive methods of Yankee whalers. Some species, such as the North Pacific Right Whale, with an estimated fifty individuals in the current population, have never recovered. 91 These Pacific whales filled the coffers of New England towns. Whaleships depended on nations across the Pacific to supply provisions. As with other U.S. industries in the Pacific, like sandalwood and guano, the whaling industry employed thousands of Pacific peoples. Without the same rights to shares and legal protections as the American sailor, Pacific peoples were a cheap solution to the labor-intensive process of harvesting whale blubber from the sea. Yet whale oil and labor were not the only resource extracted from the Pacific world.

Within the whalers’ logbook was another kind of commodity: data. Information on the Pacific world had value, even if it was not something that could be sold directly on the market. As the stories of the Grand Panorama, Olmsted’s Incidents of a Whaling Voyage, Melville’s Typee, and even Strout’s late life sojourn as a lecturer reveal, there was often great commercial value in whalers’ narratives. Map makers like Maury relied on logbooks as a source of navigational data, both incidentally recorded through the process of practicing celestial

navigation, and intentionally gathered. In their logbooks, whalers’ constructed ideologies of race and civilization, that had profound impacts on the lives of Pacific peoples both within and outside of the industry. Studying whaling logbooks as epistemological tools reveals a part of the decentralized process of spreading U.S. influence in the 19th century Pacific world.

Word Count: 12456
Acknowledgments

I owe a huge amount of thanks to the people who have helped me develop this project over the last two years. I have had two academic advisors on this project, Professor Sabin, and Professor Peterson, who have both provided me with resources and advice throughout this last summer and school year. I also owe a great deal to Dr. James Kessenides, the Kaplanoff Librarian for American History at Sterling Memorial Library, who had assisted me with research on all things whaling related since early 2022. The staff at the archives I have visited, including Yale Manuscripts and Archives, the Yale Peabody, the Yale Center for British Art, the Haas Arts Library, the Mystic Seaport Museum, the New Bedford Whaling Museum, and the Portsmouth Athenaeum, made it possible for me to access a wide range of materials, and guided me with many bits of research advice along the way. Much of this would have been impossible without the Senior Exhibit Fellowship team, including Kerri Sandcomb and Sarah Davis, who have supported me in research and in my connected exhibit project. I also owe thanks to the staff at Benjamin Franklin College for funding my initial research back in 2022, and Professor Lindskog for signing off to be my faculty supervisor during that time. Last of all, I would like to thank Lily O’Sullivan, Lesley Finn, and Hamish Laird for their help with the final writing stages of this project.
Bibliographic Essay

My senior essay focuses on log books used in the Yankee whaling industry in the mid-19th century. I have been researching the role of a logbook as a tool for collecting and disseminating information. Specifically, my project investigates the role of the whaling logbook documenting and describing the Pacific world for a western audience. I have written about the role logbook keepers played in gathering cartographic, geographic, and anthropological information about the Pacific. I am interested in the way the logbook was used as a tool for the collection of knowledge, and how this knowledge collection both served the colonial and imperialist goals of the U.S. state and impacted western views of indigenous peoples in the Pacific. As a conclusion, I look at the role of indigenous workers in the industry,

I came to the topic of the 19th century Yankee whaling industry out of an interest in studying the intersections between environment and labor. I had become interested in scholarship on the history of the ways humans described their environment, such as scholar Raymond William’s text *Ideas of Nature*. At the start of my sophomore year, I read Richard White’s *The Organic Machine*. This text transformed the way I thought about environmental history and labor history - the text not only introduces the idea that workers can come to understand their environment through their labor, but the idea that specific environments shape the way people organize their societies and interpret the world around them. The same year, I read several other texts that discussed the relationship between environment, labor, and culture, including Thomas Andrew’s text *Killing For Coal*, which argues that the specific environment of the coal mine helped shape the history of the U.S. labor movement in the 19th and 20th centuries. Another influential text was Timothy Mitchell’s *Carbon Democracy*, which discussed connections between environment, labor and political organization.
I came to whaling out of an interest in studying the relationship between environment and labor in such a transient industry, after being introduced to it as a period of history in Bathsheba Demuth’s *A Floating Coast* that same semester. My initial research project began with the Manuscripts and Archives Whaling Logs Collection. I approached these logs with the idea of finding out the ways whaler’s described the natural world around them, with the hope that this could help me understand the labor experience onboard whale ships. Heavily influenced by authors of land-based extractive industries, such as Andrews, and Mitchells, I perhaps failed to see the vagueness of this research inquiry in regards to the whaling world. Andrews and Mitchells analysis of the connections between environment and labor focused on the role the coal-mine environment played in creating concret social movements. In an analysis of a more transient industry – with a constantly “moving” environment – the experience of laborers was less tied to place. Still wanting to investigate the relationship to environment and the experience of laborers, I needed to adapt my framework from the way that Andres and Mitchells had approached it. However, I struggled to do this.

The need to shift my framework became more evident as I spent the summer of my sophomore year reading widely from the Yale, Mystic, and New Bedford archives. I had gone to the research looking to find whalers writings that demonstrated, in White’s words, “knowing nature through labor.” Coming from historiographies of coal mining, I expected to find evidence for some sort of worker solidarity that connected to a certain way of understanding the environment. In a sense, I found part of what I was looking for. Whalers write extensively about their environment. In logbooks and private journal entries, nearly every day begins with an account of the weather, often with the cardinal wind speed, or even theorizing on ocean currents. However, the way whalers recorded their natural environment did not, at that time, seem to have
any larger historical implications - it was formulaic, with a remarkable consistency in terms of word choice, more like data entry than anything else. For a few logs, I wrote down every mention of weather or the environment in an excel spreadsheet - something the repetition of description made mind numbing. I now knew what words a 19th century whaler would typically use to describe an environment - weather could be “thick,” “fair,” or “heavy.” Yet, at that time, I could not formulate exactly why this mattered. I felt as if all I had found was some sort of negative proof of the Andrews and Mitchells theories - the formulaic writings of whalers, rather than showing a connection between the workers and their environment, seemed to suggest that they were alienated from it. The whaling industry, fragmented as it was into thousands of small, isolated crews, never had any large social labor movements.

As my junior year began, my focus shifted away from weather. I began to focus on another aspect of the industry that appeared time and time again in primary sources: labor hierarchy. The whaling industry was structured around hierarchy. Its traces could be seen throughout the archive, from the crew lists, with vast discrepancies in wages according to rank, to ships plans, which showed how rank impacted the physical space allotted to the crew. These hierarchies are visible in the archive itself, where the bulk of materials belong to wealthy members of officers. In a history class that semester, I centered a research paper around a whaler’s journal I had found in the Mystic archives. Written by a dissatisfied third mate, who hoped to present the journal as testimony against his captain to the U.S. consul in Hawai`i, the journal exemplifies the ways hierarchy ruled the lived experience of workers in the whaling industry. The third mate describes how the crew suffered alternatingly from abuses and incompetence at the hands of captain and first mate. The conditions described are comparable to forced labor on modern-day deep sea fishing vessels, and unlike in the official log books where I
had begun my research, this source offered not only narration of events but personal commentary.

While working on this research paper in my junior year, I worked with many texts that discussed the social history of the whaling industry. Texts such as Howard Kushner's *Hellships*, and Briton Busch’s *Whaling Will Never Do For Me* considered how the isolated environment of the industry, governed as it was by strict hierarchies, created conditions for the abuse of workers. These authors also suggest that the hierarchies in the whaling industry were in part held up by what almost might be described as culture; hierarchies on ships were upheld not only by rules, but by tradition. These authors introduced me to the study of racial dynamics onboard whale ships. Whaling crews were diverse both racially and culturally, something that I had found time and time again in the archives. Viewing these same primary sources with more context, I was able to return to my primary sources and see how race operated within the whaling hierarchy. While technically, the whaling ship was a meritocracy, power, and by extension, wealth, was usually held by the members of white New England whaling families.

The work of historian Nancy Shoemaker was particularly important in shaping my understanding of race in the whaling world. I had the chance to meet with Dr. Shoemaker that same year. Our discussion, and her writings, introduced the idea that these social dynamics relating to race in the industry were part of a larger story of the whaling industry as an imperial force in the South Pacific and Arctic. This was something I had seen in many primary sources, such as logbooks, private journals, and even letters. The whaling industry depended on indigenous communities in the South Pacific and Arctic for supplies and labor. The journal written by the third mate on the Arctic voyage, mentioned above, referenced both South Pacific islanders working on the vessel, and several Inupiat and Unungax communities they visited for
food and provisions. Writings by white U.S. whalers show that indigenous peoples were valued for their labor, but seen as intrinsically other, and are often generically referred to as “natives” no matter what their provenance. In *Indigenous Whalemen and the World* Nancy Shoemaker argues that this othering extended to Black and Indigenous whalers from the continental U.S. - they could be valued for their skills, but cultural perceptions typically prevented them from moving up through the hierarchy.

At this point in my research, I felt as if I had gone in a bit of a circle. I had moved away from studying whaling culture in terms of how they saw their environment, in order to study what I saw as the more concrete topic of labor dynamics. Yet, when I researched whaling labor historiography in more depth, I found that many historians saw industry culture as a key piece in shaping the experiences of whalers.

The summer before my senior year, I started work on designing an exhibit centered around the Whaling Logs Collection for Sterling Library. For the first time since the previous summer, I began to seriously consider the logbook as a source. Since I abandoned weather, I had chiefly used logbooks to prop up other sources such as private journals. Coming back to these logbooks after having studied the whaling industry as a colonial enterprise, radically altered my reading of them. I became fascinated with their formulaic structure, which seemed evocative of the strict social structures that governed so much of whaling life. Coming to these sources with this broader context, I began to consider the role they played in the colonial project, and in shaping the labor dynamics onboard whaleships.

In my senior essay, I focus on the whaling logbook as a tool for collecting knowledge. As well as historians of the whaling world, I draw on historians of knowledge collection in colonial contexts, such as J. B. Harley, in his article “New England Cartography and the Native
American,” and Susan Schulten’s book, *The Geographical Imagination in America, 1880–1950.* I see this collection process as twofold. The formulaic entry in the logbook functions to organize information about weather patterns, ocean currents, and the range and distribution of target species. In the Beinecke library, charts of weather patterns and whale habitat compiled from whaling logbook data in the mid-19th century are a testimony to the importance of this role. The logbook collected another kind of information, information on the indigenous nations of the South Pacific and the Arctic. This information was not only valuable to government officials and missionaries, but also had a large popular audience. For the U.S. government, information gathered in logbooks shaped policy and political interest in the region. For the public, stories of this new “frontier” of American industry provided entertainment and insight into a world widely seen as “exotic.” Texts and artwork based on whalers’ accounts had a wide audience in the continental U.S. In my senior essay, I argue that the process of knowledge collection in the logbooks established a cultural understanding of these communities within the western world and within the whaling industry itself.

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