

**AMERICA'S FIRST WHALING INDUSTRY
AND THE WHALER YEOMEN OF CAPE MAY**

1630-1830

by

RICHARD M. ROMM

A thesis submitted to the

Graduate School-Camden

Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of Master of Arts

Graduate Program in American History

written under the direction of

Professor Philip Scranton

and approved by

Professor Philip Scranton

Camden, New Jersey, May 2010

Abstract

American whaling began in Delaware Bay—not in Cape Cod, as is commonly believed. The whale fishery began as a Dutch whaling colony at Lewes, Delaware in 1631. The history of Delaware Bay’s whale fishery is disjointed, with a half century lull before any whaling on the north shore of the bay began at Cape May by whalers from Long Island in the 1680s and 1690s. Whaling proved to be a valuable asset to the colonial economy of West Jersey; the whaling trade built elite family dynasties on the Jersey Cape that lasted for generations. As these families prospered, through the sale of whale oil, blubber and baleen to Philadelphia and beyond, they succeeded, unlike their fellow colonists in Southern slave societies, in producing a vibrant, diverse economy. They engaged in everything from oyster to sturgeon fishing, cedar mining to cattle raising, shipbuilding to knitting mittens. Not only did the whaler yeomen flourish, many were able to increase their land holdings, establish plantations, purchase slaves and endow their families with great wealth. Most importantly, the people of Cape May participated fully in the colonial economy, trading with merchants not only in Philadelphia, but throughout the mid-Atlantic and southern colonies, New England, the West Indies and Europe.

Dutch Period

In April 1609, the Dutch East India Company commissioned British sea captain Henry Hudson to find a Northwest Passage to India and China. The motivations behind this request were numerous. The Spanish controlled the Strait of Gibraltar and the Ottoman Turks controlled the Mediterranean Sea. Unfriendly to foreign mariners, both empires charged excessive fees, searched ships and seized cargo at will. In addition, piracy was rampant in the Mediterranean. The Silk Road, which was the overland route from Constantinople to the East Indies, was fraught with peril for European traders. The Dutch Republic had recently signed a peace treaty with the Spanish Empire, which resulted in an uneasy truce. The New World, opened by Spain and Portugal over a century before, offered hope to northern Europeans who sought a safer and faster way to the East Indies by way of Cape Hope, thereby avoiding penetration of the Islamic Caliphate and circumnavigation of the continent of Africa.

Hudson set sail days before Spanish and Dutch diplomats signed the Treaty of Antwerp, ushering in 12 years of peace between the Empire and the Republic.¹ Whaling was already on the minds of Henry Hudson, often referred to as “the Navigator,” and his Dutch patroons (patrons). On June 27, 1607, during his first voyage in search of a Northwest Passage on behalf of the company, Hudson sighted “Newland” (i.e., Spitzbergen) near Greenland.

On August 28, 1609, Hudson sailed into the Delaware Bay, one year shy of English navigator Samuel Argall’s exploration of the bay and river, which were named for Virginia Governor Thomas West, the 12th Baron de la Warr. Hudson then sailed to

¹ David Armitage, “Making the Empire British: Scotland in the Atlantic World, 1542-1707,” *Past and Present* (Number 155, May 1997), 52-53.

New Amsterdam and up the river that he modestly called “North River,” but which would eventually bear his name.

In 1620, Cape May was named for Cornelius Jacobsz Mey, the first governor of New Netherland who is credited with the discovery of the Cape, although the name was later corrupted to “May.” Mey led an expedition to the region from 1614-1616, and in 1620, Mey entered Delaware and carefully examined the land along the bay and river. After his return to Holland, his exploits were publicized, and his adventures spurred others to sail the seaward path to Delaware.

For decades, the Dutch had enjoyed success in whaling enterprises in Spitzbergen, an island near Greenland in the North Atlantic:

When Henry Hudson found the bowhead whales near Spitzbergen, Dutchmen became wild over the idea of making fortunes from blubber. To ‘strike oil’ in the sea was their one idea. In 1611 the Greenland and Northern whaling Company was formed in Holland. Smeerenburg or ‘Grease Town’ was for many years a famous Dutch settlement in Spitzbergen. Before the century closed, nearly three hundred Dutch ships, manned by fifteen thousand sailors, caught a thousand whales annually.²

Whaling fleets commanded by Dutch, English, Basque and Hamburg sea captains had been hunting whales in the North Atlantic for centuries. By the end of the 17th century, the lucrative whaling trade was dominated by the Dutch, who supplied all of Europe with oil during the latter half of the 17th century, employing in 1680 as many as 260 ships and approximately 14,000 men.³ At the same time, the Lenni Lenapes on the north shore of Delaware Bay, which is modern-day Cape May, was purchased, extending along the bay for sixteen miles. This purchase was made by the Dutch governor of New Amsterdam,

² William Elliott Griffis, *The Story of New Netherland, The Dutch in America* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1909) Chapter VII, “The Patroons and the Manors,” 67.

³ Paul Sturtevant Howe, *Mayflower Pilgrim Descendants in Cape May County* (Cape May, NJ: Albert R. Hand, 1921) 15.

Wouter Van Twiller, who was acting as an agent for Samuel Bloemart and Samuel Godyn. Bloemart and Godyn were rich and powerful patroons of the Dutch West India Company, the premier European trading company in North America at the time. Their single purpose was to establish a whaling station in New Netherland.⁴

Samuel Godyn was President of the Amsterdam Chamber of the Dutch West India Company, and it had been reported to Godyn by the New Netherland governor Peter Minuet that whales were plentiful in Delaware Bay. The use of whale oil for fuel lamps and as a lubricant made whale oil a desirable commodity in Holland. Patroons Godyn, Kiliaen Van Rensselaer and Samuel Bloemart notified the Dutch West India Company on January 13, 1629 that they were sending Gillis Housset (Hossitt) and Jacob Janz Kuyper, “with the intention, in case they made a favorable report to their honors, of planting a colony there.”⁵

In June 1629, Hossitt purchased land from the Ciconicins, the Algonquian-speaking Indians of Lewes,⁶ on behalf of the patroons for the founding of Swanendael colony. This sale was the first Indian land sale in the state of Delaware.

In 1630, Godyn met David Petersz De Vries, a noted navigator, in Amsterdam. Godyn asked him to go to New Netherland as the commander of a ship and a yacht equipped for whale fishing. Godyn told De Vries that there were many whales “which kept before the bay, — that oil brought sixty guilders a hogshead [a unit of measure], making good profit, and consequently that fine country would be cultivated.”⁷

⁴ Henry Charlton Beck, *More Forgotten Towns of Southern New Jersey* (New York: E.P. Dutton and Company, 1937) 155-160.

⁵ William J. Cohen, *Swanendael In New Netherland: The Early History Of Delaware's Oldest Settlement At Lewes* (Wilmington, DE: Cedar Tree Books, 2004) 37.

⁶ Cohen, *Swanendael*, 37-8.

⁷ Jeannette Edwards Rattray, Tom Twomey, *Discovering the Past: Writings of Jeannette Edwards Rattray, 1893-1974* (New York: New Market Press, 2001) 10.

By October 1, 1630, ten patroons were involved in the whaling venture in Delaware Bay, including Captain De Vries, who was hailed as “a bold and skillful seaman.” Godyn and his associates commissioned Heyes to master their ship, *De Walvis* (*The Whale*). Gillis Hossitt was employed as the agent in charge of the colony. De Vries explained that the main purpose in establishing the Swanendael settlement was “to carry on the whale fishery in that region, and to plant a colony for cultivation of all sorts of grain, for which the country is very well suited, and of tobacco.”⁸

The *De Walvis* left Holland on December 12, 1630, with a total of 80 persons and cargo of lime, bricks, tiles, horses, cows and other provisions. Among the settlers were bricklayers, carpenters, farmers and harpooners who could catch whales and refine their blubber.⁹ En route to New Netherland, the *De Walvis* discharged some passengers in the West Indies. The ship disembarked in the spring of 1631 at Bloemart’s Kill (at the time called “Godyn’s Bay,” later renamed “Hoorncill,” now called “Lewes Creek”) on Delaware Bay, having missed the winter whaling season.

The whaling enterprise in the Delaware Bay under Dutch authority was not successful. In fact, a year after they were sent, the 30 colonists who sailed in the initial voyage to the Dutch settlement at Swanendael (Lewes, Delaware) were massacred by Indians. Furthermore, in his journal, Captain David Petersen De Vries, the adventuresome sea captain chosen by the patroons to revive the whaling station in the New World, reported that despite several attempts the following winter, few whales had been caught and far more had evaded their harpoons. De Vries told New Netherland Governor Wouter Van Twiller in New Amsterdam that the South Bay (Delaware Bay)

⁸ Cohen, *Swanendael*, 39.

⁹ Cohen, *Swanendael*, 40.

whale venture was a failure. After learning of this news, the patroons in Holland abandoned their plans for a whaling station in New Netherland. Before long, the Dutch moved further up the Delaware River and established Fort Casimir (New Castle). This settlement was not set up for whaling; its primary function was to trade furs for wampum with the Indians.

Another Dutch adventurer, named Peter Heyser (alternatively spelled Heyes), sailed into the bay in 1631 and formed a colony near Lewes, Delaware. Although his mission was to establish trade with the Indians, he was also interested in attempting to catch whales. Unfortunately, his attempt at whaling failed, probably due to the inexperience of this particular set of colonists.¹⁰

Nevertheless, to the surprise of many, coastal whaling by Europeans in America began in the Delaware Bay. To be precise, it began at Lewes, Delaware (Hoorndel) on June 3, 1631, with the establishment of a whaling colony near Cape Henlopen on the south side of the mouth of the Delaware. Swanendael, a Dutch term meaning “Valley of the Swans,” was founded by a crew of 28 men, commanded by Captain Peter Heyser onboard the seafaring vessel *De Walvis*.¹¹

In September 1631, Captain Heyser departed for Amsterdam to report back to the patroons. He reported that the whaling season lasted from December to March, and *De Walvis* arrived in Delaware Bay too late for whaling. Thus, Captain De Vries led a second expedition to Delaware Bay. He sailed in *De Walvis* with 50 men accompanied

¹⁰ Harry Hallman, Jr., “Whaling in Cape May and the Delaware Bay,” pamphlet published for The Rigging Loft (“nautical,” “decoratives”) and Shoemaker Inc., Box 258, Fisherman’s Wharf, Cape May, NJ (Jenkintown, PA: Photo Communications, 1971).

¹¹ David Petersz De Vries, Henry Cruse Murphy, trans., *Voyages from Holland to America, A.D. 1632-1644* (New York: Billin and Brothers, Printers, 1853) 35.

by the yacht *Teencoortgen* (*Little Squirrel*) and approached the Delaware Bay on December 5, 1632.¹²

In his ‘Voyages from Holland to America, 1632-1644,’ published in 1655, De Vries described further attempts at whaling in New Netherland:

1632—February 12—We again entered into agreement to equip a ship and yacht for the whale fishing, in which not much profit had been realized. But S. Godyn encouraged us to make another attempt. He said the Greenland Company had two bad voyages with Willem Van Muyen, and afterwards became a thrifty company. It was therefore again resolved to undertake a voyage for the whale fishery, and that I myself should go as a patroon, and as commander of the ship and yacht; and should endeavor to be there in December, in order to conduct the whale fishing during the winter as the whales come in the winter and remain until March.

Sept. 12—Caught a whale.¹³

De Vries wrote in his diary entry of December 5, 1632, “Anchored in South [Delaware] Bay. Saw whale. Thought this would be royal work—the whales so numerous—and the land so fine for cultivation.” But the very next day, he found Swanendael “almost burnt up. Found lying here and there the skulls and bones of our people whom they [the Indians] had killed, and the heads of the horses and cows which they had brought with them.”¹⁴

De Vries gave the reason for the massacre, which he gleaned from the Indians. The Dutch had erected a column on which they had fastened a piece of tin painted with the arms of Holland. An Indian chief took this tin emblem off of the column to make tobacco pipes, not understanding his offense. The Dutchmen then slew the Indian chief who had removed the tin emblem. Some accounts claim the Indians killed the chief. The rationale for why Indians would have killed their own chief is unclear. The Dutchman in

¹² Cohen, *Swanendael*, 41.

¹³ De Vries, *Voyages*, 23.

¹⁴ Cohen, *Swanendael*, 41-2.

command regretted their actions, wishing they had instead forbidden the chief from committing the same act again; however, the deed was done. As a result of this act, the three bravest Indians in the tribe entered the Dutch fort with beaver skins to trade as a ruse, and then they proceeded to slaughter all of the settlers. One by one, the men and women in the fields were shot, the horses and cattle killed, and the houses and palisades were set on fire. The next day, the sun rose on blackened ruins and scattered corpses resulting from the massacre.¹⁵

In January 1633, De Vries and his men made “preparations to send our sloop to sea, and to set up a kettle for whale-oil.” His diary continued with whale sightings and catches that produced meager amounts of oil:

1633—Jan. 1—Saw whale at the mouth of South River.

Jan. 2—Saw two large whales near the yacht. Wished much that we could have had the sloop, with the harpooners, which was lying at Swanendael.

Jan. 11—Saw whale, eight miles up into fresh water.

Jan. 13—We came to the ship; found they had shot two whales, but they furnished little oil.¹⁶

In March 1633, De Vries attempted whaling in the Delaware Bay. This whaling adventure was a failure due to faulty equipment. De Vries penned the first account of capturing whales in “Zuydt Bay,” the Dutch name for the Delaware:

March 29, 1633—Again in the South Bay—our people had caught seven whales, but only thirty-two cartels of oil obtained. The whale fishery is very expensive when such meager fish are caught. Could have done more with good harpooners, for out of seventeen fish struck, they only secured seven, which is astonishing. They had always struck the whales in the tail. —I afterwards understood from some Basques, who were old whale-fishers, that they always struck the harpoon in the fore-part of the back.

¹⁵ Cohen, *Swanendael*, 43-4.

¹⁶ De Vries, *Voyages*, 55. Translation edited by Jeanette Edwards Rattray and Tom Twomey, *Discovering the Past: Writings of Jeanette Edwards Rattray, 1893-1974* (New York: Newmarket Press, 2001) 11. Rattray was the foremost modern historian of East Hampton, Long Island, New York.

April 16—Anchored at Fort Amsterdam. The Governor, Wouter Van Twiller, inquired how the whale fishery had succeeded. I answered him that I had a sample; but that they were foolish who undertook the whale fishery here at such great expense when one, two or three sloops at New Netherland could have ascertained whether there was good fishing or not.”¹⁷

One must pause here and ask why colonial historians of the Mid-Atlantic suffer from such historical amnesia around the tragic story of America’s very first whale fisheries. If there is no concrete documented evidence of an established whale fishery prior to 1631, then why is the role of the Dutch whale fishery on Delaware Bay missing from so many historical narratives of the American whaling industry? I propose an explanation. In the 19th century and throughout the first half of the 20th century, there was an undeniable bias favoring the primacy of New England in the retelling of America’s past. Historian Joyce Goodfriend wrote the following:

New Englanders dominated the writing of American history from the early republic onward. With a deeply rooted historical consciousness dating back to the seventeenth century, a pervasive print culture, and the nation’s first historical society (the Massachusetts Historical Society, established in 1791), New Englanders enjoyed a decisive advantage in pushing their story into the national limelight.¹⁸

Second, the history and myths of the Mayflower, pilgrims and Thanksgiving crowded out the histories of the 1607 landings of the Susan Constant, Godspeed and Discovery at Jamestown; the 1609 landing of the Halve Maen at New Amsterdam; the 1638 landing of the Kalmar Nyckel in New Sweden; and the 1682 landing of The Welcome at New Castle, Delaware. As a result, the voyage of 102 Pilgrims from

¹⁷ De Vries, *Voyages*, 55.

¹⁸ Joyce D. Goodfriend, “Present at the Creation,” *Early American Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* (Volume 7, Number 2, fall 2009) 260.

Southampton to Plymouth and their dealings with Indians became the dominant founding myth of the American nation.¹⁹

Goodfriend examined the efforts of Dutch Americans, hoping to illuminate the contributions of these settlers and weave a richer tapestry of America's past. In an address to the Holland Society in 1818, Gulian Crommelin Verplanck, a direct descendent of Abraham Isaacse Verplanck, was quoted, "I know not whence it is that we in this country have imbibed much of the English habit of arrogance and injustice towards the Dutch character."²⁰ Verplanck "had settled in New Amsterdam in the 1630s, expanded on the achievements of the Dutch, but he reserved his spleen for the bias of the English."²¹

Another scholar who was anxious to restore the Dutch story to American history was John Romeyn Brodhead, a man of mixed English-Dutch ancestry who suggested an explanation for the general oversight of Dutch settlers by many historians:

"The disgracefully neglected condition in which our earliest archives were formerly suffered to remain, ignorance of the Dutch language, an inherited or imitative spirit of supercilious depreciation of everything Dutch, which, with some brilliant exceptions, seems to have infected so many writers in our own country, especially those of New England."²²

While it is clear that New England ethnocentrism and a lack of interest in Dutch history in America played a role in obscuring the story of the Delaware Bay whale

¹⁹ Clinton Alfred Weslager, *A Man and His Ship: Peter Minuit and the Kalmar Nyckel* (Wilmington, DE: Kalmar Nyckel Foundation, 1989).

²⁰ Goodfriend, "Present at the Creation," 261.

²¹ Goodfriend, "Present at the Creation," 261.

²² John Romeyn Brodhead, "Oration of the Conquest of New Netherland: On Its Two-Hundredth Anniversary," (New York: The New York Historical Society, 1864) 54.

fishery, a second possible answer to explain this historical amnesia is the sudden demise of the early Dutch effort. In many ways this movement ended immediately after it began. All of Swanendael's earliest whalers were massacred by Indians. All told, the Dutch were engaged in whaling in the Delaware Bay for only two years. It was not until the late 17th century that whalers from Long Island would usher in the great age of whaling at Cape May.

Dutch merchants, disgruntled with the monopoly on trade imposed by the Dutch West India Company, persuaded the Swedish crown to support an enterprise in the New World. This enterprise would be known as New Sweden. Dutch, Swedes, Finns, Walloons and Germans participated in this venture. It should then come as no surprise that Peter Minuet, the Director of the Dutch West India Company, became the first governor of the colony of New Sweden. Swedes and Finns in this colony farmed the land and traded with local Indians in settlements on both sides of the Delaware River.²³

In 1647, New Sweden Governor Johan Printz took note of the numerous whales in Delaware Bay, but he lamented that he did not have the men to capture them. He wrote in a report that was sent back to Sweden, "the country is well suited for all sorts of cultivation; also for whale fishery and wine, if someone was here who understood the business." There is no evidence that the Swedes engaged in whaling near their settlements along the Delaware Bay, but whales were clearly abundant in the area.²⁴

In the following year, 1648, English explorer Sir Robert Evelin explored the southern cape of New Jersey, which was, at the time, part of the New Albion Colony and

²³ James P. Hand, President of the Cape May County Historical and Genealogical Society. Interview, February 5, 2010.

²⁴ Albert Cook Myers, ed., *Narratives of Early Pennsylvania, West Jersey and Delaware, 1630-1707* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1912) 121.

today includes modern-day New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Maryland. Evelin's description of the region in a letter published in Plantagenet's New Albion mentions, "much variety and plenty of delicate fresh and sea fish and shell-fish, and whales and grampus, elks, deere three young at a time."²⁵

The Swedes and Finns had little experience with whaling. Despite the abundance of whales in the bay, there was no evidence of whaling during the New Sweden period (1638-1655). The Dutch conquered the Swedes in 1655 under the governorship of Peter Stuyvesant. By this time, the Dutch were successfully engaged in the fur trade along the Delaware River. There was no evidence of whaling in the mouth of the bay during the second New Netherland period, which ended in 1667, although Europeans had been present at Cape May since 1660.

Although Dutch attempts to establish a whaling industry on the Delaware Bay were a failure, the English takeover of New Netherland in 1662, including the South Bay and South River, would bring whaling back to the forefront. Within a few decades, the Delaware Bay became the epicenter of whaling south of New England. Numerous histories suggest that English whalers from Long Island and New England were fishing at the Cape prior to the English takeover. The records of the whaling industry largely begin when Dr. Daniel Coxe set up a whalery in 1687.

Daniel Coxe and the West Jersey Society

The history of the whaling industry before the arrival of whalers from Long Island in the 1680s is almost nonexistent. There is myth and folklore from this time, but little

²⁵ Maurice Beesley, *Sketch of the Early History of Cape May, to Accompany the Geological Report of the State of New Jersey for Said County* (Trenton: Printed at the Office of the "True American," 1857) 166.

solid evidence. A theory exists that the English began settling Portsmouth in the 1640s. At the time, the town of New Haven, Connecticut voted to approve a plan to settle and farm in the Dutch-controlled Delaware Valley. Fifty settlers went to a place called Varkens Kill (Salem Creek) 70-miles north of the Cape. Although they planted tobacco in the area, most settlers returned to New Haven. Subsequent attempts to settle the region in the 1650s were thwarted by New Netherland's governor Peter Stuyvesant.²⁶

Although whalers from Connecticut and Long Island may have had a temporary shelter or camp at the Cape as early as 1638, Burlington Court Book records show that there was not a permanent removal to Cape May until 1685. Cape May Town, alternatively referred to as New England Town Portsmouth, Falmouth and Town Bank in court records, deeds and wills, was settled by these whalers in approximately 1685 and is believed to have been the first permanent settlement in the area. The town was situated on a bluff overlooking the bay north of Town Creek, later called New England Creek, four or five miles from the tip of the Cape. Due to erosion of the shore, the site of this settlement is currently covered by the waters of the bay, probably one-quarter to one-half mile off the present location of Town Bank.²⁷

By the 1680s, primary documents attest that land was set aside for a whale fishery at New England Town. In a letter dated from 1688, Dr. Daniel Coxe, for whom Coxe Hall Creek is named, wrote, "I have at the expense of about 3,000£ settled a Towne." Coxe, who had been a physician to King Charles II and to Anne, who was subsequently Queen, acquired exclusive rights to 95,000 acres in Cape May County. He built Coxe

²⁶ John Edwin Pomfret, *The Province of West Jersey, 1609-1702: A History of the Origins of an American Colony* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1956).

²⁷ Robert C. Alexander, "Historical Notes On Cape May," *Cape May Magazine of History and Genealogy* (Volume 5, Number 9, 1963) 414. Notes 8-11 ref. Lewis Townsend Stevens. 23, 30, 36, 43. Note 12 ref. John Worlidge Map of 1690, *A Book of Maps of Cape May 1610-1878*, by Horace G. Richards, 1954, 12.

Hall as a center for a manorial system of government, which existed from 1690 to 1692, at which time Coxe divided his holdings. In the same letter, Coxe also says he “established a fishing for whales which are very numerous about Cape May both within the Bay and without all along the sea coast which I am assured if well managed will bring in above 4,000£ per annum all charges defrayed.” Clearly bullish about the prospect of whaling, Coxe optimistically believed he would recoup his expenditure and profit 1,000£ in the first year.

In 1692, the wealthy doctor sold his land holdings to the West Jersey Society. The reasons for this sudden sale are unknown; the historical record does not indicate the reason why Coxe sold off his holdings after just four years. One theory is that Coxe sold the land due to onerous labor disputes with his French Huguenot workers. Whatever the reason, the sale of Coxe’s land to the West Jersey Society ushered in a new era for whalers (who for the most part had been tenants) as the change in ownership enabled them to securely title the land. While Dr. Coxe’s agents had conveyed only five titles for land, from 1692 to 1699 the West Jersey Society conveyed 42 titles for tracts ranging from 50 to 1016 acres in size.²⁸

Within time, Coxe’s plans for a whalery came to fruition. The Cape May whalery flourished for several decades. Writing in 1708, English historian John Oldmixon mentioned this whalery in his history of British settlements in North America: “The tract of land between this (Cape May) and Little Egg Harbor, which divides East and West New Jersey, goes by the name of Cape May County. Here are several stragling [*sic*] houses on this neck of land, the chief of which is Cox’s Hall [built c. 1691]; but there’s

²⁸ James P. Hand, “Dr. Daniel Coxe and the Huguenots,” *Cape May Magazine of History and Genealogy*. Historical Notes On Cape May, by Robert C. Alexander, *Cape May Magazine of History and Genealogy*, 1963, Volume 5, Number 9, p. 414. Notes 14-15, Maurice Beesley’s Early History, 163-4, 173.

yet no Town. Most of the inhabitants are fishermen, there being a whalery at the mouth of the Bay, on this as well as the opposite shore.”²⁹

The whaling industry was so profitable that in October 1693, the West Jersey Assembly approved a tax of ten percent of the value of oil and bone extracted from every whale caught by non-residents [whalers from Long Island]. This tax may have been America’s first protective tariff.³⁰ The Province of West New Jersey passed “An Act relating to Fishing.” The Act relates wholly to the capture of whales in Delaware Bay and implies that whale fishing of Delaware Bay was of considerable importance, beginning as follows:

Whereas the whalery in Delaware Bay has been in so great a Measure invaded by Strangers and Foreigners, that the greatest Part of Oyl and Bone, recovered and got by that imploy hath been Exported out of the Province, to the great detriment thereof; to obviate which mischief, BE IT ENACTED....that all Persons not residing within the Precincts of this Province, or the Province of Pennsylvania, who shall kill or bring on shore any whale, or whales within Delaware Bay, or elsewhere within the Boundaries of this Government, shall pay one full and entire Tenth of all the Oyl and Bone made out of the said whale or whales, unto the present Governor of this Province for the Time being.³¹

The “Strangers and Foreigners” that the act addressed were interloping whalers from New England and Long Island who came to Cape May during the winter months to hunt whales. These migratory whalers cut up the whales they had caught, sold their bones and carted off their oil to ports outside of West Jersey, tax-free. The Legislature saw an

²⁹ Beesley, *Early History*, 167-8

³⁰ Herb Beitel and Vance Enck, *Cape May County: A Pictorial History* (Norfolk/Virginia Beach: The Donning Company Publishers, 1988) 14

³¹ J.A. Allen, “The North Atlantic Right Whale and Its Near Allies,” *Bulletin of the American Museum of Natural History* (Volume 24, Article 18, 1908, 277-329 + pls. 19-24) 318.

opportunity to generate revenue from this profitable industry and put an end to the free-for-all by outsiders, who are the subject of the next section.³²

Long Islanders

The land that once belonged to Dr. Daniel Coxe was broken up into smaller parcels by the West Jersey Society. The Society then sold the land to whalers from Long Island who were, at the time, part of the Connecticut Colony. The Long Island whalers who settled in New England Town, formerly Portsmouth, in the 1680s had completed a three-leg odyssey. Beginning in England, they sailed to New England, moved to Long Island and finally relocated on the Jersey Cape in West Jersey. They settled north of New England Creek where they moored their boats.³³

There were early whaling expeditions from the Hamptons in Long Island to Cape May. Offshore whalers would arrive in December and stay until the migrating right whales left the bay in February. The Southampton and East Hampton offshore whalers made mass relocations to the Cape in the 1680s and 1690s. At the time, there were strong ties between New Haven and Long Island. Long Island was then part of Connecticut, not Dutch-controlled New Netherland (New York). The same family names that can be found in parts of Cape May can also be found in the Hamptons.³⁴

One may ask why these sturdy folks left their homes and kin to travel down into the wilderness. There were many reasons for the relocation of the whalers to Cape May. In some cases, the whalers were fleeing from religious persecution. For example, John

³² Lewis Townsend Stevens, *The History of Cape May County, From the Aboriginal Times to the Present Day* (Cape May: Lewis Townsend Stevens, 1897) 50.

³³ Scott McGonigle, "History of the Jersey Cape" http://members.tripod.com/scott_mcgonigle/history.htm.

³⁴ James P. Hand Interview, February 5, 2010.

Townsend was banished from New York for being a Quaker. Elizabeth Garlick was accused of witchcraft, so she, her whaling husband, and their family moved to Cape May. There was intense competition among the whaling companies in Long Island and there were strict laws regulating whaling in Long Island. As land became readily available for purchase in Cape May, this became a major motivator. However, the biggest reason for this competition was the great economic opportunities that it afforded: there was money to be made in whale oil and whales were plentiful in the Delaware Bay.

How did these whalers travel from Long Island to Cape May? It is difficult for us, in an age of planes, trains and automobiles, to imagine the great hardships that they endured during their journey and after arrival. Some of the women were sent down by vessel, while the men drove oxen and 'mairs' down through narrow paths or the Indian Trails of the Kechemeche, of which there were many in this county. Were these brave souls led by the spirit of adventure? No, not entirely. At that time, the whaling industry was very profitable, some of the shale cows (whales that swam close to shore) yielded as many as 2,000 gallons of oil, in addition to significant quantities of baleen, which was also in great demand. Many of these pioneers had been severely persecuted or tried in court, and some had been acquitted of witchcraft. They had fled here for refuge, as their forefathers had come from England in 1620, seeking peace from the persecution of the church and the ability to enjoy religious freedom.³⁵

These original whalers were hardy men who faced the harsh cold of winter each year to sail out on six- and seven-man boats in search of whales. They were enterprising men who formed whaling companies in Southampton, East Hampton, Sag Harbor,

³⁵ Karl A. Dickinson, *Whales, Sails and Homespun Tales of Cape May County* (Unknown Binding, 1985) 23-24.

Gravesend and Wainscot, Long Island and competed for whale blubber and baleen. By the 1680s and 1690s, the Long Island whaling industry reached a saturation point; there were too many whalers and not enough whales to make the business profitable. As a result, many of these stout men and their sons traveled south in the winter to pursue the abundant whales of the Delaware Bay. It is important to consider how they knew about the whales in the Delaware Bay. Communication at the time was slow, and it is difficult to discern who was in remote Cape May to send word up through West Jersey, then East Jersey, New York and out to faraway Long Island. People often traveled by sea, and the coastal waters of New Jersey—a considerable distance from the shores of Long Island—were navigable under English rule. With New York and East and West Jersey in English hands following the third Anglo-Dutch War, the sea-lanes were thrust open to Anglo-American commerce, communication and commuting.

In his 1867 *Sketch of the Early History of Cape May*, Maurice Beesley wrote that there were 21 original settlers “who were known to be whalers,” including Christopher Leamyeng (Leaming) and his son Thomas, Caesar Hoskins, Samuel Matthews, Jonathan Osborne, Nathaniel Short, Cornelius Skellinks, Henry Stites, Thomas Hand and his sons John and George, John and Caleb Carman, John Shaw, Thomas Miller, William Stillwell, Humphrey Hewes (Hughs), William Mason, John Richardson, Ebenezer Swain and Henry Young. Beesley added that there were, “... no doubt many others.”³⁶

Historian Jeffrey Dorwart coined the term “whaler yeomen” in his book, *Cape May County, New Jersey: The Making of an American Resort Community*, to describe the whalers who owned property on the Cape. The West Jersey Society sold whalers tracts of land that had been cleared or burned over by the Lenape Indians to plant corn.

³⁶ Beesley, *Early History*, 171.

Whaler yeomen were hardy men who braved the frigid temperatures, rough winds, and the risky business of hunting and catching whales. They followed the whales to Cape May and profited from them. These men owned hundreds, in some cases even a thousand acres of land in Cape May and often owned additional property in Long Island. In some cases, second and third generation whaler yeomen prospered as farmers and large landholders, and some of them owned slaves. These men lived life as gentlemen farmers, and many served in the judicial and legislative branches of government.³⁷

It became clear through the biographies of these early whalers that the Cape May region was settled by men from Long Island, rather than from the settlements on the Delaware. These men had followed whale fishing on Long Island, and in pursuit of that occupation some of them had migrated to Cape May, where the whales were numerous and not far offshore. At present, many descendants of those original settlers can be found in Cape May and Cumberland Counties. Some of the original names, such as Corson, Matthews, Shaw, Stites, Hand, Miller and Young, can still be found in the Cape May County telephone directories.³⁸

Agents for the West Jersey Society sold plots that were larger than those that the whalers had held on Long Island, but small enough to preclude the development of a tidewater planter gentry. The Cape May whaling families became owners of modest plantations, most between 200 and 500 acres, where they raised small herds of cattle and planted fields of corn and wheat. The first landowners embodied the English concept of a yeoman as an owner of a small landed estate who cultivated his own land and held a respectable standing in the community below the rank of gentleman. Indeed, they referred

³⁷ James P. Hand Interview, February 5, 2010.

³⁸ Hallman.

to themselves in wills and other documents as yeomen. These whaler yeoman families established control over Cape May County's political and economic development.

The family anecdotes of the Leamings were kept by Thomas Leaming, I, Esq., of Cape May. They were transcribed from a paper in his own handwriting. In the following passage, we learn of the importance of whaling, cattle driving, planting, traveling, business partners, and the births, sickness and deaths of family members:

In July the 9 day 1674 I was born in Southampton on Long Island. When I was 18 Years old I came to Cape May; and that winter I had a Sore fit of the Feaver & Flux. The next Summer I went to Philadelphia with my father and there my Father was Lame with a Withered hand; which held him till the day of his Death. The winter following I went a whaling; And we got 8 whales and 5 of them drove to the Hore Kils and we went there to cut them staid a month and the first day of May we Came home to Cape may and my father was very Sick and on the third day 1695 he departed this Life at the house of Shamgar Hand. Then I went to Long Island and Staid that Summer and in the Winter I came and went a whaling again and got an old Cow and Calf. The Summer in the year 1696 I went to Long Island again, and into New England to Guilford and back again to whaling again and made a great Voyage. And in ye year 1697 I worked for John Reeves all Summer in the winter to whaling again and got one small whale. In ye 1698 I went to the Island again and came back to Cape May and worked all winter for John Craff*** [Crafford] and in 1699 went to work on my own Land and in that fall I had a sore fit of Sickness at Henry Stites and in the 1700 I lived at my own plantation. And worked for Peter Corson. And In 1701 on the 18th of June we was Married I being that July following 25 years of Age and my wife in her 18 years and ye [year] 1702 in July the 3 day Esther was Born. And that Summer the Small pox was very bad. And in 1703 I went to Cohansie and fetched brother Aaron. And in 1704 Mercy was born on the 10th day of September. And in 1705 I was very Zealous And in ye 1706 I built my house. And in the 15th of October my Daughter Jane was Born And Samuel Matthews took a horse that was worth Seven pounds because I could not train. In ye 1707 we made the County Road. And in 1708 in June I went to Long Island. And in the 15th of October I was taken with a Long fit of Sickness. And the 4th day of November Phebe was born and we could not get a Nurse, and I very weak. It was a time of Trouble: My Daughter Phebe was a very Sickly Child. And the 15th of June 1710 Priscilla was born. And April the 18, 1712 Christopher was born. And November the 5, 1714 My Mother departed this Life at East Hampton on Long Island at Enouch Fathians house.³⁹

³⁹ Thomas Leaming Diary <http://homepages/rootsweb.ancestry.com/~sam/leaming/thomas.html>

Caleb Carmen was a very successful whaler from Long Island who owned at least one profitable whaling company and leased 1,200 acres from Dr. Coxe's attorney, Adloredo Bowde, in the year 1688. Carmen built one of the first mills at the head of Cold Spring Creek.⁴⁰

Captain Jonathan Osborne of Wainscott went to Cape May, where he and his brother Joseph jointly owned a house in 1690. The brothers' search for whales and riches led them to Cape May, which can beg the question whether the market in Long Island had reached a saturation point by the end of the 17th century. Another possible explanation for settling in Cape May is that another whaler or group of whalers had monopolized the trade in Long Island.⁴¹

Cornelius Skellinks, later Schellinger, came to Cape May prior to 1692, settling first on either Long Island or Staten Island. In 1692, with a group of 20 to 25 families, Skellinks moved to Cape May County, New Jersey, where he purchased one-hundred and thirty-five acres of land. He relocated with his family to Cold Springs, and there he established a saw and grist mill, which stood as one of the landmarks of the country for some time before it was destroyed by fire. Skellinks owned a large tract of land north of Cold Spring Creek, upon which is located the old historic Cold Spring Presbyterian Church, an edifice that is still standing, which was the third house of worship erected on that site. The will of Cornelius Skellinks, dated 1742, mentioned three sons: William, Abraham and Cornelius, I.⁴²

⁴⁰ Dickinson, *Whales Sails and Homespun Tales*, 25.

⁴¹ Jeanette Edwards Rattray and Tom Twomey, *Discovering the Past: Writings of Jeanette Edwards Rattray, 1893-1974* (New York: Newmarket Press, 2001) 496. Rattray was the foremost modern historian of East Hampton, Long Island, New York.

⁴² Beesley. Stevens.

Henry Stites, ancestor of all in the county of that name, came to the country about or in the year 1691. He located two hundred acres of land, including the place now belonging to the heirs of Eli Townsend. He made his mark, yet he afterwards acquired the art of writing, and was justice of the court for a long series of years, being noted such in 1746. He left a son, Richard, who resided at Cape Island, and he a son, John, from whom the Lower Township Stites have descended. His son, Isaiah, who died in 1767, and from whom the Stites of the Upper and part of the Middle Township have descended, lived...at Beesley's Point....Benjamin Stites, who was probably a brother of Henry... was in the county in 1705.⁴³

Thomas Hand was born in Southampton, New York, and was the son of John and Alice Gransden Hand. His will, which he wrote signed and dated on the 21st of October, 1707 at the age of 59, indicated that he was born in 1646. Thomas Hand drowned off Cape May on the 21st of October, 1714.⁴⁴ On March 7, 1715, his son, Recompense Hand, asked the court at Burlington for letters of administration [the right to administer the estate], stating in writing, "I am obliged to go whaling this spring, else I would have come myself- I will present you with a bag of oysters." Letters of administration were granted on the 1st of April, 1715 and the 27th of Sept, 1716 to Recompense Hand. Thus, the youngest son in this estate became both the administrator and the principal heir, which was often the case with Long Island families who practiced the Germanic or Anglo-Saxon custom of "gavelkind," in which all children were entitled to a portion of the estate. Gavelkind was a system of land inheritance that was chiefly associated with the county of Kent, but it was also found in other parts of England. This tradition differed from the English primogeniture, in which the first born son was sole heir of his father's estate. Thomas Hand was very generous and forward thinking, as he gave a plantation to each of his five sons.

⁴³ Beesley. Stevens.

⁴⁴ George C. Williston, *Hand Family Lineage*

John Hand was appointed a member of the Assembly of the Proprietary Government in 1701. The Assembly was a group of freeholders that met yearly with the West New Jersey Proprietors or their representative at Burlington to advise and consult with the Proprietors on matters related to governing their part of the colony. John Hand was a representative from Cape May to the provincial government, which was a position of responsibility and public trust. John Hand and his wife were among the organizers of the Presbyterian Church at Cold Spring in 1714. In accordance with the village's name, the clear and cold spring brought people to Cold Spring on Sundays for fresh water. A log meeting house was built in 1718, which was replaced by a frame building in 1762 and the present brick building in 1823. In the first years, a drum was beaten as a way to remind people of their religious responsibilities. John died without a will before the 27th of April, 1736, when letters of administration for his estate were granted to his son, Elisha. He was buried in the Cold Spring cemetery, which today has 14,000 graves with many Hands and people of other early families. Stones attributed to 19th century Hand family members flank the front door on both sides.⁴⁵

Whaling Boom

A whale's value in the 17th and early 18th centuries was unparalleled; their blubber was extracted and processed for oil. The right whale, which was a relatively abundant species at the time, could yield approximately 3,500 gallons of oil. A single whale typically yielded between 20 and 90 barrels of oil and in 1688, 50 barrels of oil were valued at 100 pounds on Long Island. At the time, those 50 barrels were used to purchase a house and its own quarter-acre town lot in Southampton, Long Island. On

⁴⁵ George C. Williston, *Hand Family Lineage*.

Cape May, the same amount of oil would have purchased 1,000 acres of unimproved farmland and a house. One did not need to farm hundreds and hundreds of acres of tobacco to produce a prodigious income. The promise of prosperity inspired Yankees to make the long journey by land or sea to a wilderness at the southern-most tip of New Jersey: whaling was big business in the colonies.

In *A History of the American Whale Fishery*, Walter Sheldon Tower enumerated the myriad uses for whale oil, blubber and baleen. He also explained the process by which oil was extracted. Finally, Tower described the way in which whalers hunted the whale.

“Whale oil includes the oil from all other varieties of whales, as well as oil from the blackfish, the porpoise and even the walrus. It was formerly used in the tanning of leather, in the preparation of coarse woolen cloths, in the manufactures of soft soaps, and of coarse paints and varnishes where it gives a strength of ‘body’ more resistant (*sic*) to weather than do vegetable oils; with tar it is used in ship work, making cordage and other industrial processes; but perhaps its most important use is in making heavy lubricating oils. It is worth about two-thirds as much as sperm oil. Since the opening of the Arctic fishery a large part of the whale oil has come from the right whale—some of which yield as much as 230 barrels of oil. The refuse of whales has also been used in making glue and in fertilizers under the name of guano.”⁴⁶

“Right whales were likely to have been the most abundant species in the region. One theory is that the Right whale got its name from fishermen who considered it the ‘right’ whale to kill because of its commercial value. Whale oil was refined to produce a crude oil used for light and lubrication, while whale baleen was used for corset stays, carriage springs, umbrella ribs, buggy whips, shoelaces, hat brims, collar stays and skirt hoops.”

“In the early days of whaling, in fact for many years after deep-sea whaling was begun, both the trying out of oil from the blubber and the refining was done on shore. Later trying out was done on board the vessels and the oil was brought back ready for the refineries. In the refining processes the oil is first heated to make the pieces of blubber and foreign matter settle. The clear oil is then subjected to a freezing process which partly granulates it.”⁴⁷

“When a whale was spotted in the bay, the boats would be launched and the sails raised. When the crew neared the whale, the sail was lowered and a crew of eight rowed close to the whale. Offshore whaling now becomes similar to blue-

⁴⁶ Walter S. Tower, *A History of the American Whale Fishery* (1907).

⁴⁷ Tower, *American Whale Fishery*.

water whaling. The captain harpooned the whale and the whale boat was towed by the whale until it tired. The crew would move the boat close to the whale, and the captain would drive a lance into the whale, trying to strike a vital organ. The angered whale would make another run until it tired again, spouted blood—pillars of fire—and died. The whale would be towed back to the beach where the blubber and baleen were processed.”⁴⁸

Whaling was an attractive yet dangerous profession. Whalers were accustomed to arduous work. As whaling was a part-time endeavor, they often busied themselves with other activities in the off-season. For example, an early settler, Thomas Leaming, was a cooper; as such, he would make barrels, casks and buckets to store and carry whale oil. He would then sell the oil in Philadelphia, netting a high profit.

After a visit to Cape May Town, William Penn wrote to business associates speaking of the town’s large whaling industry. Writing in 1683 to the Commissioners of the Free Society of Traders, he said, “Mighty Whales roll upon the Coast, near the Mouth of the Bay of Delaware; eleven caught and workt into Oyl one Season. We justly hope a considerable profit by a Whalery, they being so numerous and the Shore so suitable.” Liberal terms offered by William Penn and his associates were another reason why many of those who came for the whales remained as merchants and farmers.⁴⁹

One thinks of whaling as something that is done in large sailing ships, but Cape whalers hunted in small boats. Lookouts were posted in towers along the shore to warn men when the whales arrived. When the whales were sighted, the men would scurry off in their tiny vessels to capture them. At close range, the first harpoon was thrown at a spot just below the fin. In a rage, the whale would then dive for the ocean bottom, but,

⁴⁸ Tower, *American Whale Fishery*.

⁴⁹ Albert Cook Meyers, *Narratives of Early Pennsylvania, West Jersey and Delaware*, Volume 13, 265. Hallman. *History Through A Walking Tour*, by Beatrice Heston and Kathryn McPherson, *Historic Mechanic Street in Cape May Court House*, Blue Book 1982, Volume 8, Number 2, 77.

due to its wound, it was only able to briefly submerge. Upon returning to the surface, the whale often attacked the boats. This typical scenario describes the great sea battle of many whalers against the whale, and at times the whale was the victor. Should the men succeed in their attempts to kill the whale, they would then tow it ashore. Once ashore, they set to work stripping off the blubber and putting it in large kettles. The blubber would then cook until the oil was “tried” from it. After the work was completed, they would celebrate and enjoy a meal of whale meat.⁵⁰

Historian Edward M. Post wrote of the heroism of whalers:

“To put out from the strand in a frail craft propelled by oars with only harpoon lance and rope for a weapon, to push the bow of this craft against the side of a monster that towered far above them, to pierce a vital spot with plunge of harpoon, to follow the fleeing whale attached like a bobbing cork to a line and be present at its death struggle, demanded heroism, brawn, seamanship and quick thinking. It was a game in which, if you guessed wrong, you were down and out. It sieved the material down to the survival of the fittest.”⁵¹

The whales that were most often hunted were called Greenland whales, which were native to the North Atlantic Ocean. These whales, when fully grown, were about 60 feet long and about 40 feet in circumference. They weighed about 250 tons and would produce enough oil to fill 50 to 60 puncheons (about 74 gallons each). The whalebones themselves were sold and brought between \$1,000 and \$1,500 each. The oil and whalebone harvested from a whale was worth approximately \$3,500 to \$4,000, which was a considerable amount of money at that time. The early Indians also realized a profit in whaling; there are documented records recording the sale of a whale by the Cape May Native American Lenape Indians to early settlers in 1685.

⁵⁰ Hallman.

⁵¹ “County Enjoyed Early Background of Sea Life,” *Cape May County Gazette*, June 17th, 1932, by Edward M. Post, *Cape May Magazine of History and Genealogy*, Volume 8, Number 5, 1985, 370.

The following newspaper extracts from the first half of the 18th century announce the whales caught and washed ashore. Some of the notices ask that those who killed the whale testify to it, so that the rightful party may profit from its spoils.

“Boston News-Letter,” from March 17 to 24, 1718, indicates the following: “Philadelphia, March 13.—We are told that the whale men catch’d six whales at Cape May and twelve at Egg-Harbour.”⁵²

“The Pennsylvania Gazette” of March 13-19, 1729-30, indicates the following: “On the 5th of this Instant March, a Whale came ashore dead about 20 mile to the Eastward of Cape May. She is a Cow, about 50 Foot long, and appears to have been killed by Whalemén; but who they are is yet unknown. Those who think they have a Property in her, are advised to make their Claim in Time.”⁵³

“The Pennsylvania Gazette,” March 11-18, 1735-6, indicates the following: “Philadelphia, March 19. * * * On the 25th of Feb. last, there were two Whales killed at Cape May, the one is ashore on Cape-Island and the other on the upper end of the Cape, on the East Side; ‘tis suppos’d Yearling; the Whale-men are in hopes of killing more, for they have lately seen several on the Coast, near the Cape.”⁵⁴

“The American Weekly Mercury,” April 22, 1742, indicates the following: “We hear from Cape May, that about the beginning of this instant a Whale came ashore about 15 miles to the East ward of the Cape, she had about 4 foot and a half Bone, had a Hole in her supposed to be made by an Iron, and was therefore concluded to be kill’d by Whale-Men. And about the middle of this Instant another Whale came Ashore on Absecun Beech, about 40 miles to the East-ward of Cape May, she had about 7 Foot-Bone, and had in her 2 or 3 Irons. The said Whales are saved, and it was thought proper to give this Notice, that they who struck them know where to apply for their right in them.”⁵⁵

Whaling off the shores of Cape May was a dangerous and risky business. Survival for the whalers was a constant test of boating skills, nerve, bravery, and luck. As long as the whale migrations stayed near the coast, a steady stream of whaling men followed them. Many of the whalers earned a sufficient amount from their trade to stake

⁵² *Cape May Magazine of History and Genealogy*, Volume 6, Number 2, 1965, 104.

⁵³ *Cape May Magazine of History and Genealogy*, Volume 6, Number 2, 1965, 104.

⁵⁴ *Cape May Magazine of History and Genealogy*, Volume 6, Number 2, 1965, 104.

⁵⁵ *Cape May Magazine of History and Genealogy*, Volume 6, Number 2, 1965, 104.

new careers as farmers or merchants. Most of the whalers who stayed in the county between whale seasons became farmers to support their families. The majority of the early settlements that are further away from the coasts started as a result of these migrations.⁵⁶

The whalers lived in the bayside community of New England Town, which local historian Anna Cutshall noted was alternatively called Portsmouth, Falmouth and Cape May Town. They built their whaling boats, which averaged 30 feet in length, out of cedar wood. Their boats had flat bottoms and came to a point at the bow and stern, allowing them to be turned with speed and paddled both forward and backward. Snared whales were towed ashore, where a winch was used to drag them onto the beach.⁵⁷

Off-season: Cattle Driving, Farming, Oysters and Caviar

In addition to adventures on the sea, whalers were also responsible for planting and harvesting crops, building homes, mending boats, and hunting for meat. During the off-season or bad whaling times, whalers would mine cedar logs or trap animals for furs. The decline in whaling led to drastic results. The settlers had to find other trades in order to make a living. Most of the whalers went to Fisher's Creek (Villas, New Jersey) to become farmers, where with their large estates, they had plenty of land to farm. Although the land was marshy around Cape May, some whalers prodigiously dredged the marshes to improve the land and prepare it for planting.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Herb Beitel and Vance Enck, *Cape May County: A Pictorial History* (Norfolk/Virginia Beach: The Donning Company Publishers, 1988) 14

⁵⁷ Thomas Bergbauer, "Records: Former Whaling Village SJ's Oldest Town" (Cherry Hill, NJ: Courier-Post, June 29, 2007)

<http://www.courierpostonline.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20070201/SPECIAL23/106290004/-1/special23>

⁵⁸ Hallman.

Large farms or plantations furnished most of the necessities of life for their owners: crops and livestock, together with fish from the waters and game from the woods, provided food; flax and wool were spun and woven to make cloth for clothes; the woods supplied timber for fuel and lumber for building material.⁵⁹

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, there were four or five hundred settlers in Cape May County. Houses were located in an almost barren wilderness, scattered along the uplands adjacent to the sounds between Great Egg Harbor and Cape May. Those who did not go whaling began farming on their recently purchased lands and spent their time in the sounds and thoroughfares fishing, claming, oystering and hunting for wild fowl, which were abundant.”⁶⁰

Before they were whalemens, the men who came to Cape May from Long Island were cattle herdsman, or “colonial cowboys.” Each family had its own specific earmark, which was a specifically designed mark cut into the ear of a calf or cow. James P. Hand, President of the Cape May Historical and Genealogical Society and a 10th generation descendant of Thomas Hand, wrote an essay about earmarks for the Society’s journal. In his essay, he shares drawings of the different shapes and styles of earmarks cut into the ears of the cows. The earmark was important, as it designated the yeoman who owned marked cows. If a cow was killed and eaten, a fine had to be paid to the family that owned the animal. John Person (or Parson) drove a herd of mares to Cape May. We know their dates of arrival in Cape May from the registration of ear marks in the town

⁵⁹ Historical Notes On Cape May, by Robert C. Alexander, *Cape May Historical and Genealogical Society Magazine* (1963, Volume 5, Number 9) 414.

⁶⁰ Lewis Townsend Stevens 59

records. The marshes and meadows of Cape May County, Five-mile and Seven-mile Beaches (Avalon and Stone Harbor) in particular, were ideal pastureland for grazing.”⁶¹

With the onset of the whaling industry in 1691, settlers were attracted to the coastal areas. In 1722, Aaron Leaming, Jr. purchased the Seven Mile Beach for about \$2,500. This purchase included Avalon. During this time, the island was used as a grazing area by mainland farmers, who would swim their cattle over to the Seven Mile Beach in the spring and back over to the mainland before the first snow. A scion of one of the original whaling families, Aaron Leaming, Jr. became a prosperous landowner. He recorded in his diary the economic activities of his day. The following are several entries related to farming, cattle driving, whaling, toasting and even dueling:

Sept. 30, 1734 we Finished Sowing wheat
Oct. 19, 1734 we Finished Carting
Nov. 15, 1734 we set out to Drive Cattle [to] the 7 mile beach and lay at 5 mile [beach]
Nov. 17, 1734 A whale seen at bay side
Nov. 18, 1734 worked upon & killed by Joshua Stites & c
Nov. 19, 1734 I with many others went to See it.
Nov. 28, 1734 went to Goshen to Divide corn, did not
Jan. 1, 1735 we drank the Healths of King George, the royal Family & c.
Feb. 19, 1735 Saw a Whale
Apr. 23, 1735 we began to plow
Apr. 29, 1735 father went From House to Go to Philadelphia
May 14, 1735 We Finished planting ye Great Field 16 acres 20 rods
June 10, 1735 we began to plow among corn
July 1, 1735 we reaped wheat
July 17, 1735 we reaped Oats at Goshen
Feb. 4, 1737 They kill a whale
Feb. 19, 1739 [Father] Sailed in his New Ship for Philada.
Feb. 22, 1737 The whalemens chased the whales & struck two
April 9, 1741 John Stites Attempted to kill my Father with a Sword, he made three passes at him
April 28, 1741 Sent 10,000 ft of board to Mr. John Biddle⁶²

⁶¹ James P. Hand, “Earmarks,” *Cape May Magazine of History and Genealogy*.

⁶² Aaron Leaming Papers, Cape May County Historical and Genealogical Society Library, Cape May Court House, NJ.

By 1748, Leaming had attained a level of wealth and sophistication that allowed leisure time for collecting and reading books: “Oct. 15, 1748—I [ex]changed the 4 vol of Don Quixote with David Hall for Bailey’s Dictionary & the Secret History of Persia.”⁶³

In 1758, Jacob Spicer, Jr. recorded the economic output of Cape May County in his diary. This diary is a tremendously rich source of information; it indicates that Spicer one of the richest and most prominent members of Cape May Society, a member of the New Jersey Assembly and co-author of a history of the state with his friend and sometimes rival Aaron Leaming Jr.

Spicer reported transporting 6,000 bushels of oysters to Philadelphia: “The Stock article of the county is about 1200 [pounds] There is at least ten boats belonging to the county which carry oysters; and admit they make three trips fall and three trips spring, each, and carry 100 bushels each trip, that makes 600 bushels at what they neat 2s. per bushel, There is 14 pilots, which at 30 per annum”.⁶⁴ Spicer drew a table in his diary to enumerate each item in the Cape May County economy of 1758:

	1200
	600
	420
	<hr/>
	2220
Mitten article for the present year	500
Cedar posts	300
White Cedar lumbar	500
Add for boards	200
Fork and Gammons	200
Deer skins and venison hams	200
Furs and feathers	120
Hides and tallow	100

⁶³ Aaron Leaming

⁶⁴ Jacob Spicer, Jr. Diary, 1758

Flax seed, neats' tongues, bees' wax, and myrtle	80
Tar	60
Coal	30
<hr/>	
	4430

Annual consumption of county 4400 pounds⁶⁵

Lewis Townsend Stevens commented on the mittens Spicer noted in his tabulation: “The knitting of mittens in those days occupied all the spare moments of the housewives and the ambitious maidens, but a great deal of the encouragement of the development of this industry is given to the wife of the eminent Benjamin Franklin.”⁶⁶

It makes sense that Spicer would be so interested in the economic activity of the county; after all, he owned most of it. On August 2, 1756, two years prior to the above entry, the shrewd businessman purchased from the West Jersey Society all the “remaining lands and privileges of that organization in Cape May county, consisting of uplands, beaches, swamps, savannahs, cripples, marshes, meadows, oyster beds, oyster grounds, clam flats, shores, bays, sounds, thoroughfares, creeks, guts, rivulets, brooks, runs, steams, pools and ponds of water, and finally all fast lands and waters, etc., woods, trees, mines, minerals, royalties, quarries, hawkings, huntings, fishing, fowling, etc.” for £300, a price far below the actual value of these lands. Through influence, persuasion, cronyism and cunning, Spicer became the largest landowner in the county.⁶⁷

Lewis Cresse kept a diary, known as the “Whaler’s Diary,” in the 1750s and 1760s that recorded the events of his life and the lives of his family and neighbors. A contemporary of Aaron Leaming, Jr. and Jacob Spicer, Jr., Cresse provided primary evidence to support the conclusion that whaling continued in Cape May County well into

⁶⁵ Jacob Spicer, Jr. Diary, 1758

⁶⁶ Lewis Townsend Stevens 119

⁶⁷ Stevens 115

the 18th century. As a whaler, his spelling and punctuation was less sophisticated than Leaming's or Spicer's, but his whaling accounts were first-hand, and therefore more colorful and rich with detail. In February 1765, Cresse wrote the following:

[W]e set out for whaleing & the whales was very plenty and there seemed to be a prospeck of making a voige at the Seven Mile Beach But the owners of that Beach made So much Disturbance in our Company that we Left the chance and went to Peck Beach and next morning after we got there we kild a whale and after kild another and Struck another and She runaway and we follow'd her along Ludlams Beach and that Company came off and joind us and we kild her the Ludlams Beach Company kild a whale the Same Season.⁶⁸

The following winter, Cresse records the international role that Cape May played in the colonial economy. He wrote the following:

On the 28th of January 1766 we went to Pecks Beach a whailing and Saw no whales onely Som Spouts that Season But on the first Day of March a Ship from London Her Cargo valued at Forty-five Thousand Pounds Stranded on Absecon Beach two men drowned and grate part of the Cargo Lost and the Same day a Brig from Jamaca Stranded on Pecks Beach. The Cargo Saved with Little Loss and on the 10th of March a Schooner from Antuckit Stranded on pecks Beach and got off in little time with little Damage on the 6th Day of Aprile.⁶⁹

The last recorded whaling transaction was documented in 1775 and pertained to the leasing of Seven Mile Beach by Aaron Leaming to whalemens for thirty days.⁷⁰ At the time, herdsmen brought their cattle to Seven Mile Beach to graze. With whalemens in excessive numbers, cattle began to disappear. The hungry whalemens encroached on cattle while they grazed. They slaughtered the cows, cooked and ate their meat at the herdsmen's expense. A limit was finally placed on the number of whalers allowed in the

⁶⁸ Lewis Cresse, "The Whaler's Diary," *The Cape May County Magazine of History and Genealogy*, 283.

⁶⁹ Lewis Cresse, 283.

⁷⁰ National Parks Service: Southern New Jersey and the Delaware Bay (Chapter 3)
http://www.cr.nps.gov/history/online_books/nj2/chap3.htm

area. Seven Mile beach became known as “Leamings Beach,” and it remained in the Leaming family for 130 years.⁷¹

“In the year 1772 in consinee of Silas Swain one of the owners of the Beach having granted to 53 whalemens rights which enabled them to roam over the whole Beach, proceedings in partition were entered into by the other owners in the Supreme Court of New Jersey and on the 11th June 1772 the Sheriff with a jury Summoned from Burlington County made partition by which Beginning at the East end of the Beach three was allotted to Jeremiah Leaming in Severalty 750 ½ Acres the next lot of 46 acres to Swain; the next of 210 ½ acres to Thomas and Elizabeth Leaming in right of Elizabeth; the next lot of 165 ½ Acres to Aaron Leaming the next lot of 74 ¼ Acres to John Eli & Daniel Hand the next of 176 ½ Acres to Elijah Hughes and the last being at the west end of the Beach to Silas Swain...The partition is general in its terms but it obviously had not refferance [*sic*] to timber but only to soil—the object being to exclude the whalemens who injured the pasture.”

Whaling was big business, and one of the islands granted whalemens rights to roam over the whole beach. The unguarded brown cows were a temptation to the meat-hungry whalemens. Also, the original owners permitted others to graze for a price, which affected feeding habits. In 1771, the owners agreed that the number of cattle to be grazed should be no more than 160. This limit commenced in the middle of October and continued until the middle or end of June.

By this standered [*sic*] of 160 all sales and other regulations o the herbage are made.” Whalemens and poachers continued to invade the beach and created a problem. In 1772 a jury was summoned from Burlington to partition the island, the object being to grant rightful ownership and exclude the whalemens that injured the pasture. The partition was made of 1424 acres, to the Leaming family 1127 acres, Swain 26 acres, Hand 74 ½ and Hughes 176 1/2 .⁷²

In addition to cattle raising and driving, oysters became one of the region’s chief exports in the early 19th century. Places along the Maurice River, such as Bivalve and

⁷¹ The History and Establishment of Stone Harbor, by Cathy Johnson, *Cape May Magazine of History and Genealogy*, Volume 8, Number 5, 1985, 353.

⁷² Brown Cows of Five Mile Beach, by George F. Boyer, *Cape May Magazine of History and Genealogy*, Volume 6, Number 8, 1971, 478-9.

Shellpile, hark back to the tremendous oyster fishery that flourished in those areas from the 1820s to 1957, yielding three million bushels annually in its prime. People in the area fished in the waters off the coast, which teemed with fish and waterfowl. Everything from sturgeon to clams, oysters to shad, and geese to ducks were caught, harvested and prepared for eating or selling at the market. When the whaling industry waned in the middle of the 18th century, these types of hunting became prevalent in the region for another two centuries: “As early as 1758 [Jacob Spicer], Cape May shipped 6,000 bushels of oysters to other areas [Philadelphia], producing one-third of the county’s total revenues.” Circa 1762, Spicer penned, “Clamming, as well as oystering, occupied the attention of the inhabitants when there was no farming or other work pressing them.”⁷³

Soon afterward, the Delaware Bay whaling industry, which prospered in the primordial soup that was early colonial America, vanished without a trace—quite literally, in fact. The actual whaling village of the first Town Bank was removed from the mainland and submerged beneath the sea due to tides, storms and erosion. This site ought to be an archaeological excavation site for colonial archaeologists, similar to Jamestown, Virginia. Alas, as with many things in Delaware Bay, the site was simply neglected. For much of the 19th and 20th centuries, the bay was shrouded in mystery. A host of ghost towns string the Jersey side of the bay, including Bivalve, Shell Pile and Sea Breeze, whose names and histories are synonymous with the once prosperous and now defunct oyster industry.

Sturgeon and caviar were important products for the region. The town of Bayside, New Jersey has the distinction of once being the caviar capital of New Jersey.

⁷³ Herb Herb Beitel and Vance Enck, *Cape May County: A Pictorial History* (Norfolk/Virginia Beach: The Donning Company Publishers, 1988) 209. Lewis Townsend Stevens 135.

In fact, the original name of the town was Caviar. Around the turn of the last century, sturgeon were plentiful in the Delaware bay (Sturgeon eggs, known as row, are a precursor to caviar). These giant prehistoric egg bearers were so plentiful that caviar merchants from Russia, long hailed as the caviar capital of the world, would come to New Jersey to buy row and ship it to Russia for processing. Like the oyster, the sturgeon population in the Delaware Bay declined sharply in the twentieth century, and the town of Caviar became known as Bayside.⁷⁴

Cedar mining was a major industry in Cape May County in the 18th century. Many whalers traveled to Dennisville to mine cedar logs. The logs were cut into shingles to be used on roofs. It is a little known fact that twenty-five thousand shingles from Cape May were used on the roof of Independence Hall in Philadelphia.⁷⁵

These industries grew over time as the whaling industry declined in the first half of the 18th century. By the time of the American Revolution, it was rare to sight a whale in Delaware Bay or in the ocean off the coast of southern New Jersey.

Whaling Declines

The whaling industry began in the 1680s, although undocumented sources suggest dates prior, and continued until the last whaling contract in 1775 between Aaron Leaming, Jr. and the whalers on Seven Mile Beach. There is much speculation as to why the whales disappeared from the Cape May coastal waters, but many say it was due to the thoughtless killing of female whales that were swimming with their young.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Mark Moran and Mark Scurman, *Weird New Jersey: Volume 2: Your Travel Guide to New Jersey's Local Legends and Best Kept Secrets* (New York: Sterling Publishing Co., 2006) 72.

⁷⁵ Hallman.

⁷⁶ Hallman.

The village of Town Bank fell into obscurity, and finally the bay claimed the historic settlement. Town Bank now is a small community of homes owned by city dwellers trying to escape the rigors of the metropolis for a few months each year.⁷⁷

Whaling continued through most of the 18th century, with whalers rowing up and down the coast from mid-winter to early spring. However, by the start of the American Revolution, the whaling industry had run its course. After being out on the water for two months in the 1750s, Cape May resident and author of *Whaler's Diary* Lewis Cresse reported, "We never saw a whale nor the spout of a whale that we knew of in all the time."⁷⁸

It is known that whaling continued into the 1760s, as a Whaling Company was organized circa 1760. The business was largely comprised of large landowners and capitalists; they did not personally engage in the catching of whales, but they furnished the capital to carry on the business while the young men of the colony did the work. The business existed for only a few years as whales became too scarce to make the business profitable. The Whaling Company comprised Constantine Hughes, President, other members being John Hand, Jr., Jeddiah Mills, Jr., Ellis Hughes, Sr., James Eldridge, Jr., John Connell, William Skellinks, Thomas Hand, Jr., Richard Shaw, Nathan Church, Nathaniel Hand, Isaac Newton, Ezekiel Eldredge, Sr., Jeremiah Eldredge, Josiah Crowell, and Constantine Foster.⁷⁹

At least one piece of evidence suggests that whaling on the Cape persisted into the 19th century, dating to 1814. The United States was at war with Great Britain, and British troops had landed at Philadelphia and on the South Jersey coast. A newspaper item read:

⁷⁷ Hallman.

⁷⁸ Karen Fox, "Whalers: The Link to our Past" (Cape May: *Cape May Magazine*, Fall 2008).

⁷⁹ Henry Hand, *History of Cape May County* (unpublished) Chapter V, Cape May Whalers.

“The British also ran into problems on 4 June 1814 when a raiding party attempted to burn a sloop at Edmund’s Landing....A force of militia went after them [the British] in three whaleboats, but they started out too late to cut off the British escape to the frigate off shore.” That there were any whaleboats at all, let alone three of them, attests to that fact that whaling was not completely finished at the time of the Revolution. If it had been in decline, whalers still piloted boats off the Jersey coast in pursuit of the leviathan.⁸⁰

As late as 1823, there were still signs of the whaling industry on Long Beach: “It is a fact but little known, that, even now [circa 1823], there is a family on Long beach, New Jersey, who are every winter seeking for, and sometimes capturing whales. In this business they have been engaged, the father and two sons, ever since the time of the Revolution.”⁸¹

A large part of the capital used in New Jersey shipbuilding is said to have come from Philadelphia and New York. This capital sought its profit in whaling along the coast, and afterwards in the trade with the West Indies, which absorbed much of the shipping of the colonies in America for a time. The inlets and beaches along the New Jersey coast that were first used for whaling camps or bases are now summer resorts. Cape May and Tuckerton, for example, were started and maintained by whaling.

The coastal or boating trade began by necessity when the early settlers arrived in Cape May after finding that the center of the county was swampland. It was not possible to build roads through the swamp, so they used boats to travel along the coast. The towns

⁸⁰ “South Jersey and the War of 1812,” by Harvey Strum, *Cape May Magazine of History and Genealogy* (Volume 9, Number 1, 1987) 11-12.

⁸¹ John F. Watson, *Annals of Pennsylvania and Philadelphia*, enlarged by Willis P. Hazard, 3 volumes, 1898. Vol. 2, 429.

were situated on rivers and bays and could be easily reached by small boats. After they settled at Town Bank, the whalers entered the coastal trade during the off-season.⁸²

Shipyards were established to meet the need of the vessels. In 1705, the sloop “Adventurer” was licensed to trade between Cape May, Philadelphia and Burlington via the Delaware River. Every creek from Cape May to Cohansey was engaged in the building of ships of various sizes. Fishing Creek, Goshen, Dennis, Port Elizabeth, Tuckahoe, Petersburg, Marshallville, Green Creek, Rio Grande, Townsend’s Inlet, Dias Creek, and Cold Spring were involved in vessel building at one time.⁸³

Frequent ports of call for these coastal vessels were Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Louisiana, Texas, the West Indies, Cuba, Jamaica, Martinique, Barbados, Trinidad, Panama, South America, British Guiana and occasional voyages across the Atlantic Ocean.⁸⁴ The most common cargoes carried by these ships were lumber, bundles of hoops and staves and heads for sugar hogsheads (shooks). Other cargoes included coal, coal oil in barrels, vitriol, salt cake, brick, stone, granite blocks, fertilizers, railroad ties, cast iron pipes, sugar, molasses, tobacco, cotton, furs, and farm products. Ice was brought from Maine and Nova Scotia for the southern cities.⁸⁵

Conclusion

⁸² Joyce Van Vorst, “The Coastal Trade,” *Cape May Magazine of History and Genealogy* (Volume 8, Number 6, 1986) 444.

⁸³ Van Vorst 444-5

⁸⁴ Van Vorst 445

⁸⁵ Van Vorst 445-6.

In this paper, I have shown that American whaling began in Delaware Bay—not in Cape Cod, as is commonly believed. In addition, the marginalization of this history by New England cultural bias toward the Dutch is explained. I told the story of this whale fishery from its earliest days as a Dutch whaling colony at Lewes, Delaware to the Anglo-American whalers of Cape May, New Jersey. Delaware Bay fishery's history is disjointed, with a half century lull before any whaling on the north shore of the bay began at Cape May. Rather than following whaling scholar E.A. Little's assertion that Cape May whale fishing was finished by 1734, I argued that the industry persisted into the late 18th century, and possibly into the first decades of the 19th century.⁸⁶

There is much to be gleaned from the study of whaling at Cape May. Whaling in the bay commenced with colonists from Holland and, more prodigiously, by whalers from Long Island. Whaling proved to be a valuable asset to the colonial economy of West Jersey; the whaling trade built elite family dynasties on the Jersey Cape that lasted for generations. These families bought vast tracts of land, which were then developed into plantations, bought slaves and lived as gentlemen farmers in the countryside of Southern New Jersey. The whales, boats, beaches and men of those times are gone, but Cape May County stands as a tribute to their hard work and brave deeds.⁸⁷

Two arguments have been proposed to explain the omission of the Cape May whale fishery from so many historical narratives of the American whaling industry. First, in the 19th century and throughout the first half of the 20th century, there was a bias favoring the whaleries of New England that was possibly due to the early demise of the whaling industry in Cape May and the Delaware Bay. Second, by the time of the

⁸⁶ Reeves
⁸⁷ Hallman.

Revolution, whales had become scarce, and the locus of whaling was New England. However, whaling existed in Cape May County into the 19th century with whaleboats cited in a newspaper entry dating to the War of 1812.

This paper offers a unique opportunity to tell the story of Delaware Bay. For much of the 20th century, the Delaware Bay was shrouded in mystery. A host of ghost towns string the Jersey side of the Delaware Bay, including Bivalve, Shell Pile and Sea Breeze, whose names and histories are inextricably linked to the once prosperous and now defunct oyster industry. By the middle of the 19th century, Cape May had become a summer retreat, and the whaling industry that prospered in the primordial soup that was early colonial America vanished.

In recent years, there has been much research on the tobacco planters of the Chesapeake. It is time for scholars to consider another bay, no less significant, that has been badly neglected: the haven of Delaware. Not only did people come to the bay to hunt for whales in the 17th century, but Cape May enjoyed a thriving whaling industry from the 1680s to the turn of the 18th century. This paper explored the history of the whaling industry in the Cape May region by examining the lives of the whaler yeomen who lived and continued to prosper through the 18th century. The story of whaling in the mouth of the Delaware must be told, if only to enrich our understanding of one of America's first industries. There has been much written about the history of whaling in New Bedford, Nantucket and Long Island, but study and documentation of the history of whaling in Delaware Bay, Chesapeake Bay, the Carolina coast, Labrador and New Foundland has been limited. Only by exploring these histories can we gain a fuller picture of a trade that spanned the North Atlantic Ocean.

This essay was essentially three histories weaved into one. The first was about the early venture by Dutch merchants to establish a whaling colony at Lewes, Delaware, which I considered to be the first whaling industry begun by Europeans in the territory that would become the United States. The second was about English court physician and land speculator Dr. Daniel Coxe's similar attempt to establish a whaling colony at Cape May, New Jersey, a half century later, and the Long Island whalers who purchased Coxe's land and took up that endeavor there. The third history was an economic one. It detailed the off-season pursuits of the colonists who settled Cape May and its environs, everything from oyster to sturgeon fishing, cedar mining to cattle raising, shipbuilding to knitting mittens. The three histories were woven together into a meta-narrative of local and regional historiography.

So what did we learn from this essay? Many Americans have forgotten the Dutch portion of our heritage. Yet the Dutch began to settle Manhattan, the Hudson Valley and the Delaware Valley a decade before the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth Rock, and two years after the arrival of English ships at Jamestown. The forgotten tale of the Dutch whaling operation in the southern portion of New Netherland is an important one. It teaches us that the Delaware Bay was connected to a long tradition of European whaling, from the Basques in the Bay of Biscay to the Dutch, English and Hamburgers at Spitzbergen in the Arctic Ocean. Through this telling, we acknowledge that history does not happen in a vacuum. A group of people from one part of the globe impacts another, as the Dutch did with the Indians they encountered at Lewes. The story of the massacred Dutch settlers is one more example of conflict between Indians and Europeans in the New World, and a precursor of many more to follow. We learn how the Dutch story of

New Netherland, and especially their experience in the Delaware Bay and River Valley, was obscured over the centuries, marginalized by the narrative of the English conquest of New Netherland and the Anglo-American experience in New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Delaware.

Furthermore, I told the lost story of whaling at Cape May. Through my research of colonial New England Town, which also appeared in maps and wills as Town Bank, Falmouth, Portsmouth and Cape May Town, we learned that Cape May was not cut off from the rest of the state, or even the region. As yeomen farmers, herdsman and whalers left their native England for America, settling with their families on Long Island, they were motivated to move again south to Cape May, where land was cheap and whales were plentiful. The story of these early families is well known in Cape May County, but is largely unknown outside. As these families prospered, through the sale of whale oil, blubber and baleen to Philadelphia and beyond, they succeeded, unlike their fellow colonists in Southern slave societies, in producing a vibrant, diverse economy in a remote location surrounded on three sides by the sea and cut off in the north by thick primeval forest. It is remarkable that these hardy folk flourished in such a place. Not only did they flourish, many were able to increase their land holdings, establish plantations, purchase slaves and endow their families with great wealth. The Leamings and Spicers produced statesmen who contributed to the political life of colonial New Jersey. Most importantly, the people of Cape May were not limited by their geographic confines. They participated fully in the colonial economy, trading with merchants not only in Philadelphia, but throughout the mid-Atlantic and southern colonies, New England, the West Indies and Europe.

Finally, by studying the decline of whales, which were hunted by the thousands for their oil, we may pause to consider other animals that were hunted down to the brink of extinction, such as the American buffalo and the polar bear. We may also consider our own insatiable quest for oil, and the environmental, human, political and economic catastrophes that were caused by the acquisition, extraction and transport of products derived from a limited and valuable natural resource. Today the whale is still hunted in the United States, Canada, Japan, Russia, Norway, Indonesia, the Philippines, Greenland, the Faroe Islands, St. Vincent and the Grenadines and the Caribbean.⁸⁸ Whale meat is a premium commodity and a delicacy featured on restaurant menus around the world. There are television programs about groups who fight to stop whale hunting. The International Whaling Commission was set up in 1946 as an intergovernmental body responsible for the conservation of whales and the management of whaling.⁸⁹ Despite the IWC's 1986 moratorium on commercial whaling, whaling nations continue to press their rights further into the ocean to hunt the whale to the brink of extinction.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ "Whaling Today" <http://www.highnorth.no/iwc2000/briefings/Whaling.htm>

⁸⁹ International Whaling Commission <http://www.iwcoffice.org>

⁹⁰ The moratorium was passed in 1982 and became effective in 1986. "Commercial Whaling Catch Limits" <http://www.iwcoffice.org/conservation/catches.htm>