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Full Circle

by

DOROTHY COTTLE POOLE

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# DUKES COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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## Full Circle

by

DOROTHY COTTLE POOLE

The American Indian was catching whales before the white man ever set foot on Martha's Vineyard. Now, over a hundred years after the peak of the whaling era, an Indian is the only surviving Vineyard whaler.<sup>1</sup> This man is Napoleon Bonaparte Madison, Medicine Man of the Gay Head Tribe of the Wampanoag Indians.<sup>2</sup> This is his story.

According to legend,<sup>3</sup> when the first Indian and his dog arrived at the Vineyard on a cake of ice, they found a huge man and his wife, four sons, and a daughter, living in a den at Gay Head, subsisting on whales which they caught and roasted. One day the man, whose name was Moshup, sent his children to play on the beach between Gay Head and Nomans Land. Then he, slowly and deliberately, drew his foot across each end of the beach, making deep ditches, which quickly filled with water. When his frightened children called out that they were drowning, he told them to pretend to be killing whales. They did, and he turned them into killer whales. Moshup's wife mourned so for her children that he threw her away. She fell upon Seconnett where, changed to stone, she may still be seen. Then Moshup, too, went away. No one knew where he went, for he did not communicate with the Indians, but he remembered them and sent whales for them to eat.

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Antone Fortes of Vineyard Haven is an ex-whaler, but he was born on Sao Nicolao, Cape Verde Islands. He shipped from there and from New Bedford, Mass., where he later made his home. He did not come to the Vineyard to settle until several years after his seafaring days were over.

<sup>2</sup> The Vineyard Indians of the 17th century were of the aboriginal Algonquians, among whom were included the Micmacs of Nova Scotia, the Abnakis of Maine, the Massachusetts, and the Narragansetts of Rhode Island. The people of Gay Head were of the Wampanoag Tribe, under the rule of the chief sachem of the Pokanaukets.

<sup>3</sup> Legends vary with their source. This is the version found in Charles E. Banks, M. D., *The History of Martha's Vineyard* (Boston: George H. Dean, 1911), Chapter I, page 48.

When the first white settlers came to Martha's Vineyard, they found the Indians, in their big dugout canoes, pursuing whales and attacking them with an audacity that astonished the English.

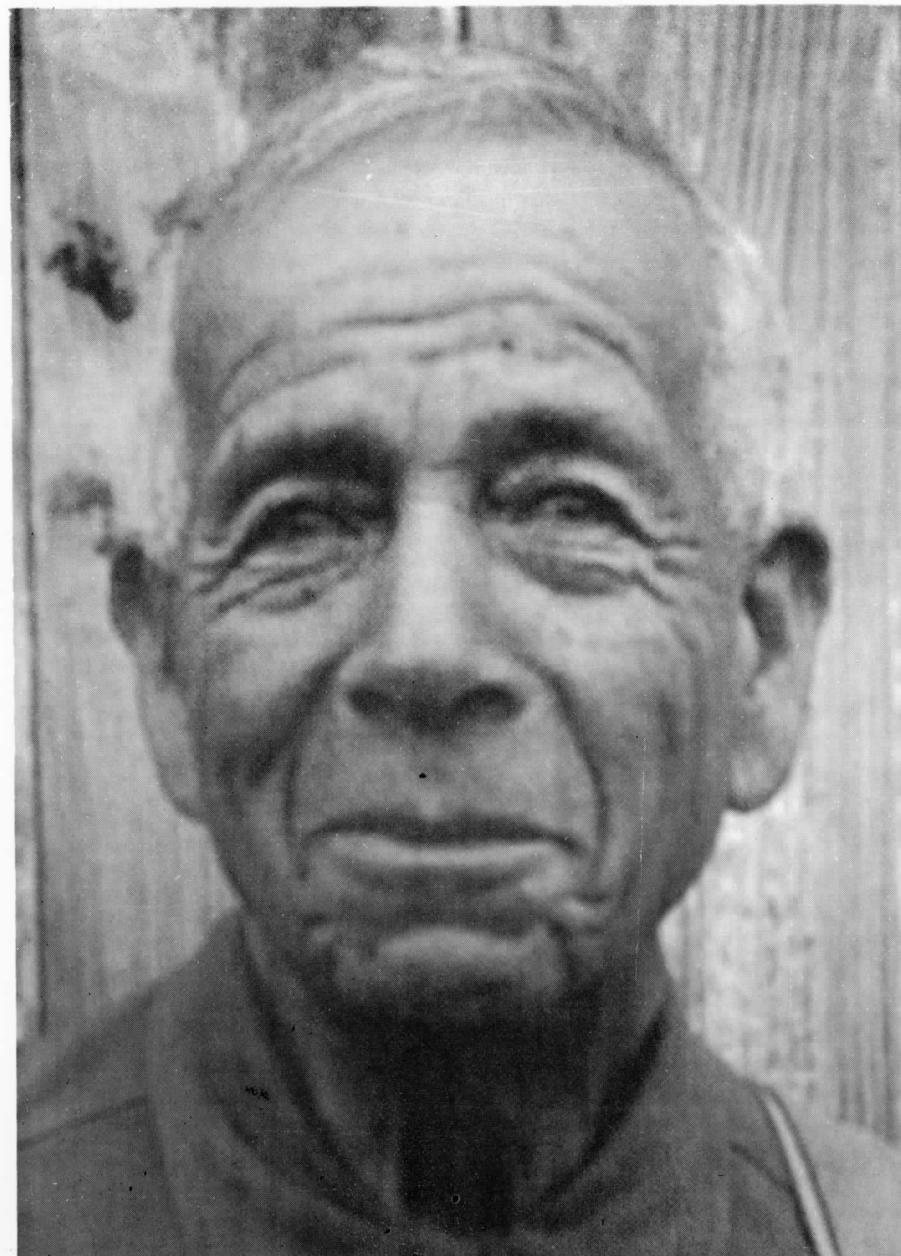
Whales were an important part of the Island economy from the outset. When land was bought from the Indians, whaling rights were included; so in 1658, when Thomas Mayhew bought Chickemmoo from Cheesehahchamuk, sachem of Holmes Hole, he also acquired "four span round in the middle of every whale that comes upon the shore of this quarter part, and no more." "Privileges" were enumerated in deeds of other lands bought from the Indians and when, in turn, the white settler sold this property, he passed on the "rights of fish and whale."

Whales were exceedingly plentiful and "drift" whales were common on the beaches. Others, close to shore, but not entirely stranded, were quite tame and were easily encircled and captured by the Indians, who willingly taught their new neighbors this skill. As whales became less tame and less plentiful, Vineyarders pursued them in boats fashioned after the Indian canoes, double-ended, lightweight, and seaworthy.

When beach whaling was superseded by deepsea whaling, Indians were shipped as crew members, for they knew the habits of the whale and how to hunt them with skill and dexterity. So many Gay Headers went to sea that any Indian crewman was called "Gay Head" aboard ship. Many of them became boatsteerers and mates, and the latter were often entrusted with the vessel on a "tween seasons voyage," while the captain remained in port with his family. Among the Gay Headers who went whaling, Amos Smalley was probably the best known because he was the only whaleman known to have struck a white whale, which he did while he was boatsteerer aboard the *Platina*.

Some of the outstanding whalers from Gay Head whom Mr. Madison recalls were Joe Belain, who went whaling for many years in the Arctic, Joe Peters, William Cook, George Belain, and Henry Jeffers. Two who did not enjoy their experiences were Jerry Diamond and Will Lang, who shipped on a sperm whaler, bound for the Indian Ocean. The ship stopped at the Cape Verde Islands and the two young men deserted (a very common occurrence). They sought out the United States Consul to obtain transportation home, and never shipped out again. Another whaleman who did not complete his voyage was Luther Madison, boatsteerer on the ship *Josephine*, but his story will be told later.

Napoleon Bonaparte Madison was one of a large family of fatherless children who lived with their mother in Gay Head, the largest Indian settle-



PHOTOGRAPH BY KATHRAINE W. TWEED

Amos Smalley the Gay Head Indian whaleman who struck the white whale.

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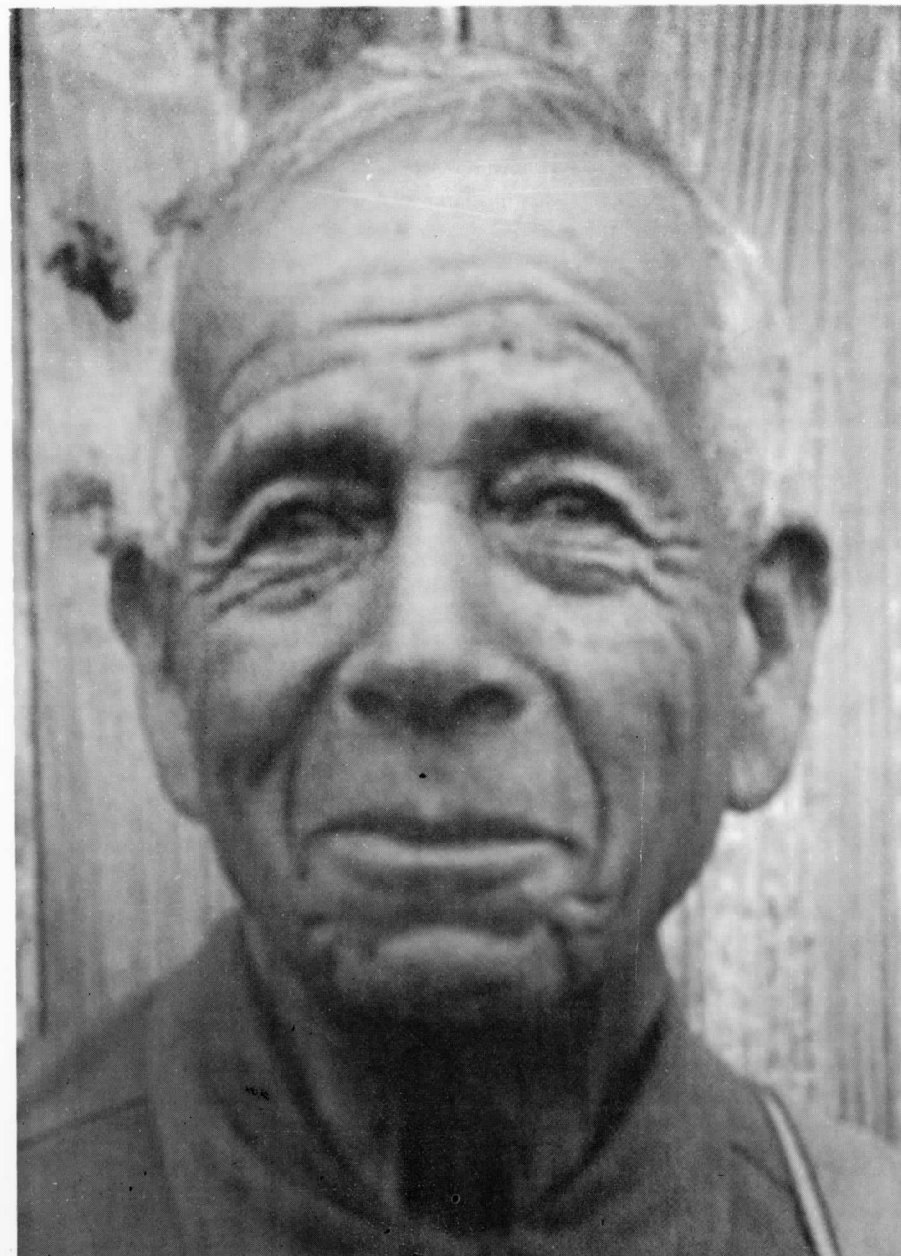
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Amos Smalley the Gay Head Indian whaler who struck the white whale.





The Gay Head lighthouse as it looked when Napoleon Madison was a small boy. This famous light guided whaleships home for many years.

ment on Martha's Vineyard. There was little money, so the children helped by picking and selling berries, which grew in wild profusion in the fields and swamps, and by finding more remunerative jobs as soon as they were old enough. Napoleon, in his own words, "jumped the gun" and went to work very early. He went to school when he could, but that wasn't often, and he learned by "picking up here and there."

He "picked up" a great deal from Mr. Edy Flanders, a retired whalerman who lived down across Menemsha Creek. Napoleon was sent there for milk and potatoes and he would visit by the hour with Mr. Flanders in his large barn, as clean and well-cared for as the low, gray house nearby. The boy listened avidly as the old man recalled his whaling days. Nearly always, as Napoleon left the barn, Mrs. Flanders would open the kitchen door and hand him a bag of cookies or doughnuts "to eat on the way," but there were always enough left over to share with his brothers and sisters at home. No wonder Napoleon like this particular errand.

It was through Mr. Flanders that Napoleon got his first real job. Knowing that the boy was not attending school, Mr. Flanders said,

"How would you like to go to Edgartown to work for some of my wife's relatives?" Thinking of the cookies and doughnuts, and all the other kindnesses of Mr. and Mrs. Flanders, Napoleon said he would like to go. He was never sorry. He lived with the Nortons in Edgartown for three winters, earning his keep, and a little more, by chopping and stacking firewood, milking the cows, feeding the pigs and chickens, and doing some of the heavy household chores. He did his work well and was always friendly and courteous, so he was well thought of by the townspeople.

He was well-treated and he liked the Nortons, but Edgartown was a long way from Gay Head and, when he had a chance to go to Lambert's Cove to work on a chicken farm, he took it. Two, and sometimes three, other boys worked there and Napoleon became "Poly" and learned to mix work with play. Mr. Frank Schultz, who ran the farm, was a very religious man, but he understood boys and they liked and respected him, even though they chafed at some of his straitlaced rules. It was a good life, but Napoleon was a Gay Header and that meant that, fundamentally, he was a man of the sea.

So when summer came, Poly left the chicken farm and went fishing and lobstering in a small catboat with John Davis. They fished from Vineyard Haven and, when the weather was not fit for fishing, Napoleon was free to follow his own pursuits. One such day, when he was walking to Lambert's Cove to visit Mr. Schultz, he saw several bicycles lying by the roadside on Tashmoo Hill. He "borrowed" one and rode to the cove, where he had a good visit with his friends, but when he was asked where he got the bicycle, he lied.

On the way back to Vineyard Haven, the bicycle pedals spun round and round and would not catch. Poly did not know what to do, so he had to

walk, pushing the bicycle along the sandy road at a snail's pace. He wished he had walked in the first place. After awhile he heard a cart rumbling along behind him and turned to see Sammy George Mingo, an Indian whaleman and farmer, from Christiantown.

"Oh ho, where'd you get the fine bicycle?" inquired Sammy George, when greetings had been exchanged.

"I bought it," replied Napoleon, compounding his guilt.

"Well, why are you pushing it instead of riding?" Napoleon told what had happened and Mr. Mingo said,

"Well, hoist it up into the wagon and climb aboard. I'm on my way to town to sell my vegetables." The ride to the village was pleasant, for Napoleon and Sammy George had much to talk about, exchanging news of their families and friends. By the time they stopped at the livery stable, where Mr. Mingo went to make arrangements for leaving his horse, Napoleon had forgotten all about the bicycle in the back of the cart. As he sat on the high seat, looking at the busy main street, he saw Mr. Gould, the policeman, walking across the road with a boy who suddenly yelled, "There it is! There's my bicycle!"

"Napoleon's story of just 'borrowing' the bicycle did not impress Mr. Gould, especially when he discovered that the bicycle had been damaged. Napoleon was taken into custody and driven to the jail in Edgartown, where he waited several days before he was taken to the courthouse for trial.

The court felt that Napoleon should be sent to reform school, but Mr. Herman Mayhew, Mr. Baxter and several others, who had known him well when he worked for the Nortons, interposed in his behalf. Ultimately, Herman Mayhew put up bail and Napoleon was bound over to him for two years.

Those were uneventful years in which the boy behaved himself and worked well. When his time was up, he returned to Gay Head, but he had no job and felt too old for berry-picking, so he spent much of his time wandering aimlessly. Noticing this and always mindful of the welfare of others, Stella Ryan suggested that he go to the Carlisle Indian School.

"You would like it there," she told him. "It's a school, established by the government, just for Indians, in the Cumberland Valley, near Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. That part of the country was very important in the French and Indian Wars and in the Revolution. General John Forbes marched from Carlisle to capture Fort Duquesne and, later, Colonel Henry Bouquet led two expeditions from there to crush Pontiac's Conspiracy. There's a life-sized monument of Molly Pitcher in the graveyard with a large plaque which tells of her brave exploits, and a guardhouse, nearby, built by the Hessians during the Revolution.

"It was there, too, that Benjamin Franklin and the other commissioners negotiated a treaty with the Ohio Indians."

"It sounds interesting all right, but what's the school like?" rejoined Napoleon.

"Oh, you would like the school," Miss Ryan went on. "It's in the Carlisle Barracks, the oldest military post in the United States, and it was founded and supervised by Lieutenant Richard Henry Pratt, who has just retired. There are farms and shops where the pupils work, and regular classes for school lessons and art. You would have a chance to become proficient in the Indian arts and crafts, if you wanted to, for there are classes in color and design, in leatherwork, in beadwork, and in weaving."

"Sounds like girls' work," the boy murmured, but Miss Ryan could see that he was interested, so she continued to tell about the school, ending with praise of its excellent athletic work.

"Well, I might try it," Napoleon agreed, having nothing better to do. Miss Ryan at once contacted the authorities at Carlisle<sup>4</sup> and, in due time, the proper credentials and a railroad ticket arrived and Poly bade his family goodbye and left the Island. He was sixteen at the time.

At Carlisle, because of his lack of schooling, Napoleon was placed in classes with very young children. He tried hard for a week or two, but it was too humiliating to have to study and recite with children half his age. He couldn't stand it, so he went to the headmaster's office to see what could be done. The master arranged for Napoleon to be transferred to one of the school farms. Daytimes, he worked in the fields and evenings, he attended classes. He was a good worker and it wasn't long before he was made foreman of his group. It happened that some fence posts needed to be set in front of the main house and Poly, used to manual labor, began to set them himself. One of the young women teachers remonstrated with him, saying that a foreman should just see that someone else did the work. Napoleon thought that absurd, said so, and proceeded to set the posts. He was called to account for his "rudeness" and told to apologize to the young woman. He fumed at the injustice of this and made up his mind to leave the farm at once. He packed his few belongings and, early the next morning, he stole down to the depot and boarded a train. He made his way, by several stages, to New Bedford and then to South Dartmouth, where he found work on a farm. The old man who owned the farm was a retired whaleman and during the long winter evenings, he told Napoleon of his adventures at sea. The young man made up his mind to be a whaleman. He stayed on the farm until the haying was done the next summer, and then went to Gay Head to tell his mother his plans.

While he was at home, the older men who had been whaling, passed

<sup>4</sup>Many Gay Head Indians were educated at Carlisle.

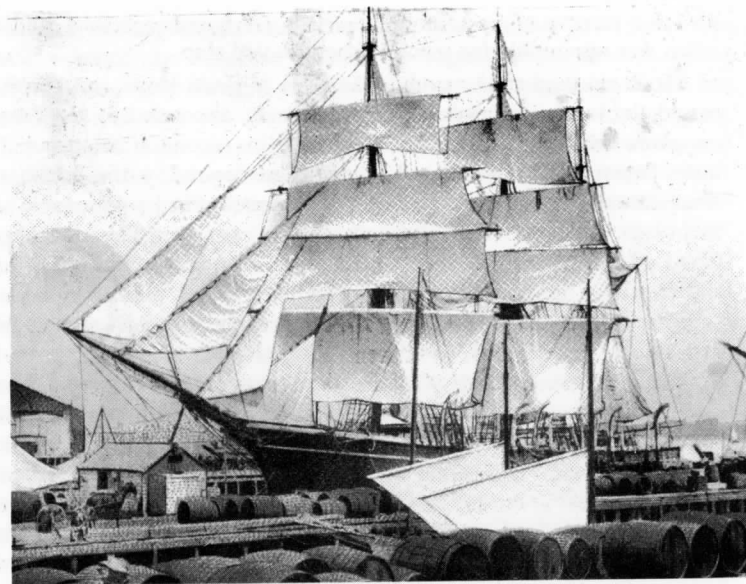
along useful bits of information such as what sort of lay, or share, he might expect. They spoke of the food, of various whaling grounds, of ports that might be visited, and, inevitably, ended with tall tales of their own ventures. But old Joe Belain was more helpful, for he gave Napoleon very good advice :

"Take enough money with you so that you will not be stranded, penniless, far from home. Be sure to take your own boots, foul weather gear and heavy clothes, too," he cautioned. "If you have to buy these things from the slop chest aboard ship, they'll cost you three or four times as much as they do at home and, at the end of the voyage, you'll find your purchases have swallowed up your entire pay." Poly took his advice and assembled his outfit. Then he and his cousin, Luther Madison, went to New Bedford.

There they found the bark *Josephine*, Captain A. D. West, bound for the Crozets, right whaling. The *Josephine* was a clipper model ship of 384 ton, built in 1877. She was well-kept, clean, and "smart under sail." She was bark rigged to be handled with a small crew, and would lay to much easier than a ship, very important when boats were lowered or taken up. Important, too, because a whaleship had to come about repeatedly to follow the boats when they were fast to whales, and the bark rig was more easily handled than the ship rig. The *Josephine*, at the time she was built, was said to have been the only ship in the New Bedford fleet that could beat out of the harbor under sail. She did not require the aid of a tow-boat. The young men were pleased with what they saw, and signed on, Luther as boatsteerer and Napoleon as foremast hand. They sailed for the South Atlantic in September, 1905.

Sails were hoisted and the anchor lashed in board. The *Josephine* passed Fort Phoenix and Clark's Point, sailed out past Nomans, and drove to the eastward. When the decks were cleared and the rigging coiled, all hands were called aft to pick the boat crews and watches. The wind breezed and most of the foremast hands were sick for a day or two. The officers and harpooners got their boats equipped with water and bread kegs, compass, spade, hatchet, knives, bailer, and waif, each in its own place, and all lines carefully coiled in their tubs. Poles were set in the harpoons and lances, which were ground, cleaned and oiled. Oars and paddle, mast and sail were put in each boat, which was now ready to be lowered when whales were sighted. Men were stationed aloft to watch for whales from sunrise to sunset, each man standing a two-hour watch. Occasionally, all four boats would be lowered to give the crew practice in handling oars and sails and in using the paddles noiselessly, so the whales would not be galled.

The captain and his officers were respected and the crew was "run-of-the-mill," doing the tasks assigned them and filling their leisure time,



Bark *Josephine* drying sails at the wharf in New Bedford.

during the dog watches, with harmless pursuits. Napoleon enjoyed the evenings on deck when the men sang and danced to the accompaniment of banjo, guitar, accordion, or violin. He was not a skillful musician, but he whiled away many an hour, practicing on his harmonica the tunes he'd heard the others play.

Aboard ship the food, "call it good or call it bad," was mostly scouse: salt beef, or salt pork, and hardtack boiled together. Sometimes there was salt horse, or beans, or pea soup, and once in a while, a gingerbread. But the mess in the forecabin was like that in the cabin, except for butter, condiments, and an occasional pie or cake, so there was little grumbling. The water, which got "gooey and stringy" after four months or so, clarified again in a couple of weeks and was once more useable.<sup>5</sup> There was

<sup>5</sup> The "stringy and gooey" water results from changes in microscopic organisms, found in all water but only apparent when closely confined, as in the whale casks. Clarification occurs when this particular phase of development is past.

(Dr. George C. Mattiessen)  
Robert C. Murphy, *Logbook for Grace*, (New York, Macmillan Co., 1947) p. 18

always a scarcity of fresh foods, especially fruits and vegetables, and this often was responsible for much sickness aboard ship.

About ten days after rounding the Cape of Good Hope, the *Josephine* passed the lonely, uninhabited Crozet Islands, discovered by the French navigator Marion Dufresne, and named for his second in command. The three largest islands were used as provision depots by the British and American sealers and whalers, but only Possession had a reasonably safe anchorage, sheltered from all winds except easterlies. This, the largest island of the group, was a splintered block of granite about a mile high and five miles long, at one end of which was a rock pierced by an arch large enough for a full-rigged ship to sail through. Napoleon and his shipmates could not see this, for Captain West gave the islands a wide berth. He knew that these islands, whose snowy peaks could be seen from a great distance, were surrounded by sunken reefs, over which furious seas seethed and foamed. Great rollers, winged by thousands of miles of storm, rushed toward the land, thundering at the base of the rocks to send spray hundreds of feet in the air. This awe-inspiring spectacle could be seen from the *Josephine* as she skirted the islands on her way to the whaling grounds.

One day was much like another, except that each lessened the distance between the ship and her goal. Sometimes another ship would be sighted in the distance - the only break in the monotony. But the men performed their duties and scanned the waters with hopeful eyes, for they were nearing their destination.

Then tragedy struck. Luther Madison became sick and the captain applied every remedy available without success. Luther died. When Napoleon went on deck to attend the burial of his cousin, he saw Luther's flag-draped body on a hatch by the open gangway, where whale blubber was taken aboard. Napoleon was suddenly overcome with grief, and he sobbed and sobbed as the captain read the service and committed Luther to God and the deep.

Work aboard the *Josephine* went on as before. Napoleon was taken out of the forecabin and assigned to his cousin's berth as boatsteerer to the first mate. The ship reached the whaling grounds and the task of filling the hold began in earnest.

The first time his boat was lowered, Poly's pulse raced as he neared his prey. He knew he must strike the whale or be sent back to the forecabin in disgrace. At the mate's command, he peaked his oar and jumped to his feet, grasping the iron. He braced himself firmly against the clumsy cleat and, as wood and blackskin met, Poly buried his harpoon clear to the hitches in the whale's back. Turning quickly, he seized the second iron and drove it into the whale as the boat backed away. Joy and relief surged over him as he realized that his dart had been powerful and his aim true. The

wounded whale plunged ahead, the whale boat rocking in its wake. The mate wrapped the whaleline around the loggerhead to slow its racing before he and Poly changed places. In a short while, the strain on the line eased and the crew saw the whale's head break water far to windward. They peaked their oars, turned on the thwarts to face the whale, and hauled in on the line, pulling the boat close enough for the mate to lance the whale. Then, following the command, "Stern, all," the crew pulled back as the whale went into its flurry. Thick blood spurted from its blow hole and its flukes beat the water spasmodically as the whale rushed round and round. Faster and faster it circled in its death agony until, at last, it rolled over on its side, lifeless.

The *Josephine*, some distance to windward, now swung off before the wind and made for the dead whale. The ship hove to, close by, the whale was taken alongside, and the whaleboat was taken up.

Whales were sighted almost daily now and the crew was kept busy chasing them, cutting in the blubber, and boiling down the oil. Of course, they did not always strike the whale they were chasing, nor get every whale they struck aboard, but the boatsteerers on the *Josephine* were skillful harpooners and Captain West was well pleased with the amount of oil and bone stowed below decks.

Frequently other whaleships were encountered and sometimes they stopped for a gam. The masters compared the number of barrels of oil and pounds of bone, and exchanged news from home. The crews, too, had a chance to visit friends and swap tales. The season was a good one. There had been a number of gales, but none of great intensity or long duration.

Now the long, low swells, which had been making up for some time, grew higher and higher. The wind breezed. Part of the crew went aloft to reef sails. Others were detailed to secure the boats to the upper cranes, lash down everything loose and batten the hatches. A sudden squall hit the *Josephine* and the mainsail burst, sounding like a terrific explosion. The slashing, wind-driven sleet cut like glass. It filled every corner of the deck and coated the rigging with ice, making the men's descent extremely hazardous. The squall soon passed, but the wind did not abate. It blew harder and harder, until heavy seas came crashing over the rail. Captain West gave orders to heave to. All night, all day and all the next night the vessel was buffeted by the gale, while driving snow made visibility zero. But on the morning of the second day the wind abated, the snow stopped, and faint sunlight pierced the clouds. It was still very rough, but Captain West ordered the topsails and courses set and the *Josephine* sped on her way. The bulwarks were stove in and the waist and bow boats were too badly damaged to be repaired at sea. It was the end of the season and winter was already upon them. All things considered, Captain West decided



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Whales were sighted almost daily now and the crew was kept busy chasing them, cutting in the blubber, and boiling down the oil. Of course, they did not always strike the whale they were chasing, nor get every whale they struck aboard, but the boatsteerers on the *Josephine* were skillful harpooners and Captain West was well pleased with the amount of oil and bone stowed below decks.

Frequently other whaleships were encountered and sometimes they stopped for a gam. The masters compared the number of barrels of oil and pounds of bone, and exchanged news from home. The crews, too, had a chance to visit friends and swap tales. The season was a good one. There had been a number of gales, but none of great intensity or long duration.

Now the long, low swells, which had been making up for some time, grew higher and higher. The wind breezed. Part of the crew went aloft to reef sails. Others were detailed to secure the boats to the upper cranes, lash down everything loose and batten the hatches. A sudden squall hit the *Josephine* and the mainsail burst, sounding like a terrific explosion. The slashing, wind-driven sleet cut like glass. It filled every corner of the deck and coated the rigging with ice, making the men's descent extremely hazardous. The squall soon passed, but the wind did not abate. It blew harder and harder, until heavy seas came crashing over the rail. Captain West gave orders to heave to. All night, all day and all the next night the vessel was buffeted by the gale, while driving snow made visibility zero. But on the morning of the second day the wind abated, the snow stopped, and faint sunlight pierced the clouds. It was still very rough, but Captain West ordered the topsails and courses set and the *Josephine* sped on her way. The bulwarks were stove in and the waist and bow boats were too badly damaged to be repaired at sea. It was the end of the season and winter was already upon them. All things considered, Captain West decided

to head for Mauretius to repair damages and recruit.

Mauretius Island was surrounded by coral reefs and covered with rugged mountains, among which lay fertile plains and immense green fields of coffee plants and sugar cane. As the *Josephine* approached the roadstead, the twin lighthouses at the entrance of the harbor, the elevated fortification, the mole which guards it, and the signal tower halfway up Peter Brite Mountain, were all visible. Soon the *Josephine* was exchanging signals with the tower, announcing her name, hailing port, and business. Inside the harbor, she was boarded by the quarantine physician and the port officer.

When the doctor was assured that every one was in good health, he gave Captain West a red flag to fly at the fore royal truck, as a certificate of health and a permit to transact business in the city. The port officer left a book of harbor laws and regulations, mostly quarantine restrictions, but containing, also, a series of signals for the safety of vessels in the roadstead during typhoons, which might be expected any time from the first of December to the first of April.

Assisted by a steam towboat, the *Josephine* went up to the head of the of the harbor, near the dry dock where several vessels were hauled out for repairs. The first few days in port, everyone was very busy getting the vessel cleaned and repaired. After that, each watch, in turn, was allowed a day ashore.

When it was his watch ashore, Napoleon was almost deafened by the noise on the docks, a mingling of most of the languages of the world with the harmonious voices of many donkeys. Walking along the streets, he saw Arabs in turbans, white robes and sandals. He learned that most of them were merchants and many were reputedly very wealthy. Other assiduous business men whom he saw were Chinese with their long pigtailed, wide conical hats and satin slippers. He was told that nine-tenths of the mercantile business of the port was conducted by the Creoles, and it was not hard to believe, for there were a great many of these neat, polite, thrifty people industriously at work all through the town. Everywhere he went, mixed with the races described, were hordes of Malaysians, Malabars and Madagasceans. Most of these people performed menial tasks and lived crowded together, anywhere and everywhere, subsisting principally on rice and curry and a fiery beverage called *arrack*, which they consumed in large quantities. These poor people were purchased by the French and English through what was called the "apprentice system," but they were really no more than slaves.

Walking slowly through the crowds, along the narrow, twisting streets, Napoleon remembered the admonition one of his shipmates had given him as their watch was about to go ashore:

"Keep your hands deep in your pockets, for these people are masters of sleight of hand." Many incidents he saw in the market place made Napoleon realize the wisdom of his friend's advice, but he wouldn't have missed his shore leave if it had cost him every cent he had.

The warehouses on the wharf were built with iron framework and Napoleon discovered that the market house in the center of the town was built the same way. It was not enclosed, but divided into four parts: one where meat and fish were sold, though the only "fish" Napoleon saw was a shark; at the next stall, coffee was being sold for a penny a cup; Napoleon tried it and found it delicious; then in the third stall, he saw vegetables and birds; and the last division was a complete bazaar with stalls for fancy-work, perfume, cutlery, hosiery, cloth, and many articles which were strange to the young whaleman. Each merchant was adorned with a streak of India ink, from the center of his scalp-lock to the bridge of his nose. Inquiring the reason for this, Poly found that the wearers were a distinguished caste known as *Parsees*. It didn't take long to learn that these merchants never asked what they expected to get for their goods. They would state a price much too high expecting the prospective buyer to offer a lesser amount. Then the merchant would lower his asking price a little and the buyer would raise his offer, until they agreed on a price and the purchase was completed. A very small purchase often consumed hours of time.

Napoleon was not greatly impressed with the buildings. The Government House looked like an old farmhouse; the hospital was large and surrounded by verandas, but it was utilitarian rather than beautiful; the barracks were bleak and barren, as most barracks are; and the Sailors Home looked like any boarding house on Acushnet Avenue in New Bedford. Even the park was rather drab and uncared for, despite many fountains which were welcome spots in the sun-parched town. Beyond the town, Napoleon found an avenue shaded by hugh cypress trees. He followed this to its end, where he saw a square cemetery well-filled with monuments of good style and workmanship, adorned with vases of fresh flowers. Most of the inscriptions were in French, but several were of English naval commanders who had died while stationed on the island.

Passing the American Consul's home, Poly went back toward the dock, stopping for awhile to listen to the brass band playing outside the barracks.

The next day, with damages repaired and fresh supplies aboard, the *Josephine* set sail for the whaling grounds off the Crozets. For months she fished and then, with bone and oil to be shipped home, she went into Natal Durban. Captain West had been there before, so he kept to the windward side of the channel, taking the combers end on, and dropped anchor in the sheltered bay near the center of the coast. Napoleon's watch was

detailed to remain aboard ship while the others went ashore. Deprived of a chance to land, the men refused duty. The captain sent for the shore police to arrest the crew. All who refused to go along willingly were handcuffed; Poly was the only one without handcuffs, yet he was really the instigator of the mutiny. The entire watch was jailed. Several became very sick, but the police insisted nothing was wrong, until, finally, a doctor was called. He found that five of the men, including Poly, had malaria. The chief of police escorted them to the hospital, where each crewman was guarded by a policeman at the head of his bed. Two of the men died. After nine or ten days, the rest heard that the ship was sailing and they were to be left behind until they were well, when they would be shipped home by the first ship which called at Durban. Napoleon sent out word that he wanted to talk with the captain. When Captain West appeared Napoleon announced:

"I don't want to be shipped home. I sailed on the *Josephine* and I want to return on her."

"Well, if you want to stay here until the next time we come in to recruit, we'll pick you up then." Thus Napoleon spent some time at Natal Durban. When his fever abated and he could get about, he learned that Natal was discovered on Christmas Day, 1497, by Vasco da Gama, and named "Tena Natalis." Later, Dutch Boers from Cape Colony settled here and the town was laid out. Then the British took it over and made it their base of supplies during the Boer War. The land around Natal was ruled by Zulu kings whose fierce warriors, thousands strong, fought bloody battles with the early settlers.

When he went ashore, Napoleon saw descendants of these warriors selling magic charms and potions, along with mealies (native corn). He saw their women, who all wear heavy metal rings on their ankles, carrying great trays of produce on their heads. He also saw small featured Indian women dressed in gold and lavender saris, and many Indian men, including snake charmers, fire walkers, and indentured servants from the sugar plantations. There were Indian bazaars and Hindu temples all over the city, for Durban had the largest Indian community of any city outside India.

On the esplanade was a large equestrian statue, which Napoleon learned was in honor of the "Paul Revere of Durban." In a clash with the Boers in 1842, the fort at Durban was besieged and the British were hopelessly outnumbered. Young Dick King volunteered to ride for reinforcements. His goal was Grahamstown, six hundred miles away, over tortuous mountains and through jungle trails. Despite hostile natives, wild animals, such as lions, leopards and hyenas, and the crocodiles which infested the rivers, he made the journey in ten days and Durban was saved for the British.

As Napoleon explored the city from end to end, days and weeks passed.

He no longer felt ill. He was very eager to ship out, but he clung to his resolve to wait for the *Josephine*. At last, after about three months, she again entered the harbor at Durban to recruit. As soon as the bone to be shipped home had been landed, and water and food had been taken aboard, the *Josephine* returned to the Crozets, this time with Napoleon aboard.

The weather was unusually calm; whales were plentiful and all the boats' crews were busy. One day when the mate's boat was fast to a whale, a dense fog shut in. The crew could not see the ship and the men aboard the ship could not see the whaleboat. The whale swam farther and farther away from the ship, towing the whaleboat in its wake. Hour after hour, the dense fog enveloped the men. The whale was tiring, but had not ceased its efforts to escape. All hands bent to, to haul the boat closer to its quarry. The mate lanced the whale and the great creature shuddered and then lay still. The fog had grown denser; there was scarcely enough visibility to see from one thwart to the next. Fastened to the whale, the boat drifted through the night. The men were wet, cold, tired and hungry. They huddled down to keep as warm as possible, only rising, now and then, to try to find a break in the thick fog.

Fourteen hours passed. Then the fog lifted and there was the *Josephine*, miles away to be sure, but in plain sight. The men bent to their oars with a will, but progress was slow with the great whale in tow and every one was relieved when the mate sang out that the ship was bearing down on them with all sails set.

Twice the *Josephine* had dropped anchor at Durban to discharge cargo and to recruit. The next time she headed for shore, Captain West said they were bound home and would make port at Saint Helena, to take on fresh food and water.

As they approached Saint Helena, Captain West bided his time and entered the cleft between the two mountains, which form the long, narrow valley which is Jamestown, during a period of comparative calm. Usually the winds blow down the mountains and funnel with violence through the valley, making landing extremely hazardous. As the *Josephine* dropped anchor, barefooted gayly clad boatmen rowed swiftly across the sparkling blue harbor to board the ship and trade with the whalemens.

The recruiting took several days, so each day the watch not on duty was allowed a few hours ashore. Napoleon was particularly interested to see for himself this famous island and Longwood, home of the exiled emperor for whom he was named. He smiled to himself as he recalled how this had come about. His mother, Rosetta Madison, was friendly with Evelina Cook, who had come to Gay Head from Saint Helena. When the two young women discovered that they were going to have babies at about the same time, they made a pact that whichever baby arrived first should

be named Napoleon Bonaparte. Poly won that honor, and the Cook baby was named Arthur.

Now Napoleon had a chance to explore the volcanic island of which he had heard so often. He wandered through the square, past the cannon used to signal the approach of ships, to the public gardens. He passed the fountain and the pergola and went along the serpentine path known as the Seven Sisters' Walk, to the goldfish pond surrounded by cannas and many other flowers in ornately shaped beds. Just beyond the garden, he saw the boarding house of Mr. Porteous where Napoleon Bonaparte spent his first night on Saint Helena. The house was in bad repair and there was very little to see, but Poly lingered to listen to the bent old man, who told his tale whenever he had an audience:

"Saint Helena was discovered by the Portuguese. The first settler was Dom Ferrando Lopez, a Portuguese nobleman who, while fighting with Alfonso Albuquerque in Goa, defected to the Indian commander, Rasul Khan. When the Indians surrendered, Lopez was delivered back to his countrymen, who chopped off his ears, his nose, his right hand and his left thumb and who pulled out all of the hair of his head and beard by the roots. Lopez finally crept aboard a homeward bound ship, but he lost his courage and begged to be put ashore at Saint Helena. Later, he regained courage and boarded a ship bound for Lisbon, from where he made a pilgrimage to Rome to have the Pope absolve his sins. This accomplished, the Pope granted Lopez a boon and he asked to be returned to Saint Helena. He brought seeds, trees and livestock with him and soon these fertile valleys were providing well for all the passing Portuguese ships.

"Much later, some other Portuguese sailors were put ashore on Saint Helena to die, but the climate was so healthy that they recovered quickly. They nurtured the trees and the crops which they found growing wild, and again provided food for the passing ships.

"Some of these ships were British, returning to England from the East. Crewmen frequently 'jumped ship' and settled here on the island. People of many other nationalities have made the island their home, too. Freed slaves flocked here from Africa; many Boers were sent here as prisoners at the end of the nineteenth century, and scores of Zulu chiefs were exiled to Saint Helena. The English, Dutch and Portuguese all claimed the island and, for many years, whatever one group built, the next would destroy. Now you will find them all, and many more, along the streets of Jamestown."

Napoleon thanked the old man for his story and continued his walk until he could look over the old wall and the moat to see the *Josephine* lying quietly in the bay. It was hard to realize that, at certain times of year, rollers broke with great violence on the lee side of the island, forcing ships to anchor well outside the bay, cutting off all communication with the

shore. Today it was as calm as a millpond. In the foreground there were several men and boys fishing for bull's eyes from the rocks along the shore. Others were walking along the harbor wall to find flying fish which, chased by dolphin, had dashed themselves against the wall and, stunned, were left there for the natives to gather.

Turning back, Napoleon could see the town itself, filling the narrow valley, extending inland a couple of miles. Houses were crowded together and he was not surprised to see many chapels, for the old man had said that Jamestown's population was of many races and many creeds. From his vantage point, Poly could see an English castle, a Dutch fort and a Portuguese church, whose tall spire served as a guide to navigators. Beyond the square was a church built from some old Chinese barracks, several houses, a large warehouse and the way up the Ladder. Poly climbed the Ladder, six hundred ninety-seven steps rising up the sheer, brown rock like a fireman's ladder, to the fort at the top. There he could see the rollers, enormous masses of rolling, heaving water, which often wrought destruction to ships, but which on this day looked like a broad stretch of corrugated cardboard.

In his wanderings about town, Napoleon learned many odd facts. The library, and parts of other public buildings, were built of teak or cypress. Poly learned that this was because of white ants which had been brought from South America in 1840. They had soon become a plague and had eaten large parts of many buildings. These had to be replaced with buildings of teak or cypress, the only woods which termites will not devour. He saw other pests, too: scores of rabbits and rats by the dozens, building their nests in the trees. But he also saw the interesting wire bird, Java sparrow, cardinal, ground doves, partridge, pheasants and guinea fowl. There were flowers everywhere, exotic blooms from all parts of the world, giving the island the aspect of a botanical garden. The trees were tropical: evergreen oak, banana, bamboo, date palms and peepul, the principal shade tree. Mingled with these were English gorse and the castor oil plant.

Poly saw a cemetery in the center of town and learned that there had been three cemeteries there until the town grew and buildings had to be erected over two of them. Outside the village were the Baptist Cemetery, which was also overgrown, and the Boer Cemetery where the graves stood in three neat rows, each marked by an obelisk, bearing the name of the dead Boer. This Poly saw the day he went to Longwood.

Napoleon walked beyond Jamestown to Rupert's Bay, guarded by batteries on each side and by the dangerous undertow below. Some young boys, idling nearby, told him that not many years ago, desperate slaves attempted to escape from the island in small boats, using their shirts and neckerchiefs as sails. That was when slave ships used to come from Africa



with thousands of slaves, closely packed for many weeks in holds so hot and polluted that the deck was strewn with dead and starved bodies, no longer human looking. These miserable, helpless objects were picked up from the deck and handed over the ship's side, living, dying and dead. Poly turned away from the scene of such horror, only to encounter the nearby leper station, which the boys hastily assured him was occupied now only by scorpions and centipedes. Only slightly reassured, Poly wandered back of the fortification, where he saw a tall chimney which the boys said used to be the pumping station for the Boer Prison Camp and, beyond that, the remains of a town. The boys told him it had been called Hay Town and had been built about fifty years before to relieve the congested slums of Jamestown, but now there were only a long shed, one house, some hovels and the rubble from long disused buildings. Poly had seen enough, so he returned to the ship as quickly as he could.

The next time Napoleon's watch was off duty, he and some others set out for Longwood, less than four miles from Jamestown. They walked past acres of flatlands planted to potatoes, vast herds of sheep and cattle grazing on the hillsides, and through stands of pine and oak, as well as through gorse, brambles, broom and bracken. They stopped to pick some Peasant Leaves to put under their hats, as some islanders do to keep cool on very hot days.

As the boys approached Longwood, they saw the long, low, white house with hibiscus hedges and tidy gardens. Purple bougainvillea, day lilies, oleanders, agapanthus, almond trees and many other blossoms flowered profusely, and carefully tended lawns stretched out in all directions. They learned that Napoleon Bonaparte had planned his own garden with sunken paths, irrigation ditches, and flower beds of many shapes.

The young men entered the house through the French windows of the billiard room, a green room with golden globes of the heavens and earth which Napoleon used to study, twirling them round and round as he mused. The shutters of the room had peepholes through which, the boys were told, the exiled emperor spied on his guards. Poly glanced at the billiard table with its torn pockets and went into the next room where Napoleon had played chess, always insisting on having the first move, though he played with the black pieces. In the dining room the boys were told that Napoleon was supplied six hundred thirty bottles of wine a fortnight, and fifty pounds of beef, a sheep, and nine fowls daily.

They saw his silk-hung bedroom with its famous camp cot and heard the story of the night when the general swore he killed seventy-seven rats there. Though he had a staff of fifty and rode in the first horse-drawn carriage on the island, while the governor traveled in a cart drawn by

bullocks at three miles an hour, he delighted in embarrassing his captors. He chopped up furniture for firewood and hammered out silver dishes and had them pawned in Jamestown to imply that not enough was being spent on his upkeep, though the tally was twelve hundred pounds a year.

The people of Saint Helena had other reasons to be annoyed with Napoleon, for his incarceration brought a string of ordinances curtailing their liberty. Then they had to forego trade, for no ships were permitted to call while the famous prisoner was in captivity. In addition, when regiments were sent to guard Napoleon, the islanders' meat supply was severely rationed. These were stories of Napoleon that his namesake, and the other whalemens, had never heard before.

The young men completed their tour of Longwood and followed the path which led to Napoleon's tomb, where they learned from an attendant why it was unmarked:

"The governor of Saint Helena would not allow the emperor's title on stone and suggested that it be marked simply, 'Napoleon.' Napoleon's friends did not like this and had the stone left blank." The attendant went on to tell them of Napoleon's wish to be buried by the Seine and how, ironically, the spot where he was entombed was in the Valley of the Sane, one of the island's most verdant and peaceful valleys. The only sounds were the cries of the birds and the croaking of the frogs from the nearby spring where, it was said, a Chinaman used to come daily to fetch drinking water for Napoleon.

Continuing on their way, the young men inspected the Boer Cemetery and then reached Rosemary Hall where Prince Danizale, son of Cetewayo, the chief of the Zulus, had been imprisoned from 1890 to 1897. This rebel prince, like Napoleon, took keen delight in tormenting his captors. He insisted on learning to play the piano, thereby causing his jailers no little anguish.

Past Rosemary Hall was Plantation House where Poly and his friends stopped to look at the two hundred year old tortoise with his leathery neck and puckered skin. They fed him some bananas, which he seemed to relish, though they were told that pears were his favorite fruit. The tortoise ate slowly, as if he had unlimited time at his disposal, but the crew of the *Josephine* did not, so they left their friend enjoying his feast, while they hastened back to Jamestown.

The next day was sunny, with a good breeze. By mid-morning the shore boat was taken up, the sails were set, and the anchor hauled inboard and lashed. Outside the harbor, more canvas was bent on and the *Josephine* headed northwest, bound for New Bedford. It was very hot, running before the wind, but the crew got some relief by splashing each other, while washing down the decks. Sunny, tropical weather continued for some time.

The days were extremely hot, but the nights were cool and the Southern Cross hung low on the horizon over calm waters. At the end of the week, the *Josephine* passed close to Ascension Island, a lonely, barren rock in the middle of the Atlantic.

The next day, just after sunrise, the lookout saw a small pod of whales. Three boats were lowered and each struck a whale. When the cutting in and boiling down were over, forty more barrels of oil were stored below decks.

The days were pretty monotonous for there was little for the men to do. When they saw a school of porpoises playing under the bow of the ship, they would dart at them from the martingale. Occasionally, one was hauled aboard and the crew dined on porpoise steaks. It was a welcome change from salt beef. With steady trade winds and fine weather, the *Josephine* bowled right along. For three uneventful weeks, no whales were sighted. Then one morning the cry rang out:

"There she blows! There she blows!" All boats were lowered and, with sails set and crews paddling mightily, they raced for the school of whales. The second mate's crew got their whale and towed it to the ship. After a tussle, the mate lanced his whale, which breached, and then lowered its head and thrashed its tail in all directions. At last, the lance hit a vital spot and the whale rolled over, dead, with its fin up. Back at the ship, the fluke chains were put on and the whales were cut in. These were small whales, so only twenty-nine more barrels of oil went below.

A month north of the equator, the *Josephine* struck heavy squalls. The crew raced to reef in the sails and adjust the yards, first on one tack and then on another. Heavy seas washed over the decks. The incessant thunder was deafening and the lightning almost continuous. It was a rough, stormy night and the gale continued all the next day. Then the weather changed, the seas went down and the ship flew along under a light, northerly breeze.

Expecting to be on soundings soon, Captain West ordered the *Josephine* prepared for entering New Bedford. The try works were knocked down and the bricks and useless lumber thrown overboard. The try pots were turned upside down and lashed between heavy knees bolted to the deck, which held the tryworks in place. The bulwarks and the deck were thoroughly scrubbed. The masts and yards were given a fresh coat of paint for, like all good whaling masters, Captain West took pride in bringing his ship home in the best possible condition.

The *Josephine* was nearing home. Soundings were taken, off and on, during the day. Captain West knew they were not far from land. A drizzly rain and fog settled over the ship and nothing could be seen in any direction. The captain ordered the sails aback and the ship rose and fell lazily on the long ground swell. Everything was very still; even the familiar sounds of

the sails slatting and the yards creaking had an eerie sound.

But soon after sunrise, the fog lifted and Block Island appeared, close at hand. In a short while, a pilot boat drew near the *Josephine*. The ship luffed to the wind and soon the pilot was on board. With fair wind the vessel stood in for New Bedford.

As she passed Dumpling Light, the light sails were taken in; the fore and main royals, jibs, topsails and staysails were clewed. Passing Clark's Point, the fore and main sails were clewed. The *Josephine* was anchored in the harbor, but was quarantined until the next morning, when the doctor came aboard to examine all hands. All were in good health, so the *Josephine* was allowed to ease into Butler's Wharf and the hawsers were made fast.

Napoleon had been gone from home twenty-five months. He went ashore and sought out the shipping agent, John Wing, to get paid off. Poly's lay wasn't very great, but he fared better than most, thanks to Mr. Belain's advice.

Napoleon did not linger in New Bedford, but headed for the Vineyard on the first packet sailing that way. Three of his brothers, Isaac, Nehemiah, and Hezekiah, were still at home. It was good to see his family again, but there was nothing to do and he was restless after his months at sea. Charlie Hatch persuaded him to go to Vermont to get work on a farm. Napoleon visited with friends of the Hatches for three weeks and then got work on a nearby farm. When Poly found he could not put up with the irascible Farmer Martin, he left and found work elsewhere. Once he went to Granville, New York, but he soon returned to Vermont. After some years, he settled in Ludlow and went to work in a woolen mill. Strangely enough he did not mind working in the mill and was quite content with his life in the thriving town. But one day he caught his arm in the carding machine. He could not work for some time, so he decided to go home.

Napoleon had never been homesick. He had, in fact, nearly always felt an urge to leave home, to seek new places and new acquaintances. But that changed. When he returned to Gay Head, he discovered Annetta Vanderhoop, a lively young school teacher, with dancing black eyes and a comely figure. For the first time in his life, he seriously considered settling down. Napoleon had no trouble finding work to do and, once more, he became a fisherman. In summer, he went lobstering; in the fall and spring, dragging; and winters he had a small boat of his own from which he fished for scallops in Menemsha Pond. A fisherman's day is long, but Poly found time to woo and win Annetta.

They were married and, in time, had two daughters, and a son who was named Luther. Napoleon built a fine house on the south side of Gay Head, overlooking the broad expanse of the Atlantic. He was made Medicine Man of the Gay Head tribe and he was content to remain at home, enjoying his

family and renewing the friendships of his youth.

The years passed quickly, Napoleon's children grew up, married and had children of their own. Children and grandchildren were always welcome at the medicine man's lodge and it was seldom that the older Madisons did not have some of their family living with them.

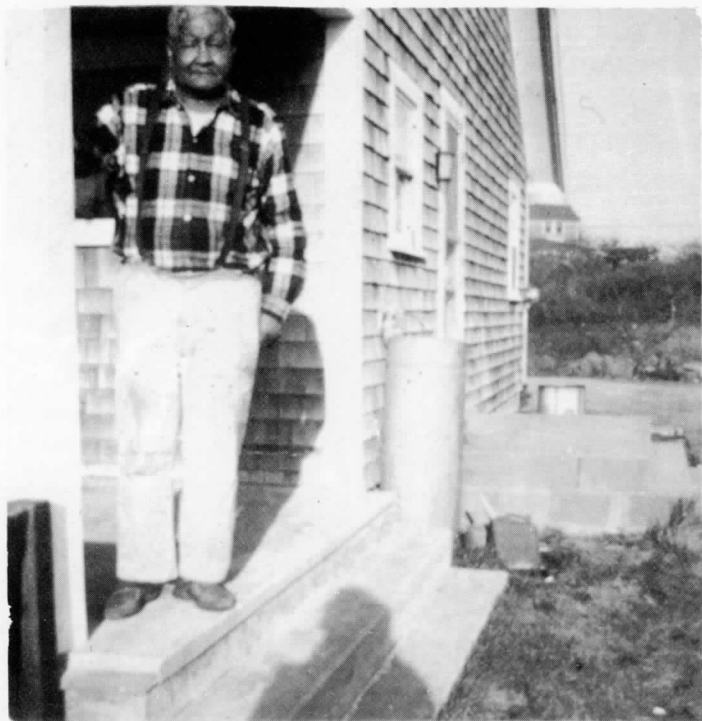
Napoleon grew too old to haul lobster pots or scallop drags. He and Annetta built a little restaurant and souvenir shop on Gay Head Cliffs, directly above Moshup's Den. During the summer months, with the assistance of one or more of their children or grandchildren, they supplied busloads of tourists with refreshments and mementos of their trip to Gay Head. Between customers, Napoleon's gaze ranged up and down the sound and off beyond Nomans. He said little, but doubtless his thoughts ranged further than he himself once traveled on the whaleship, *Josephine*.

But that was long ago. In 1910, the *Josephine* was sold to Chile, where she was lost off the coast in December 1919. Not only is his ship gone, but so are the men with whom he used to talk about far places. Of course, the older men who had counseled him before he sailed have long been dead. Now even his contemporaries, who went whaling, are gone. Napoleon Bonaparte Madison, Medicine Man of the Gay Head tribe of the Wampanoag Indians is the last native whaleman on Martha's Vineyard, where his ancestors were the first whalemen.



PHOTOGRAPH BY DEWOLF C. THOMPSON

Napoleon Madison in the regalia of chief medicine man of the Gay Head tribe.



Napoleon Madison on the steps of his home.

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## Historical Society News

Summer visitors have as usual brought increased activity to the Dukes County Historical Society both for the Thomas Cooke house and the Museum library.

Two new displays in the Thomas Cooke house are drawing admiring attention. They are the recently restored Pellegrini water color of the *Consuelo* sailing into Marseilles harbor July 10, 1884 and the four ancient hand guns dating from the late 1700's.

The *Consuelo* was built at Richmond, Maine in 1845 and her captain was Simeon B. Ray of Millbridge, and Edgartown, who was the father in law of Mrs. Carrie Worth Ray of Edgartown, who bequeathed the painting to the Historical Society at her death in 1933.

Mr. Harold R. Mouillesseaux of Franklin Lakes, New Jersey, a summer visitor was responsible for the painstaking restoration of the four hand guns much in need of attention. Given to the Society by Vineyard donors a number of years ago, the guns now are displayed in a handsome pine case, also the work of Mr. Mouillesseaux, who is a member of the New Jersey Arms Collectors Club. He was aided by two friends and fellow members, James C. Altemus and Calvin V. Schneider.

The Society has acquired a photo copier which already has been put to use and is available for researchers using the Society archives. Mr. Robert Lewis, Santa Barbara, Cal. a grandson of whaling captain LaRoy Lewis of the Vineyard, requested copies of the Norfolk Island letters written by the "Mutiny of the Bounty" descendants to Capt. Lewis in the 1880's. Mr. Lewis also sent the Society photographs of Capt. Lewis and his great grandfather, Capt. Ellis Lewis. The photo copier also has been put to use on early records of the Vineyard excursion steamers for Nelson Wood, Pennsylvania State University professor, who is compiling a book on excursion steamers of New England, and delighted to find so much material in our Society library.

Repairs made on our microfilm machine now permit its use for showing 35 mm. films which are of Edgartown Customs House records, when the Shire town was the main port of entry for the Vineyard.

The Martha's Vineyard Chapter DAR, Edgartown, has joined the number of other organizations which have Life memberships in the Historical Society. The Sea Coast Defence Chapter's historic little museum building on Upper Main St., Vineyard Haven now is open from 12 noon to 5 p.m. daily, except Mondays, again aided by the DCHS.

Descendants of the Mayhew family, now may have an opportunity to buy a reproduction of the Mayhew Family Tree on sale in the Museum library. Reprints of the original, they show the genealogical details which began with patriarch Thomas Mayhew who bought the Vineyard in 1641.

Dorothy R. Scoville

*Curator*

## Some Publications

OF THE DUKES COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY ON SALE  
AT ISLAND BOOK STORES AND IN THE SOCIETY'S LIBRARY.



*Whaling Wives* by Emma Mayhew Whiting and Henry Beetle Hough.  
A new edition. 294 p., illustrated. Cloth \$4.50.

*Bartholomew Gosnold Discoverer and Planter, New England—1602, Virginia—1607* by Warner F. Gookin and completed by Philip L. Barbour. 271 p. Cloth \$8.00.

*Capawack Alias Martha's Vineyard* by Warner F. Gookin. 58 p.  
Cloth \$1.00.

*Martha's Vineyard A Short History and Guide.* Eleanor Ransom Mayhew, Editor. New edition with added index. Maps and illustrations. 191 p. Paper \$2.50.

*The Wampanoag Indian Tribute Tribes of Martha's Vineyard* by Milton A. Travers. 78 p., illustrated. Paper \$2.00.

*The Heath Hen's Journey to Extinction* by Henry Beetle Hough. 31 p., illustrations. Paper 50¢.

*The Fishes of Martha's Vineyard* by Joseph B. Elvin. With 36 illustrations of fishes by Will Huntington. Paper, 50¢.

*The History of Martha's Vineyard* by Charles Edward Banks. A new edition. Indices, illustrations, three volumes. Cloth \$25.00.

*Tales and Trails of Martha's Vineyard* by Joseph C. Allen. 234 p. Illustrated. Paper \$3.95. When ordering by mail please add 25¢ to cover postage and handling.