

Between War and Poverty: Whaling in 18th-Century Bermuda

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ABSTRACT: The development of whaling in Bermuda in the eighteenth century reflects the transformation of the colony's economy and social structure from one based on a agricultural mentality into a maritime, mercantile one. The stringent economic conditions of the island led Bermudians to seek in whaling a source for oil, meat and other products that for the most part were used for subsistence. Given the strict legal regulations imposed by London and the local governor, whaling generated a lot of conflicts between the local residents and the authorities. Liberalisation of those regulations permitted the development of financial ventures whose success was modest at best and always short-lived. Depletion of the local stocks of whales, the development of Yankee whaling and the tensions between the North American colonies and Great Britain that culminated with the American Revolution complicated the conditions of whaling in Bermuda.

INTRODUCTION: *Economic conditions and whaling*

In a previous article (Romero, 2006) I described the origin and development of whaling as well as the exploitation of whale products, such as ambergris, in 17th-century Bermuda. There I explained how whaling was an operation attempted since the early years of the colony and that it developed mostly for the profit of the locals, in defiance to the rules and regulations established by the Bermuda Company. I also described the method of early whaling and hypothesised that the techniques developed by Bermudians may have been copied by Yankee whalers, from whom, in turn, they were copied in the rest of the wider Caribbean.

In this article I deal with the history of whaling in Bermuda during

the 18th century and the social, political, and economic circumstances under which it developed.

By the end of the 17th century, economic conditions in Bermuda worsened to the point that commercial operations were no longer financially attractive to foreign investors. The colony was under the administration of the Bermuda (or Somers Islands) Company. This venture, founded in 1615, originally counted with 117 London merchants and courtiers as shareholders. But as the original investors died off, by 1670s only about 20 Londoners still held about 10 percent of the land shares, with most of the property now in the hands of local Bermudians. That loss of interest in London and the increasing desire by the Crown to control the finances and politics of the colonies, lead to the dissolution of the Company in 1684 (Dunn, 1963).

Because Bermuda lacked any major financial value to the metropolis, the British government very much abandoned the island to its own fate until the beginning of the American Revolution when they realised its strategic importance. Until then, the Crown appointed the governors but did little more to help local residents. Even the governor's salary was supposed to be paid for by money raised locally (see Wilkinson, 1933, 1950; Kennedy, 1971 and Bernhard, 1985 for a glimpse of Bermuda society in the 18th century).

This meant that Bermudians had to deal with their own problems whether caused by nature or by the residents themselves. On the natural side three hurricanes, two in 1712 and another in 1716, devastated both lands and buildings. This led Bermudians to change their construction habits from using the endemic Bermuda cedar (*Juniperus bermudiana*) wood to limestone rock as main building elements to better withstand extreme winds. The storms also destroyed most of the Bermuda palms (*Sabal bermudana*) from which plait was used to weave hats and baskets (one of the few exports of the islands) and for thatching their houses. Further, by that time it had become clear that the colony could not produce neither the quality nor the quantity of tobacco needed to compete with the one produced in Virginia (Wilkinson, 1950:14; Bernhard, 1999:149).

In addition to that, a number of deadly epidemics that included yellow fever, measles, smallpox, and cholera also impacted the labour force (Tucker, 1983:83). There was a great deal of skewed sex ratio towards women (among both whites and blacks) with the large number of males engaged in seafaring activities reduced even further the work force that could be engaged into labor-intensive activities such as agriculture (Crane, 1990; Bernhard, 1999:245).

This lack of productivity from the land and the extremely poor economic conditions led people to depend almost exclusively upon maritime-related activities. Those activities were mostly opportunistic endeavors such as piracy, privateering, ship-wrecking, smuggling, salt-

trading from the Bahamas (Bermudians settled the Turks Island in 1673 by sending 500 people in 1701; Packwood, 1993:46–47), and whaling (Crane, 1990; Bernhard, 1996; Jarvis, 2002). Because all of these activities required more shipbuilding, many tobacco fields were reforested with cedars for timber production (Jarvis, 2002). Yet, the rapid increase of shipbuilding activities put pressure on the local cedars to the point that on August 3, 1704 an act was passed aimed at preventing the destruction of these trees.

The intensification of maritime activities led to a sudden increase in the number of vessels owned by Bermudians: from 14 in 1680 to 70 in 1700. In that year, the Bermuda fleet was manned by about 170 masters (all whites), 400 white sailors and 100 black, mulatto and native-American slaves, showing that there had been a profound shift in the utilization of labour among all races (Jarvis, 2002). In those years the phrase “salt, cedar and sailors” was used to describe the Bermudian way of life (Tucker, 1983:75). By 1729 almost all the occupations for the population of 5,086 whites and 3,688 blacks were maritime-related (Packwood, 1975:33–34).

With whales visiting Bermudian waters during the spring only, whaling became part of those opportunistic activities, although one on which people could depend only for short periods of time. Yet, by the end of the 17th century whaling in Bermuda was not in good condition due to the lack of sufficient boats, equipment, and investment, but the governors kept pressing for its development since all expected to get £100 from it on an annual basis (Anonymous, 1946).

With the dismantling of the Bermuda Company in 1684, the prohibition to build whaling vessels was lifted that year (Schortman, 1969). That did not mean, however, that this was an unregulated activity. Because whaling was supposed to provide one of the few sources of income to the governors of the island in the form of a £10 fee per whale killed, virtually all of the governors took a personal interest in this activity. For example, Sir John Hope Bruce (*b.* 1684?–*d.* 5 June 1766), who governed Bermuda from 1722 until 1727, considered whaling in Bermuda “one of the great curiosities of the world” and he claimed having killed a calf himself. He thought it to be “the prettiest diversion ever I saw if it was not sometimes attended with danger” (John Hope private letterbook, 1721–1727; Bodleian Mss. Rawlinson A 484:10, 30 cited in Jarvis, 1998:458).

In 1723, a typical year in terms of whaling, 5,782 gallons of whale oil were exported to London, Liverpool, and Barbados, which means that at least six whales were killed. The total value of that export was £600. However, whaling was carried out in a disorganised way, with boats competing with each other. When in 1727 Governor Hope departed from the colony, the whaling operations languished due to increased competition and mismanagement (Jarvis, 1998:458).

LIBERALISATION OF THE WHALING INDUSTRY

By the 1720s whaling provided one of the few commodities that could be exported in the form of whale oil, as well as providing whale oil for local consumption (for lamps and as lubricant). Also whale meat probably supplied the only opportunity to non-whites to eat meat while the hide was used also by non-whites to make shoes which they wore in very special occasions such as weddings and funerals (Wilkinson, 1950:14, 224; Packwood, 1993:92).

Still, any whaling activity was supposed to be under strict control by the Crown, not only because parts of its proceeds were to contribute towards the governor's salary, but also because of its legal status. Since 1324 by Royal Decree of Edward II of England "the crown has the Sovereign dominion and jurisdiction over the sea which encompasses the British isles, and over all creeks and arms of the sea and navigable rivers, it has no general property in the fish therein except whales and sturgeon. These are royal fish and belong to the crown" (Fraser, 1977). That meant that if Bermudians wanted to exploit the local whales they needed special authorisation. Thus, in 1727 they sent a petition to King George II asking for whaling to be allowed to them. They argued that for several years they had faced a shortage of oil and that whales were essentially the only source of fresh meat for slaves. The Crown relented and the "Royal Fish" prerogative on the colony was lifted in 1730. Still a license was required in 1733 and part of the fee had to be used to pay for the governor's salary. £100 per year was expected to be generated by this industry, which was about 20 percent of the governor's salary (Lefroy, 1877:93; Anonymous, 1950; Wilkinson, 1950:111).

Now that whaling was permitted and that the governor needed to monitor it for his own benefit, this activity became more transparent and more complete records are available. For example, by 1734, seven to eight boats belonging to two whaling companies were participating in the fishery, which resulted in overcrowding of the whaling grounds. These grounds were also called "the shallows of Bermuda" and consisted mostly of the area from west and to north of the island, surrounded by coral reefs and that was normally used by baleen whales for breeding and sheltering purposes during their migration. In 1735, 11 whales were taken and eight more the following year. (Gov. John Pitt [1728–37] to the Board of Trade, 30 May 1734. PRO CO 37/12:162; 13:16).

This increase of whaling output fueled Bermudians' dreams of exporting whale oil. However, at the same time competition appeared from Yankee (New England) whalers which meant that the price of whale oil dropped and, thus, its value as an export commodity for Bermudians. To make things worse, in 1731 New Englanders and in 1733 the British started to subsidise whaling which made Bermudian

whaling even less competitive in the international markets.

In 1738 the new Governor, Alured (old spelling for Alfred) Popple (*b.* 1699; *d.* Bermuda, 17 November 1744, whose tenure lasted until his death), convinced the legislature to reform the whaling licensure system to eliminate counter-productive competition. The fee of £10 remained until 1740 (Lefroy, 1877:93). Two companies were established that year but one went bankrupt and sold its boats and equipment to the surviving one, the Smith's Island Company. Apparently the harpooners of that time were so aggressive and/or unskillful in pursuing the whales that they were scaring them away instead of killing them (Jarvis, 1998:459).

Because whales were becoming scarcer, an act was passed aimed at limiting whaling activities between March 20 and the first week of May, and to make an agent for each company responsible for paying duties (Whaling CO 37, 5, 11, 12, 14, 73, 74, 117, 162, 191, 324, 349. M of C. 3 and 7 May 1732, 23 June 1769; Wilkinson, 1950:111; Jarvis, 1998:459). Because the island was still incapable to come up with the money to pay in full the governor's salary, the Bermuda assembly voted in 1741 that the Governor would receive more money per each mature whale captured: £14 per adult (M of C., 8 and 10 August 1737; Schortman, 1969). By that year a number of small shore-whaling operations had been established and shut down. These were mostly small, family operations, in contrast to the 30-member Smith's Island Company that had been operating until then. In 1744 no whales were taken. This suggests that the local population of whales (essentially humpbacks, *Megaptera novaeangliae*) had been depleted and if more whales were to be taken, the locals needed to develop more sophisticated approaches and to look for other species of whales and even other whaling grounds.

ATTEMPTS TO INDUSTRIALISE AND THE FIRST MODERN WHALING STATIONS

During the second half of the 18th century, whaling became a more professionalised activity. In 1759 two whaling companies were incorporated: the Town Whale Company and the Eastern Whaling Company.

The Town Whale Company was established on February 27, 1759 (for the minutes of the incorporation meeting and other meetings see Appendix 1). From those documents several facts emerge: the board was constituted by the governor William Popple (brother of Alured, *b.* 1700/01; *d.* Hampstead, England, February 8, 1764), and members of the Bermudian commercial elite. For example, the Higgs of Bermuda descended from Thomas Higgs who established sense in those islands in 1626. Several of his descendants owned land in Smith's and St. David's islands, both major centers of whaling in subsequent years (Arnell and Harris, 1991).

The Town Whale Company had 12 board members and 30 investors. Apparently they were using boats and whaling paraphernalia that belonged to a previous whaling operation in the “East End” (East Whale Bay) of the islands. They used three boats and employed 23 people to man them. The oarsmen and the steersmen were black while the harpooner was white (Jarvis, 1998:460). For some reason they went into big lengths to make sure that the slaves employed in the operation were given enough rum punch. The last document bearing the name of that whaling company is dated 1769 when they reported having killed only one whale after 31 days of effort. So despite the careful administration of its operations as transpired from its meeting minutes, this was another ephemeral business (10 years) due, presumably, to low whaling success. However, other factors may have furthered the demise of whaling in Bermuda as a promissory financial venture: in 1766 a British Duty was imposed to all American colonies (including Bermuda) on whalebone and whale oil imported into Britain. The duty was to pay for royal frigates that provided protection from pirates and privateers (Mawer, 1999:13).

The other whaling venture founded in 1759 was the Eastern Whaling Company which was established on 19 April of that year. The shares of the company were distributed as follows:

Governor William Popple:	2.5
President: Dr. Forbes:	1
Dr. Forbes (Director):	2.5
Sam Butt:	0.5
General Butterfield:	2
Colonel Harvey:	1.25
John Slater:	1
Colonel George Tucker:	1.5
Total:	12.25

The harpooner was to receive 40 shillings per successful strike (CO 37, 15, M. 201; 16, 195; 20, Q. 51. J. of Assembly, I, 692, 695, 708; II, 922; Wilkinson, 1950:216).

Notice that some of the shareholders were the same as of the Town Whale Company, including the governor.

The members of the Eastern Whaling Company were the ones who apparently built the first modern (and long-lasting) whaling station for its time. They did so during the very first year of operations (1759) when they built a “whale house” on Smith’s Island. The list of known whaling stations in Bermuda for the 18th century are compiled on Table 1 and what we know about them follows. Their location can be found in Fig. 1.

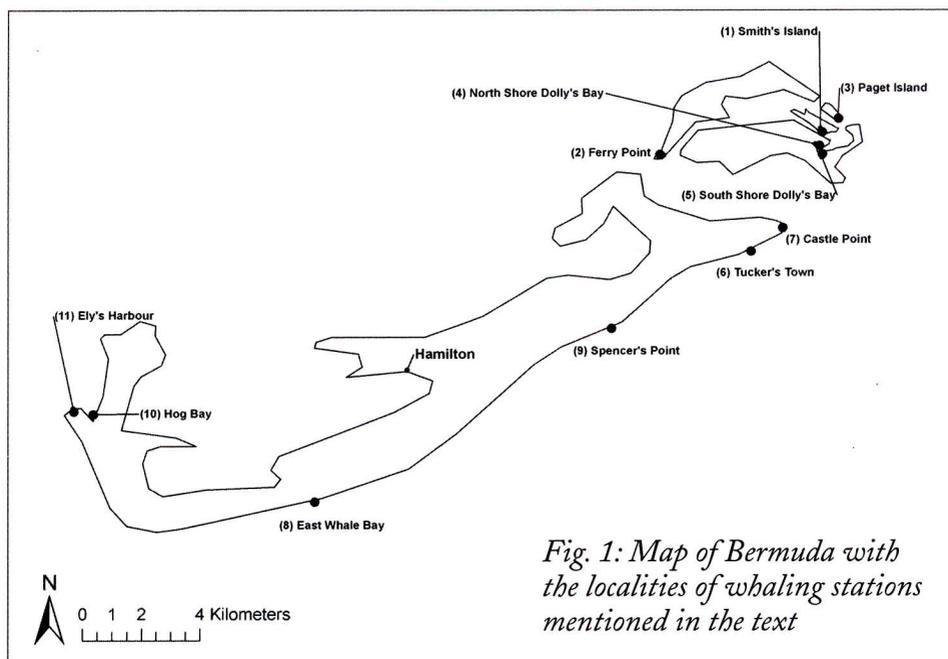


Fig. 1: Map of Bermuda with the localities of whaling stations mentioned in the text

18TH-CENTURY BERMUDA WHALING STATIONS

	<i>"Whale house" name</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Parish</i>
1	Eastern Whaling Company	Smith's Island*	St. George's
2	Greave's whale house	On the west side of Deep Bay, now called Richardson's Bay, on Ferry Reach/Ferry Point	St. George's
3	Hinson's whale-house	Across St. George's Channel on Paget Island	St. George's
4	Dolly's Bay House	On the north shore of Dolly's Bay, St. David's Island	St. George's
5	"Whalehouse"	On the south shore of Dolly's Bay, St. David's Island	St. George's
6	?	Tucker's Town, Green Bay	St. George's
7	?	On Castle Point/Harbour, west of Green Bay.	St. George's
8	?	East Whale Bay	Southampton
9		Spencer's Point	Smith's
10		Hog Bay	Sandys
11	?	Whale Island, Ely's Harbour*	Sandys

*Remains of these whaling stations are still visible today (see text).

Known whaling stations ("whale houses") or whaling processing locations in Bermuda in the 18th century

1. Eastern Whaling Company at Smith's Island

This company purchased one acre of land with the rest of the island being owned by John Slater, who was a shareholder in the company (unpublished document by E.A. McCallan provided by Peter & Diana Beckett). It is quite possible that his investment came from the piece of land he provided for the whaling station.

Smith's Island is the largest in St. George's Harbour. This is the one that served as the first permanent human settlement in Bermuda. It was also the one inhabited by Christopher Carter and Robert Waters, deserters of the *Sea Venture*, and later by Edward Chard (the "Three Kings of Bermuda") and where the first big piece of ambergris was presumably found (Romero, 2006). The island was privately owned from the beginning but not by the original settlers since Carter moved to Cooper's Island, Chard was imprisoned and Waters went pirating with Moore (Arnell and Harris, 1991).

This whaling station on Smith's Island might have been the first whaling station in Bermuda that bears the characteristics of a modern



Fig. 2: Roof timbers of Smith's Island whalehouse

whaling station for its time. The original house was about 50 feet long by 16 feet wide and built using limestone blocks. The original doors of this house were four feet wide in to permit easy access to men carrying blubber or hot oil (Tucker, 1962). For the roof cedar timber was utilised.

Today the house has been transformed into a family home but still maintains the original roof with cedar timber (Fig. 2). Outside the house one can see on the limestone shore next to the sea the scores and grooves caused by the friction of the ropes used during the handling of the whale carcass.

A few metres south of the house we can still see in relatively good conditions the masonry fireplaces and flues for the trying pots where the blubber was boiled to extract the whale oil (Fig. 3). The masonry is 5.75 m length, 2.46 m width and 1.14 m height. This construction held four trying pots. The first one, and closest to the house, was made originally of copper and was 1.4 m in diameter and 25 cm in depth (Schortman, 1969; Paling, 2003). That trying pot has now disappeared. The other trying pots were made of iron and ranged in diameter from 82 to 90 cm and about 68 cm in depth (Fig. 4). There was a furnace for



Fig. 3: Masonry for the trying pots at Smith's Island



Fig. 4: Iron trying pot at Smith's Island

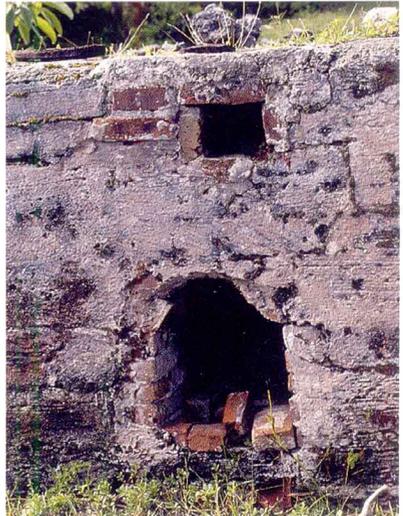


Fig. 5: Inside of the furnace of the masonry for trying pots at Smith's Island

each try pot, each covered with an iron door (now gone) leading to the chamber where the try-pot was placed (Fig. 5). There were flues above each furnace in the rear wall to vent smoke.

West of the house, next to the trying pots, there is a pit on which a copper cooler was placed (unpublished document by E.A. McCallan provided by Peter & Diana Beckett). According to Schortman (1969) "the cooler had been sold, and the pit was then covered over with cedar planks of which were stored a mincer now at the rooms of the St. George's Historical Society, two iron trying pots, a few pulley blocks,

half a dozen barrels-gear never again to be used for whaling.” About seven metres west of the fireplaces one can still see the remains of a rain-water catchments and a 10,000-gallon water tank. According to Tucker (1962) other water tanks were built on Smith’s Island and they were used to supply freshwater to ships.

2. Greave’s whale house

No remains of a whaling station can be found here but it is quite possible that this site was used for whale processing from early times when the butchering of the whale and the extraction of the oil took place on the beaches without any stone structure supporting such operations. The tip of Ferry Reach is next to what is known as Whale-bone Bay although the name may be because of the shape of the cove (curving around like whales’ ribs) or because it was the place of a whale stranding (Blagg, 1997:48).

3. Hinson’s whale house

There are no remains above ground of a whaling station on Paget Island.

4. and 5. St. David’s Island

There were two whaling stations on St. David’s Island, one on north shore of Dolly’s Bay and the other on the south shore of that bay. No remains of whaling stations can be found there, which is not surprising since that island was heavily modified for the construction of the American military base, Kindley Field, during the Second World War. Yet, there is little question that whaling activity was common on that place. Dolly’s Bay is located at the center of the north coast of St. David’s where a whaling station known as “Dolly’s Bay House” was built. Blagg (1997:45) has hypothesised that the name of Dolly derives from the winching of whales to be processed at that location. Nearby there is a Whalers’ Hill, a promontory that could have been used to sight the whales and alert the boats of their presence, a custom pretty common to the south in the Caribbean (Romero and Creswell, 2005).

6. Tucker’s Town

No remains of a whaling station can be found there but that is not surprising since that place has been heavily transformed from being a community inhabited mostly by poor blacks into a luxury resort. This was a community originally known for its fishing, whaling, and boat building activities.

7. Castle Point

There are no remains of a whaling station. This is another area that was heavily transformed by latter development (Blagg, 1997:39).

8. East Whale Bay

No remains of a whaling station exist at this location. This area is full of toponyms referring to whaling: West Whale Bay, East Whale Bay, Little Whale Bay, Whale Bay Road, Whaling Hill, Whaling Lane, and Whale Bay Battery.

9. Spencer's Point

No remains of a whaling station exist at this location. However, there are records as far back as 1665 that this place was being used for whaling (Blagg, 1997:150)

10. Hog Bay

This place is mentioned by Blagg (1977:335) as a location of one of the “Whaling centres;” however, I have not found independent confirmation of such a fact. On the other hand, Whale Island (see below) is very near Hog Bay and it is possible that Blagg confused one with the other given their closeness.



Fig. 6: Masonry for trying pots at Whale Island

11. Whale Island, Ely's Harbour

Besides the remains of the whaling station at Smith's Island, the only other remaining whaling structure clearly identifiable today is that on Whale Island, Ely's Harbour. Two different trying pots areas: one rectangular—5.5 m long by 2.2 m wide by 3.30 m high—and the other circular—2.3 m in diameter—which is very unusual due to its size. The first one is made of bricks and contained four trying pots (Fig. 6). Counting from the beach towards the house, the first one was crowned with a small chimney while the space for the fourth one is almost



Fig. 7: Trying pot at Whale Island



Fig. 8: Giant trying pot at St. Vincent and the Grenadines. One like this might have been used at Whale Island



Fig. 9: Platform area where the whale carcass was processed at Whale Island

completely destroyed. The other three still have the iron trying pots in diverse states of conservation (Fig. 7). Churned pieces of whalebones are still found in the furnaces. Pieces of whalebones (mostly vertebrae and ribs) are still found all around the grounds. The examination I conducted when visiting that property indicated that all bones I found belong to humpback whales. Behind this brick construction, one can find the hole for a large trying pot, very similar to those found elsewhere in the Caribbean (Fig. 8). Next to these constructions one can see the docking area used by whalers to land the animals: a stone platform about half metre in depth, and scars on the limestone produced by the ropes presumably used to pull the animals and/or its parts ashore (Fig. 9). (For more details on this and Smith's Island whaling station see Paling, 2003).

YANKEE WHALING AND OTHER INTERNATIONAL EVENTS

The 1750s were interesting years for whaling in general and for Bermuda in particular. Those years saw not only the incorporation of ambitious whaling ventures in Bermuda (described above) but also witnessed world historical developments that influenced the colony's place in this trade.

Prompted by demand of whaling products at both home and in Europe, Yankee (New England) whaling developed very fast. Such a growth in the trade was made possible by two innovations developed by New Englanders: one was the ability to manufacture candles out of the spermaceti of sperm whales (*Physeter macrocephalus*) which generated more light and less smoke. The other was the incorporation of try-works onboard (originally invented by the Basques) which meant that these vessels were no longer in need of whaling stations and could now stay at sea for years instead of few months, during their whaling expeditions. Since sperm whales are usually found in waters deeper than those of right and humpback whales (the species traditionally hunted by Yankee whalers), New Englanders whaling vessels started to visit whaling grounds other than those off North American coasts. The first grounds they tested beyond the American continent were those of the Bahamas and Bermuda. Yankee whalers started visiting Bermudian waters as early as 1762 when the sloop *Sandwich* out of Nantucket, under the helm of Capt. Micajah Coffin, was reported at Bermuda (logbook at the Providence Public Library, Rhode Island).

By concentrating on sperm whales, Yankee whalers now shifted production into sperm oil. The intensification of efforts and efficiency in operations of the New Englanders meant a much higher output, which in turn translated into falling oil prices (Coleman, 1995). That meant that the prospects for Bermudian whalers to obtain a financial windfall out of whaling products in the international markets vanished.

To make things worse, the populations of the two species that had been traditionally hunted by Bermudian whalers (humpbacks and right whales, *Eubalaena glacialis*) started to show serious sign of decline in the North Atlantic. That was due to the impact of whaling by Yankee whaling but also as a collateral effect of centuries of European whaling by Basque, Dutch and British whalers, among others (Romero and Kannada, 2006). This compelled Yankee whalers in the 1760s to seek new whaling grounds elsewhere. First it was in the East and South Atlantic and when the whale stocks of those parts of the world also show signs of decline in the 1790s (Alden, 1964), they moved onto the whaling grounds of the Pacific.

That was a sign that there was little hope for Bermudians to develop a sustainable whaling industry in their own waters. For example, documents at the Bermuda Archives show in 1767 after 31 days of effort only two whales were captured.

In 1768 a new whaling venture called the East End Whale Company was in operation but without much success since they were able to land only one whale after 23 days that year. This production was so pitiful that whalers decided to stop paying fees. The following year was no better with only one “young bone whale” captured after 31 days (Kerr, 1936:20; see also Appendix 1).

Despite these poor results and the obvious decline of whales in Bermudian waters, some local residents kept dreaming about whaling. In 1770 a new venture was established: the Company of Whale Fishery, which was the result of merging all of the existing small companies. It had 19 principal investors: James Cox, Richard Wright, John Cox, Stephen Judkin, John Coulson, John McKenzie, William Higgs, Daniel Outerbridge, and Edward Pearman from the East End and Thomas, Ephraim, and John Gilbert, Paul Paynter, Joseph Jauncey, Daniel Seymour, Cornellius Williams, Jeremiah Burch, John Morris, and Thomas Fowle from the West End. That year the company petitioned to have the £14 fee formally abolished (PRO CO 37/20:149, 182–185; 21:28–29 cited in Jarvis, 1998:460).

Despite this request, in 1772 Governor George James Bruere (who governed between 1764 and the year of his death in 1781, with a small interlude in 1780) kept charging fees per whale, which did not help that activity. He was trying to collect money for his salary which was still dependent, in part, of whaling fees. After all, he had collected only £80 from whaling during the first seven years of his tenure as governor, with no income from this activity the two previous years (Kerr, 1936:34–35).

However, political developments would change the market for whaling products between the American colonies and Britain. It all began with the Boston Tea Party of December 16, 1773 during which American colonists threw 340 chests of tea into Boston Harbour from

three vessels: *Dartmouth*, *Beaver*, and *Eleanor*, of which the first two were Nantucket whalers. The British government responded with punishing measures such as the New England Restraining Act of March 3, 1775 whose Article VI prohibited the American colonies from whaling or fishing in Newfoundland, the coast of Labrador or the River or Gulf of St. Lawrence unless “the ship or vessel is entirely the property of his Majesty’s subjects.” The Americans responded in turn by an edict of the Continental Congress, meeting in Philadelphia, which placed an embargo on all trade with Britain and its loyal colonies. This meant interruption of food being sent to Bermuda from America. That took effect September 10, 1775 (Tucker, 1977; Packwood, 1993: 42). As a result of all this, whale oil prices increased to almost 900 percent in 1775 (Coleman, 1995).

The American Revolutionary War (1775–1783) meant big changes, not only for Bermuda but also for the whaling industry in the North Atlantic in general. First of all, Yankee whaling came into an almost complete halt with virtually all of the whaling fleet being destroyed or captured by the British Navy and with the surviving vessels being converted into warships by the Americans. Furthermore, most whalers were killed, imprisoned or given by the British the chance to put their know-how in practice to revitalise the dying British whaling industry.

One of the places that benefited by hosting these American expatriates was Bermuda. The first American name that appears involved in the resurgence of whaling pretensions is a Pinkham who arrived to the island in 1780 and taught Bermudians some whale meat-processing techniques in order to avoid waste. We do not know who this Pinkham was, but he was probably a Nantuckian loyalist since many from that part of Massachusetts not only carried that last name but were also involved in whaling. Given that many inhabitants of Nantucket opposed the American Revolution because of both their Quaker convictions against war and their fear of losing their livelihood as whalers by having their activities threatened by the British Navy, a number of them emigrated elsewhere including Bermuda. Yet, by the early 1780s whales were very scarce, to the point that some whaling equipment was put up for sale. During those years the price of a gallon of lamp oil was between 2s 8d up to 3s 4d (Zuill, 1958:259–262).

By 1781 Governor Bruere was still anxious to collect whaling fees. He felt that the whale company was cheating and that £1,500 was owed to the treasury. He announced that he would seize any whale on which no fee had been paid and ordered Lieutenant David Davis at the West End to actually seize one. This created a lot of resentment among the local whalers and when the new governor, William Browne (*b.* Salem, Massachusetts, February 27, 1737; *d.* Westminster, England, February 13, 1802), took office in 1872, he abolished the whaling fees. From this point onward, on average, half of the oil production was sent

to England while the other half remained on the islands. Most of the men involved in the shore-whaling operations were slaves but the harpooner was usually a white man. These slaves were owned by the whaling company shareholders and were engaged in other fishing activities during the rest of the year (Verrill, 1902:522; Kerr, 1936:104–05, 125; Wilkinson, 1950:111).

With the end of the Revolutionary War in 1783, the new United States tried to revitalise their whaling industry and one thing they wanted to make sure was that the competition created by Nantucket expatriates would not hurt their attempts of resurgence. For example, Captain Alexander Coffin in a letter written in Nantucket and dated June 8, 1785, wrote to Samuel Adams, then a senator in the Massachusetts legislature, denouncing attempts to export whaling paraphernalia and know-how to Bermuda. This prompted the senate of Massachusetts to prohibit the export of whaling equipment to island.

But this will not be the only blow to any dreams by Bermudians to develop their whaling industry: the beginning of the French Revolution in 1789 meant the loss of one major market for whaling products while the expansion of the Yankee whaling operations in the Pacific Ocean meant that the Americans were responding to the depletion of the whaling grounds in the Atlantic by exploiting other grounds.

BERMUDIAN PELAGIC (DEEP-SEA) WHALING

Despite the depletion of local whale stocks, the increasing competition by a reborn Yankee whaling, and despite the fact that the new whaling grounds were farther and farther away which meant higher voyage expenses, Bermudians still dreamt of whaling as a financial venture.

Their beliefs that whaling could still be profitable were prompted by three circumstances. One was that the new governor, William Browne (whose tenure lasted from 1782 until 1790), not only had abolished the whaling fees but that he was a British loyalist (Brown, 1976) from Massachusetts. That made him a person familiar with the benefits of pelagic whaling. The second circumstance was that the leading mercantile house in Bermuda, Jennings, Tucker, & Co., bankrolled the idea of pelagic whaling and they began the construction of whaling vessels for high seas operations in 1784 (Verrill 1902:523) with the first of several vessels, *Queen Charlotte*, sailing in 1786 (Table 2). The third circumstance was that Bermuda whaling received for the first and only time a small subsidy (244 sterling) for whaling between 1791 and 1793 (Schortman, 1969).

The little we know suggests that these ventures were not very successful and operations ceased in 1793 with the outbreak of the British-French war of that year.

In the meantime, Bermudians switched to the use of candles instead

BERMUDA VESSELS ENGAGED IN PELAGIC WHALING, 1786–94

<i>Vessel</i>	<i>Rig</i>	<i>Voyage</i>	<i>Master</i>	<i>Grounds</i>	<i>Production</i>
<i>Queen Charlotte</i>	220-ton ship	1786	John Darling ¹	South Seas	?
<i>Governor Browne</i>	116-ton brig	1787	Bailey ²	South Seas	550 bbl, 6cwt bone (baleen)
<i>Mercury</i> ³	72-ton sloop	1789	Eben Coffin ⁴	South Seas	?
<i>Mercury</i> ⁵	72-ton sloop	1789	Eben Coffin	South Seas	?
<i>Bermuda</i>	193-ton brig	1792 6	John Darling ⁷	–	900 barrels oil, 7,000 lbs bone
<i>Governor Browne</i>	116-ton brig	1791	Paul Painter	–	?
<i>Governor Browne</i>	116-ton brig	1792	Bell	–	40 lbs spermaceti, 400 barrels oil, 5,000 lbs bone
<i>Bermuda</i>	193-ton brig	1793	Coffin	Brazil	(wrecked there)
<i>Governor Hamilton</i> ⁸	88-ton schooner	1793	John Darling	–	Crew became sick. Voyage abandoned
<i>Bermuda</i> ⁹	brig	1794	King	South Seas	800 bbl oil

Sources: Schortman, 1969:81; Wilkinson, 1973:30–31; Anonymous, 1976; Watlington, 1976)

of whale oil as illuminant (Wilkinson 1973:30–31) as the former became cheaper and more readily available. Also, unexpectedly, 12 whales captured locally in Bermuda in 1792 (Schortman, 1969), including a right whale, a very rare occurrence. Some documents found at the Bermuda Archives reveal a number of transactions related to whaling equipment in 1795 with Captain Anthony Atwood at the centre of those operations. That family name will appear notoriously in the whaling activities of Bermuda during the 19th century.

1 He was from Nantucket.

2 This Bailey could be John Bailey from Nantucket (Lund p. 22).

3 First whaling sloop built in Bermuda.

4 A loyalist from Massachusetts (Schortman?).

5 Second voyage the same year.

6 This voyage lasted seven months.

7 He was from Nantucket.

8 Named after Governor Henry Hamilton whose tenure cover the 1788–94 period.

9 Different from the first *Bermuda* (1792).

CONCLUSIONS

Whaling in Bermuda during the 18th century was an opportunistic activity whose development was curtailed by diminishing whale stocks, international events and strong competition. Despite all this, the inhabitants of Bermuda, who had to deal with a poor economy and local demand for whale products, attempted in many forms and at various times during that century to develop a stable whaling industry, including the merging all operations into one and even attempting pelagic whaling. Today the remains of two whaling stations provide us with a glimpse of the procedures followed by the local residents in the processing of whale products while historical documents provide an insight on the structure of the financial ventures ranging from small, highly opportunistic activities, to greatly structured and professional ones. Despite these efforts, Bermudians were only moderately successful at best and the output of this industry was too sporadic and unpredictable as to be considered the financial success that all expected from it.

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APPENDIX 1

Minutes of the incorporation and subsequent business meetings of the Town Whale Company (sources: “Whale Company April 1759” day book found at the Bermuda Archives, Atwood Papers, 1759–1769. PA: 2145–95:001). The texts have been transcribed literally. When a question mark appears, it means that the word was illegible.

27 February 1759 meeting

In a meeting of the Proprietors of the Town Whale Company on Tuesday the 27th Febr'y 1759.

Present:

His Excellency Wm. Popple

Col. George Tucker

George Forbes Esq.

Mr. [?] Richardson

Sam Burt

W. Ed. Pearman

W. John Colson

Capt. W. Higgs

W. John McKenzie

[?] Burch Esq.

Capt. Burt and W. McKenzie chosen as two directors for this year.

Capt. Burt and W. Pearman chosen Overseers for the Whale House for this year.

9 April 1759 meeting

At a Meeting on Monday the 9th. Day of April 1759

The Company chose Rich Tucker agent for the Company for this year; and ordered that the Articles be fairly transcribed by the Agent and signed this Day

Articles. Bermuda.

1. Whereas the Whale Fishing at the East End of these Islands was for many years past carries on by a number of People, mutually agreed to bear and equal expence of the Profit and Loss in said Business, and for diverse reasons best known to them selves did it in present year by a majority in said concern come to a Resolution after several Meetings held to sell and dispose of their Boats, Cuppers and other Utensils belonging to them, as will more fully appear by their Proceeding in Meeting now in the Hands of W Henry Tucker their late agent, and in Consequence of such Proceedings did expose to public reduce and did actually sell all and every thing belonging and being the property of the former owners of said Whale Fishing, and whereas the Purchase of said utensils have by mutual consent incorporated themselves in order to carry on the Whale Fishing Business in the best Manner they can, and to that Purpose do by these Presents agree to the following Regulations as a Basis to enable them to effect it with better Appearance of [?] than hitherto, that is to say,

Imprimis. The Company to consist of Twelve Persons with whom the Power of acting all affairs concerning the Said Fishery Whale remain, and are as follows:

His Excellency the Governor	Capt. William Higgs
Col. George Tucker	Capt. Stephen Judhin
Jon. Burch Esq.	W. I. [?] McKenzie
George Forbes Esq.	W. Int. [?] Colson
Sam Butt Esq.	W. Edward Pearman
Rich. Somersal	W. Int. Smith

2. The Twelve Persons above named are to constitute an Agent, to call Meetings, to adjust and settle all accounts and to supply what may be necessary in the said Fishery given the Preference to any of the Proprietors for such supplys if they dispose of them as may be bought of others.

The whole property of said Company is divided into 30 shares, and the said twelve persons are burthened with shares and half shares more or less exclusive of his own. Part for and on account of the old Proprietors who are respectively to share Profit & Loss with said Twelve in Proportion to the shares they hold.

And it is regulated as follows

His Excellency the Governor	2 ½	1/12
The Honble the President		
Col. Geo Tucker	½	1/12
Jon Burck Esq.	2 ½	1/12
Geo Forbes Esq.	2 ½	1/12
Sam Burt Esq.	½	

Nath Butterfield Esq.	2	1/12
Rich Somersall Esq.	1	
Wm. Richardson	1	
		1/12
Mr. John Cox		½
Capt. Willm. Higgs	1	
Capt. Thomas Smith	1	
		1/12
Mr. Cooper	½ /	
Mr. [?] Pearman	1 ½	
Mr. John Stone	1	1/12
Capt. Judhin & mother	2	
Mr. James Gibson	½	1/12
Mr. John McKenzie	1	
Mrs. Margaret Tucker		1
		1/12
Mr. Outerbridge	½	
Mr. John Colson	½	
John Slater Esq.		1
		1/12
Mrs. Esther Smith	1	
Mr. Sam Smith	1 ¼	
		1/12
Col. Harvy	1 ¼	

That out of the above Twelve Men, two shall be chosen annually on the approach of the Whaling Seasons by a Majority of Voices, which two shall be instrusted with the care of inspecting the Boats, Utensils, Harpooneers, Steers Men, Negroes and to take care of the whale fishery for the season shall be conducted with industry, care and good management.

That the two Directors for the time being shall purchase rum and sugar at the cheapest rate on the beginning of the season and at the Direction of the Harpooners allow the Negroes employed in the Company's Service such a proportion of punch, and at such times as they may judge necessary to be made of such Rum Sugar so purchased always provided that such Negro as shall not attend his boat before sun rise shall not be [inletuded?] to any for that Day.

That the two Gentlemen acting as a foresaid for the time being shall be obliged to take an inventory of every utensil belonging to the company at the end of the season, and by such inventory to deliver the whole into the possession of a person proper to keep and take care of the whole giving his receipt for the same which must be lodged with the agent for the Company [?] such person who keeps them being paid as usual for his care, and to be accountable for the whole.

That on a signal made to the whale boats during the season when out by Fishing Boats or otherwise and by such signal such whales or whale killed and brought to the Place of Manuring, such Person or Persons making such signal shall be paid by the two Managers for the Time being twelve shillings on the Report and Acknowledgement of the Harpooner that such Whale or Whales were discovered by such signal.

The Purchases made by Persons newly concerned, they shall pay their respective Purchase Money into the hands of the agent in Ten Days after their proportions are settled and that in Ten Days after such payment made the said agent shall pay to the respective persons to whom the said Money is due taking care to deduct out of said Money whatever they are indebted to the [?] company. That all accounts of said Fishery are to be settled on the second Thursday in July every year and every season having demands on said Company not delivering in their accounts or before such Day shall be excluded...

That Harpooners shall have 40p for every whale killed and brought to the Place of Manuring Whales.

That the Overseers of the Whale Houses shall be allowed as formerly.

That the steersmen and oars men be paid as follows that is to say the oars men 2p & steers men 2/4p.

That all the Negroes that are engaged in the service of the Company shall be obliged to attend the season so as to be ready on a call and his Condition to be made with their respective owner under penalty of a very severe correction when such Negroes are absent.

No Harps to be used but one season, the old ones to be disposed of.

That a White steersman if to be paid at the usual wages, shall always be appointed with a black Harpooner.

That the twelve Proprietors shall be obliged to find 23 able Hands to Man the Whale Boats being three in number.

That all affairs concerning the Company done by the Twelve Proprietors al ready Named, or a Majority of them shall be binding to the whole Proprietors and on the Death or one years absence of any one of the said Twelve Persons, the remaining Eleven are to hold a meeting and by a majority of voices to chuse [?] a Proprietor in the Room of Such Dead or absent Proprietor as they shall think most Proper in order to keep up the Number of Twelve already settled.

That the agent for the time being shall be obliged to settle under and pay all accounts against the said Company and or be [?] the 10th day of August yearly under the forfeiter [? missing word from a missing piece in the paper] Annual allowance on failure, which is five pounds Current Money annually, that in case the twelve Persons before mentioned, or any twelve for the future, or a Majority of them should find it necessary to alter or amend any of the aforesaid articles for the

Benefit or better Conducting the affairs of the Proprietors, they are hereby empowered to do it provided does not in any shape affect the Property of any Individual concerned who may transfer, or sell out their Respective Proportions the same as in other common Matters of [?] or interest to which and all of the before mentioned articles we hereunto subscribe our names this 10th Day of April 1759.

Willm. Popple	Geo Tucker
Geo Forbes	Jon Burch
Alex Richardson	Marg Tucker
John Smith	John Colson
Esther Smith	Sam Gibson
Sam Burtt	John Slater
Rich Somarsall	

15 March 1760 meeting

At a Meeting of the Proprietors of the Town Whale Company on Saturday the 15 March 1760.

Present

Col. Geo: Tucker	Mr. John Smith
John Burch Esq.	Mr. John Colson
Capt. [?] Somarfall	Mr. James Gibson
Mr. Ind [?] MvKenzie	Capt. William Higgs

Then Dr. Forbes & Jon Burch Esq. were chose[n] Directors for this year. Capt. Burtt & Capt. Wm. Higgs were chose[n] Overseers for the Whale House for this year.

10 March 1761

At a Meeting of the Proprietors of the Town Whale Company on Monday the 10th March 1761.

Present

Then it was agreed that the two boats be fitted out and the 3rd. to be repaired; when Mr. Burch promised to engage a proper Workman to repair the second boat, together with the Blubber Boat.

Capt. Somarsall and Capt. Higgs were appointed to [?ensure] such Repairs they think will be sufficient for Work's [?]

Then Jon Burch Esq. & Mr. Ing. McKenzie were chose[n] Directors for this year.

Capt. Higgs and Mr. Colson were chose[n] Overseers for the Whale House for this year.

Agreed that the Harpoonerrs, Steersmen, and Oarsmen be paid as usual.

Dr. Forbes said in behalf of Mr. Slater, Himself and the other Proprietors of Smith's Island to know of the Proprietors of the Whale Company whether they the Proprietors of the Islands could take possession and to repair at their own expence the three large Cisterns to the Southward of the Whale House, and whether they should esteem [?] them as their Property for the Future—The Company answered that they will not expect those cisterns provided they can have their half [?] laid out by the Sea tide as will be most convenient for them. Ordered that a Chimney be built at the Small Room at the Whale House.

14 April 1762 meeting

At the Meeting of the Proprietors of the Town Whale Company on Tuesday the 14th of April 1762.

Present

Geo: Forbes Esq.	Sam Burt Wsq.
Jon Burch Esq.	Mr. Jon. McKenzie
Coll. Geo Tucker	Mr. John Colson
Capt. R. Somarsall	Mr. James Gibson
Capt. Wm. Higgs	

Then it was agreed that the Boats be fitted out.

Capt. Somersall & Capt. Higgs were appointed to chuse [*sic*] such Ropes as they think will be sufficient for Narhs [?].

Jon Burch Esq. was chosen director for this year.

Capt. Higgs and Mr. Colson were chose[n] overseers for the Whale House this year.

10 October 1769 meeting

Bermuda. At meeting of the Town Whale Company at the House of William Elbersen [?] on Tuesday the 10 day of October 1769.

Present

Capt. John Colson	Capt. Stephen Judkin
Mr. Rich Wright	Jonathan Nurch Esq.
Capt. William Higgs	

Then Capt. Colson laid before the Company a letter from his [?] George James Bruere [?] Esq. Governor of these Islands together with certain paragraphs of an Act of Assembly all which being read and Considered.

Resolved that it is the opinion of This Company that neither of the Whales caught by this Company at the last season are liable neither by any Act of Assembly, or custom of these Islands to any Duty. And that

this Company indemnify the said Capt. Colson from any Prosecution with which he is by the said Governor [?] in the said letter by paying all Fines and Expences which shall be legally inflicted on him.

Burch	Rich Wright
John Colson	W. Higgs
Judkin	

Summary for 1769

1 "young bone whale," 29 barrels of "oyl," 31 days.