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Susan A. Lebo

Newspaper Stories Promoting Local Nineteenth-Century Shore-Based Whaling in Hawaiian Waters

WHALES; BAY WHALING; WHALING OFF MAUI; WHALER EXTRAORDINARY; A SPERM WHALE TAKEN; SPERM WHALING OFF HONOLULU; THERE SHE BLOWS; GOT A WHALE; FIRST RETURNS. From the 1850s to the 1870s, these riveting headlines and accompanying stories appeared in local news columns in four English-language Honolulu newspapers: *Friend*, *Hawaiian Gazette*, *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, and the *Polynesian*.¹ These accounts generally promoted entrepreneurial whaling by small local parties in bays, channels, and along coasts frequented by humpback and sperm whales. They announced sightings of whales and reported the pursuits, strikes, kills, losses, and returns of the whaleboats launched by crews from the shore. Some also provided reports from or about pelagic whalers sighting or taking whales in the same areas as shore parties, while sailing from one island port to another, or while engaged in short cruises in Hawaiian waters.

An early editorial extolling the potential of local shore-based whaling appeared in the *Polynesian* in 1841. A foreign resident told of witnessing the processing of a drift whale off the northwest shore of the island of Hawai'i:

MR. EDITOR.—Last January, a large Sperm Whale drifted ashore near my residence at Kohala, and had there been any one there who understood the business of saving the oil, a large quantity might have been made, provided he had conveniences. The natives went from every quarter by hundreds and cut off as much of the blubber as they could conveniently carry away, and carried to their houses—some of them, with a design to eat it. Some had small iron pots, in which they boiled their pieces, and stowed their oil in calabashes; several barrels of the best of oil was thus made. Since that time I have seen whales spouting off Kohala at three different times—in less than four months.

¹ The newspaper data are supplemented, where missing or inconsistent among sources, with information (e.g., registry, captain's name, voyage catch) available in the Honolulu Harbormaster records (Hawaiian Government, 1842–1894, Series 104, Volumes 1–4, 5 Folio, 6–7). Where appropriate, place names have been standardized with modern English- and Hawaiian-language gazetteers and diacritical spellings. Nineteenth-century spellings are retained for all quotes. Riggings, hailing ports, and captain's names of American vessels have been inserted where missing and standardized using Lund (2001). Vessel data are presented using the following format: registry, rigging, vessel name, and captain's name (e.g., Hawaiian bark *Desmond*, Gilley).

The query arose in my mind—would it not be a profitable business for some person skilled in taking whales, to establish himself somewhere on Hawaii, provided with boats, &c. and be on the watch for whales, and thus add to the resources of wealth to these islands. It was mere accident, as it were, that I saw the whales as above mentioned; and should a man attend to the business, he might much oftener discover these lords of the deep . . .²

In the late 1840s, accounts describe fledgling efforts to obtain “exclusive rights” from the government to take whales from designated locations, as well as efforts to establish a Honolulu-based pelagic fleet. They illustrate foreign resident and government interests in bolstering the kingdom’s whaling economy.³ On 20 May 1848, the *Polynesian* documented the first instance of a local whaling company taking whales in Hawaiian waters:

THE WHALE-FISHERY.—Sperm whales are frequently seen near these islands, and several projects have been set on foot at different times to capture them. Mr. Jas. Hough of Lahaina obtained a few months since a charter for the exclusive right of fishing for whales at Honuaula, on the Island of Maui, and at length succeeded in capturing a sperm whale. In consequence of the difficulty experienced in “cutting in” and getting the “blubber” on shore, only about 30 barrels of oil was secured. This at the current rates, here is worth about \$800.⁴

News stories extolling whale sightings and shore-based whaling did not regularly appear in Honolulu’s newspapers until the late 1850s, more than three decades after merchant Stephen J. Reynolds began recording in his journals (1823–1855) vessel arrivals and departures at the port of Honolulu as well as sightings and catches taken by foreign pelagic whalers in Hawaiian waters.

Newspaper stories about shore-based whaling from the late 1850s to early 1870s reveal that some parties likely engaged exclusively in shore-based whaling or pelagic whaling, while others clearly engaged in both. For example, on 25 December 1854, the Hawaiian Government granted a petition from C. J. Clark and H. Sherman to ob-

2 *Polynesian*, May 29, 1841, 1(51): 203.

3 *Polynesian*, January 25, 1845, 1(36): 146–47; *Polynesian*, September 5, 1846, 3(16): 65; *Polynesian*, May 20, 1848, 5(1): 3.

4 *Polynesian*, May 20, 1848, 5(1): 3.

tain fishing rights for one year to take whales from Māʻalaea Bay, Maui.⁵ Reportedly former shipmates, Clark and Sherman “bought boats and whaling tackle . . . to engage in humpback whaling at Kalepolepo Bay.”⁶ On 2 April 1855, they killed three humpbacks,⁷ and in late 1856, their company chartered the schooner *Haalilio*, with a plan to fit the schooner out “for the sperm whale business in the neighborhood of these islands.” The schooner was a regular inter-island trader to Kona, Hawaiʻi.⁸

News stories indicate shore-based whaling involved the launching of small whaleboats from shore and, when successful, of hauling the dead whales onto the beach where they were tried out in try-pots (trying out is the process of extracting oil from blubber in heated vessels). They reveal that some shore-based enterprises likely lasted a single season and all likely involved minimal investment—one or two whaleboats and try-pots and a small crew. None are described as involving stations with buildings.

Stories document shore-based enterprises strategically located on four islands—Oʻahu, Maui, Kahoʻolawe, and Hawaiʻi—to target near-shore migration routes and breeding areas; sightings occurred primarily from January to April, less frequently between mid-October and the end of December, and included sightings of both solitary whales and pods and occasionally humpback and sperm whales together.⁹ Numerous shore-based parties centered along the leeward coast of Maui, where frequent sightings of humpbacks were reported off Lahaina, opposite Lahaina in Māʻalaea Bay, and in Kalepolepo Bay near Kihei.¹⁰ A smaller number of shore-based parties were located at Hilo, Hawaiʻi. Stories identify the leeward coast of Maui as a humpback breeding area and report the presence of a sperm whale breeding area off Kaʻū, the southern

5 Privy Council, *Minutes*, December 25, 1854; Maude Jones, “Whaling in Hawaiian Waters,” *Paradise of the Pacific* 50, no. 4 (April 1938): 20.

6 *Friend*, January 1, 1855, 4(1): 2.

7 *Friend*, April 2, 1855, 4(4): 28.

8 *Polynesian*, December 20, 1856, 13(33): 130.

9 *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, February 19, 1857, 1(34): 2, 3; *Polynesian*, March 14, 1857, 13(45): 179; *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, April 23, 1857, 1(43): 2, March 11, 1858, 2(37): 2, March 18, 1858, 2(38):2, April 21, 1859, 3(43): 2, April 19, 1860, 4(47): 2; *Polynesian*, January 19, 1861, 17(38): 2; *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, February 5, 1863, 7(3): 2, March 12, 1864, 8(37): 2; *Hawaiian Gazette*, December 8, 1867, 3(48): 3; *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, March 2, 1868, 11(35): 3, March 26, 1870, 14(39): 3, February 17, 1872, 16(34): 3, February 28, 1872, 8(7): 3 March 26, 1873, 9(11): 3 February 28, 1877, 13(9): 3.

10 *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, February 19, 1857, 1(34): 2, March 18, 1858, 2 (38): 2, April 2, 1857, 1(40): 2, April 9, 1857, 1(41): 2, April 23, 1857, 1(43): 2, February 18, 1858, 2(34): 2, March 11, 1858, 2(37): 2; *Polynesian*, February 11, 1860, 16(41): 3; *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, February 5, 1863, 7(32): 2; *Polynesian*, March 28, 1863, 19(48): 3; *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, February 17, 1872, 16(34): 3; *Hawaiian Gazette*, February 19, 1873, 9(6): 3.

district of the island of Hawai‘i.¹¹ No shore-based enterprises were identified along the Kohala-Kona coastline of Hawai‘i, although sperm whales were reported on various occasions off Mahukona and sperm and humpback whales off Kawaihae,¹² as well as at Kailua and Kealahou Bay.¹³

The stories suggest that in 1858, four or five shore-based enterprises operated along the leeward coast of Maui, primarily near the port of Lahaina,¹⁴ with two or three new parties operating the following year.¹⁵ In 1859, two enterprises were located on the island of Kaho‘olawe, of which only the enterprise of Messrs. Turton and Lockwood of Lahaina is identified in newsprint.¹⁶ In 1866, parties on Maui included O. J. Harris and Pat Shaw. Both reportedly engaged in humpback whaling between Lahaina and Kalepolepo and, in March, Shaw’s crew succeeded in killing and beaching a whale about eight kilometers east of Lahaina. The whale yielded “a thousand gallons [approximately four thousand liters], more or less.”¹⁷ Captain Spencer operated an enterprise at Hilo in the spring of 1869¹⁸ and possibly the same party or another was located there in 1870. Another enterprise operated from the leeward coast of Maui in 1870,¹⁹ and several in 1872, including one operated by O. J. Harris. The last known shore-based whaling enterprises involved several unidentified parties centered at Lahaina in 1873.²⁰

Stories about shore-based whaling mention both drift whales and live whales. They record that Indigenous Hawaiians harvested drift whales for whale meat, rendered blubber into oil for personal use or for sale, or simply sold beached whales outright.²¹

11 *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, May 7, 1863, 7(45): 2, March 10, 1866, 10(35): 2.

12 *Friend*, April 2, 1855; *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, March 19, 1857, 1(38): 2, March 30, 1867, 11(39): 3, June 19, 1869, 13(51): 3.

13 *Polynesian*, February 4, 1860, 16(40): 3, February 18, 1860, 16(42): 3; *Friend*, March 1, 1860, 9(3):24; *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, March 12, 1864, 8(37): 2; *Hawaiian Gazette*, February 28, 1877, 13(9): 3.

14 *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, February 18, 1858, 2(34): 2; *Polynesian*, March 6, 1858, 14(44): 348; *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, March 11, 1858, 2(37): 2.

15 *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, January 20, 1859, 3(30):2, January 27, 1859, 3(31): 2.

16 *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, January 27, 1859, 3(31): 2; Maude Jones, “Whaling in Hawaiian Waters,” *Paradise of the Pacific*, 50, no. 4 (April 1938): 20; A. Gove Day, *Hawaii and Its People* (Honolulu: Mutual Publishing, 2005), 161.

17 *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, March 2, 1868, 11(35): 3, March 10, 1866, 10(35):2.

18 *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, March 13, 1869, 13(37): 2; *Hawaiian Gazette*, March 17, 1869, 5(9):3; *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, March 30, 1869, 13(38): 3.

19 *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, March 26, 1870, 14(39): 3.

20 *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, February 24, 1872, 16(35): 3, March 9, 1872, 16(37):3; *Hawaiian Gazette*, February 19, 1873, 9(6): 3; *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, February 22, 1873, 17(34): 3.

21 *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, July 9, 1857, 2(2): 2; *Hawaiian Gazette*, February 1, 1871, 7(3): 3; *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, March 7, 1874, 18(35): 3, May 20, 1876, 20(47): 3; *Hawaiian Gazette*, February 28, 1877, 13(9): 3.

One account from 1866 involved an individual named Hema who “fitted some boats for Humpback whaling off this port [Lahaina, Maui] and the seas adjacent.” One of his boat crews caught a whale estimated likely to yield 25 barrels of oil. However, the observer expressed concern that Hema’s try-pots were not yet ready. The observer went in company with others to where Hema’s crew had stranded the whale. The observer reported, “We found that the people were laying out a feast on whale beef. About one-fourth of the blubber was on the beach, and the rest still on the whale” and the casks were not yet cleaned and readied.²² Another Indigenous Hawaiian shore-based whaling enterprise located near Lahaina was operated by Kakainahaole and his wife and included an “all-native crew” reportedly from Honolulu. On 1 March 1858, the crew killed a cow and a calf in “sight of the town.” The same day, a bull was killed by crew from the American whale ship *Sharon*, Captain King. Reportedly, Kakainahaole was in Honolulu at the time and so his “wife had taken charge of the business and went in the boat herself, superintending the capture and saving of the whales.”²³ This report provides the only known reference to Kaikainahaole’s wife as actively participating in the taking of whales.

Newspaper accounts identify some shore-based enterprises by name, including Hema, Kakainahaole, Thomas Welcome Roys, Pat Shaw, and Thomas Spencer; and as partnerships such as C. J. Clark and H. Sherman, James Hough and Henry Fennes, and Messrs. Turton and Lockwood. Other sources expand this list to include an unnamed shore-based enterprise at Keka’a, Maui, that possibly operated from 1849 to 1859.²⁴ Others include John Freeman, who in 1847 received exclusive whaling rights from the Hawaiian government for the area spanning from Pu’uloa (Pearl Harbor) to Diamond Head, O’ahu;²⁵ James Hough of Lahaina who received a charter in 1850 granting him “the exclusive right of fishing for whales at Honuauula, Maui”;²⁶ and E. M. Mayor, who received permission in 1858 from R. C. Wyllie, lessee of the entire island of Kaho’olawe, to establish a station on the island to take whales in the “coming season.”²⁷

22 *Hawaiian Gazette*, March 10, 1866, 11(8): 2.

23 *Polynesian*, March 6, 1858, 14(44): 348.

24 *Fornander*, 1918–19, *Fornander Collection of Hawaiian Antiquities*, 5: 542–43.

25 *Privy Council*, Minutes, May 26, 1847; *Privy Council*, Records, vol. 2T, 21 August 1846–28 June 1847, 423–24; Maude Jones, “Whaling in Hawaiian Waters,” *Paradise of the Pacific*, 50, no. 4 (April 1938): 20.

26 *Polynesian*, May 20, 1848, 5(1): 3.

27 E. M. Mayor to R. C. Wyllie, Letter, May 8, 1858; Maude Jones, “Whaling in Hawaiian Waters,” *Paradise of the Pacific* 50, no. 4 (April 1938): 20.

Published reports from the 1860s describe shore-based parties engaging in bay whaling using sloops, schooners, or other small vessels. A story from 1861 reported: “Bay Whaling—From Lahaina, we hear that six whales have been captured in Kalepolepo Bay. The sloop *Live Yankee* is engaged in the service.”²⁸ A party on the leeward coast of Maui in 1862 engaged in shore-based whaling for at least several years, sailed a pelagic cruise in 1868, and was again engaged in shore-based whaling in 1872.²⁹ In early 1863, Captain Harris, sloop *Laanui*, took a large humpback whale off Lahaina, where it was seen on 25 March “trying out the oil, laying at anchor.”³⁰ In January 1870, Captain Thomas Welcome Roys erected tryworks at Olowalu, about six to eight kilometers from Lahaina. He chartered the Hawaiian schooner *Annie* [also spelled *Annel*] for a short whaling cruise off the leeward coast of Maui. The *Annie* secured two whales using Captain Roys’s new whaling guns manufactured by Mr. Hopper of Honolulu,³¹ reportedly in what was the first time such guns were used in Hawai‘i.³²

Reflecting the demise of this whaling activity in Hawaiian waters, the last news stories about shore-based whaling date to February 1873.³³ Collectively, nearly three decades of news stories about shore-based whaling appeared in the *Friend, Hawaiian Gazette, Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, and the *Polynesian*. They provide invaluable locally recorded documentation of the small enterprises centered at strategic locations on the islands of O‘ahu, Maui, Kaho‘olawe, and Hawai‘i from the late 1840s to early 1870s. Their importance is elevated by the paucity of information about shore-based whaling in local archival sources, including journals, logbooks, government records, or in published articles or books. As such, they hold considerable potential for contributing to a broader understanding of the range of whaling activities conducted in Hawaiian waters, including short cruises conducted by vessels in the Honolulu-based fleet, which returned to island ports with catches including whale, seal, shark, and/or turtle

28 *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, April 18, 1861, 5(42): 2.

29 *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, April 17, 1862, 6(4): 2; *Polynesian*, March 28, 1863, 19(48): 3; *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, May 14, 1863, 7(43): 2; *Polynesian*, May 30, 1863, 20(5): 3; *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, February 1, 1868, 12(29): 3; *Hawaiian Gazette*, March 4, 1868, 4(7): 3; *Hawaiian Government, Collector General, Series 104, vol. 6, (1868–1880)*; *Hawaiian Gazette*, November 11, 1868, 4(43): 3; *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, November 14, 1868, 13(20): 2; *Hawaiian Gazette*, October 6, 1869, 5(38): 3; *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, February 24, 1872, 16(35): 3.

30 *Polynesian*, March 28, 1863, 19(48): 3.

31 *Hawaiian Gazette*, February 2, 1870, 6(3): 3; *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, February 26, 1870, 14(35): 3, March 5, 1870, 14(36): 3.

32 *Hawaiian Gazette*, March 2, 1870, 6(7): 3.

33 *Hawaiian Gazette*, February 19, 1873, 9(6): 3; *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, February 22, 1873, 17(34): 3.

oil, and cruises conducted by foreign vessels visiting the islands, as suggested in stories titled: ISLAND LOCALS; FOR A CRUISE; ISLAND WHALING; WHALING NEWS; A NEW ENTERPRISE.