

The Whaling Industry

Just as “the sandalwood trade” of ‘iliahi wood was about to end another industry was about to begin. One day in October 1819 two American whaling ships, the Balaena and the Equator, anchored in Kealakekua Bay. Liholiho was eager to see these ships. In his favorite forty-foot double-hulled canoe Liholiho sailed down the coast from Kawaihae to Kealakekua Bay. With him were his canoe steersman, twenty paddlers and a translator.

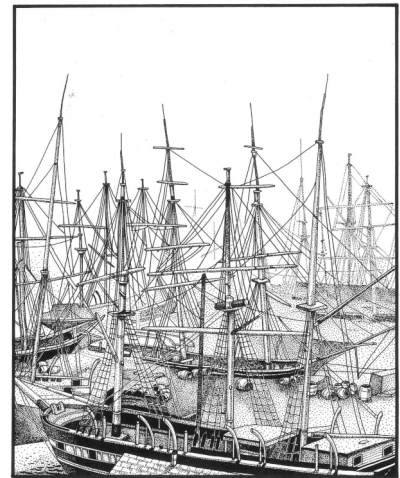
Suddenly, a seaman posted high on the foremast shouted, “Thar she blows!” Quickly the ship was made ready and the hunt began. Liholiho was able to see it all from the chase, harpooning, and killing of the whale. This began the story of whaling in Hawaii.

Whalers spent from two years to as long as four years at sea before returning home. Whaling ships would anchor and resupply at ports near where pods of whales had been spotted before again going out to sea – Hawaii was an ideal port for the whalers.



R. G. Carter
Sailors being towed, called a "Nantucket Sleighride," after harpooning a whale

When a whale was sighted at sea much of the crew would leave the ship in big rowboats. These rowboats would try to get close enough to a whale for a sailor to throw a harpoon into the whale. The harpoon was heavy barbed spear which was attached to a line fastened to the rowboat.



Once hit, the injured whale would race off dragging the rowboat behind. Sometimes the whale would dive deep and drag the boat below the surface and sailors might drown. Other times a whale would swim out of sight of the whaling fleet before dying, sometimes separating the men from their ship.

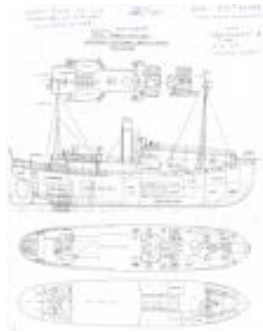
Once a whale was caught and killed it had to be brought to and lashed alongside the whaling ship. Then the hardest work began. The whale had to be cut up and processed. Huge chunks of blubber, or whale fat, surrounding the meat of the whale were cut and stripped off the body. The blubber was then heated in large iron pots on the ship's deck. This melted the fat into oil that was stored in barrels to be more easily carried for long voyages.

(Over.....)

In Hawaii whaling soon replaced “the sandalwood trade” of ‘iliahi wood in economic importance. It lasted about fifty years, from 1820 to 1870. During this time Hawaii provided support services to the whaling ships. Since Japan refused to let foreign ships enter her ports, the whaling ships stopped in Hawaii to pick up supplies. After stopping in Hawaii the ships transported whale bone and whale oil back to New England in America.

In those days whale products were very important. Whale oil was used to make candles and light lamps. Whale oil lubricated machines. Ambergris, a waxy substance from whales, was used in perfume. Whale bone was used for corsets, fishing rods and umbrellas.

As the need for whale products grew so did the size of the whaling fleet. These ships, mostly American came in the spring and fall. Sometimes there were so many ships in Honolulu Harbor a person could walk from one end of the harbor to the other across the decks of these ships. As the trade in furs and ‘iliahi declined, servicing the whaling fleet became more important in Hawaii.



By this time many foreigners had settled in the islands and gone into business. Blacksmiths and carpenters worked to repair ships. Businesses sprang up to provide entertainment for the hundreds of sailors who went ashore. People grew crops and sold fresh fruits and vegetables and firewood to the ships.

Salted meat was needed by the ships for long voyages because meat which has been salted lasts a long time without spoiling.

Parker Ranch on the island of Hawaii was started in the 1830s to provide meat for the ships.

The Hawaiian government also made money from the whaling trade. Foreign ships had to pay for permission to dock in Hawaii. The trade goods these ships brought to Hawaii were taxed before they could be sold.