

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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'There She Blows'

Today we will have one more story on the old Whalers and the whaling industry in Monterey Bay. We have already given the history of the Monterey Whaling Company organized in 1854; the Portuguese company in 1855, known as the "Old Company"; and the "New Company," also Portuguese whalers, who operated here about 1860.

In 1861 the Carmel Company was organized. At first they whaled in Monterey Bay, but in the spring of 1862 they moved to Carmel.

The humpback season commenced about the 10th of August and expired about the first of December, to be followed immediately by the California grey season and that continued until the middle of April. The first half of the season was known to the whalers as the "going down season" as the whales are then descending from their summer haunts in the Arctic Ocean to the lagoons and bays on the lower coast, for the purpose of bringing forth their young, according to the editor of the "Monterey Handbook" published in 1875.

It was during the "coming up" season, as their return to the North was called, that the greater number of whales were caught; for if the whalers could succeed in striking the "calf," the "cow" was an easy capture, as she would die rather than desert her offspring.

The report from the Smithsonian Institute tells of the capture of whales. At the first break of day the whalers man their boats, six to a boat generally, and proceed to the whaling "ground" (near Pt. Pinos). Here they lay on their oars and carefully scan the water for a "spout." Suddenly someone sees the wished-for column of mist foam and cries out "There she blows!" Then all is activity, the boat is headed for the whale and the guns are ready to fire. When within a short distance of the animal the oars are "peaked" and the boat is propelled by paddles so as not to disturb the wary whale. Having arrived within shooting distance, which is about 40 yards, the harpoon, connected with a long line, is fired into whatever part of the whale is visible.

Down goes the whale, the line with a turn around the "loggerhead" of the boat being allowed to run out for several hundred yards, when it is held fast. The whale generally makes a direct course for the open ocean, so

the experts say, dragging the boat with almost lightning rapidity. Soon, however, it became weary and would come to the surface to breathe. Then would come the golden opportunity. The boat would approach as near as possible and a bomb-lance would be fired.

In case the lance would enter a vital spot, the huge animal would be killed at once, but more often that does not happen, and the same maneuvering as before is repeated until two or three bombs have been shot before the animal is dead. It is then towed to the try works, where the "blubber," as the casing of fat with which it is covered is called, is removed, cut into small pieces, and boiled out. We have been told by old-timers that there were big iron cauldrons for this purpose, standing along the shore near the present breakwater, and a runway of broad pine boards ran down from the high ground to the water.

Sometimes the whale would sink as soon as killed; should such be the case, a buoy was attached to the line, and the animal was left until the generation of gases in its body caused it to rise, which usually occurred in from three to nine days. It was then towed in and "tried out" as before.

In the early 1860's the usual yield of a California grey was about 40 barrels if a female, and 25 if a male. That of the humpback about the same. The "Hand Book of Monterey" tells us that the average size of a California grey was 42 feet in length, and 28 to 30 feet in circumference. A sulphurbottom was occasionally caught which measured 100 feet from tip to tip.

In 1872 the New Company commanded by Capt. Pray, captured a right whale 70 feet long and 50 feet in circumference. It yielded 175 barrels of oil and 1,500 pounds of bone, and netted the company over \$2,000. At the close of the season the two companies, numbering in all 34 men, were consolidated into one company of 23 men, 11 quitting the business entirely.