

AINA NEWSLETTER

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Summer 1977

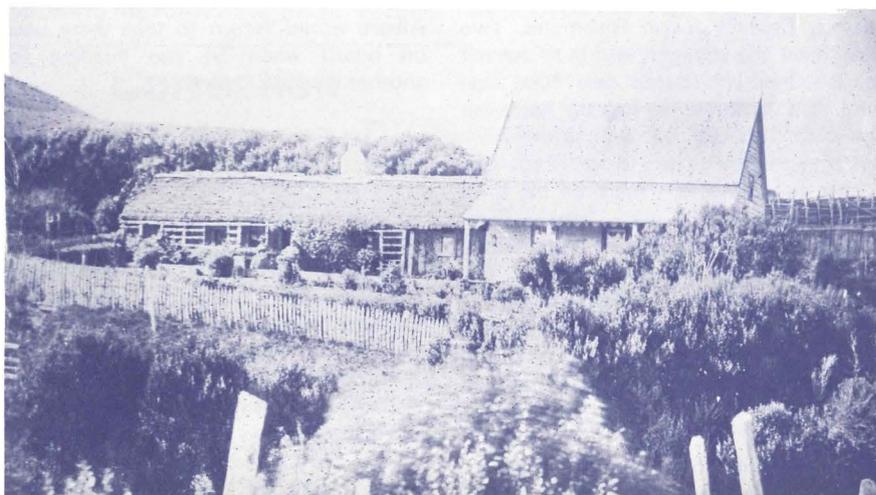
Many AINA members are not professional archaeologists, but contribute significantly to the study of naval history through membership in AINA and by research into a broad variety of special topics. In the Winter, 1975 issue of the AINA Newsletter, several members reported on such activities. In the present issue, Sylvia Thomas, a charter member of AINA, describes some of her adventures while investigating her grandfather's career in the whaling business in the 19th century. Miss Thomas has recently completed a book on this subject, bringing to light details of shipboard life and experiences of a whaling captain's family.

—Ed.

Beware of the Chathams

Being born and raised in 20th-century New York City would hardly seem to qualify one to be associated with the once-prominent whaling industry of a century ago. However, as a child at my grandmother's knee, I heard fascinating tales of a family voyage to the South Seas. Between the ages of five and nine my father had been around the world on a wooden sailing ship, captained by his father. Thus, a predilection for the sea and travel was in my blood. My grandfather, Albert Thomas, went to sea at 20, made his fortune at sperm whaling, and retired to Florida at age 42. He described himself in his will as "at present an orange grower, formerly a seafaring man in the whaling business sailing from the port of New Bedford, Massachusetts." Whaling to Albert was indeed a business. To quote him: "Crewmen will get but one good chance; I can't come out here to chase whales around for their pleasure!" In his writings he somehow managed to reduce the excitement of a whale hunt or violent storm to the commonplace.

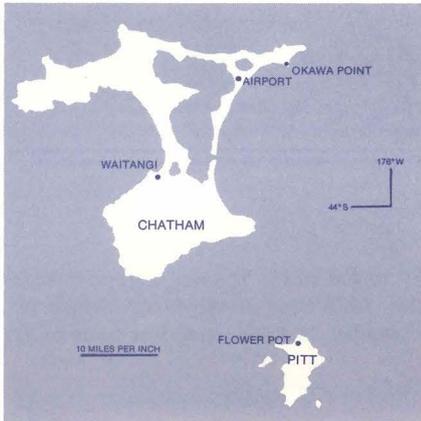
In 1936 when making a donation to the Whaling Museum in his hometown of New Bedford, his son, Ernest, learned that the logbook of a voyage on which he had sailed on the *Merlin* was preserved there. Since then I have many times read



Fred Hunt's homestead at Flower Pot. The cottage was built from planks taken from the Franklin wreck. Note the man and woman seated in front of the cottage on the left. (Credit: Sylvia Thomas)

this exciting logbook and was stimulated to search for information on my grandfather's earlier voyages. It was not until I retired, however, that I was able to concentrate full faculties on intensive research on the project. In the past year the results have been most fulfilling — and frustrating — as any researcher knows. Involved was correspondence with, and studies at, whaling museums and libraries and visits to whaling ports the world over.

Eventually I succeeded in documenting five voyages. Albert's first was as a lowly carpenter on board the Ship *Franklin* which left New Bedford in 1853 in search of whalebone in the North Pacific. An amazingly dramatic personal journal written by a young crew member is the main source of information on this cruise. It was a four-year voyage and, after three months at home, Albert sailed again on the *Franklin*, this time as fourth mate and boatsteerer under the same



The Chatham Islands, some 450 miles east of New Zealand. (Credit: Drawn by Martha Kagan after a map of the New Zealand Department of Lands and Survey.)

master, Captain Josiah Richmond. Two years later the voyage ended in shipwreck in the Chatham Islands near New Zealand. No logbook or journal has been found for this trip, but basic information has been obtained from scattered sources. Albert became a first mate on his third voyage, still sailing with Captain Richmond, on the Ship *Daniel Wood* which left in 1860 for the South Pacific. The logbook for this trip has fortunately survived and, as it was customary for the first mate to keep the log, most of it is in my grandfather's hand. He then spent an interlude of three years ashore, during which he married.

His son was but a few months old when, on Christmas Day, 1867, Albert left his family and again headed for the South Pacific, this time as master of the Bark *Albion*. Sources for this voyage give us a most interesting two-pronged account of conflict between my grandfather and his second mate, George Bowman. For two and a half years before he was discharged, Bowman kept a journal which reveals a sensitive and sentimental individual who seemed ill-suited to whaling. Another side of the story was written by Albert in letters to the ship's agents, in which he reported that Bowman was afraid to kill a whale and was responsible for the loss of much sperm oil. Albert

sold the *Albion* on behalf of its owner in New Zealand in 1871 and for the second time had to find other means of transport back home. His last voyage from 1872 to 1876 was as captain of the Bark *Merlin*, and he took his wife and son with him. As mentioned earlier, the logbook of this voyage is available and gives a far more exciting picture than that of the *Daniel Wood*. In addition, family papers include letters which my grandmother wrote home from the South Seas, and these leave us a warm and human memoir of a woman's life in this world of "wooden ships and iron men." Unfortunately, poor Emma was seasick much of the time and, as a result, Albert would often leave her and little Ernie on shore while he cruised for whales. They stayed sometimes for months on the Chatham Islands before Albert would return to take them back on board when he was heading for another whaling ground.

To make my knowledge of these voyages more meaningful, I felt that I must see those ports most frequented by my grandfather. In 1971 I made my first trip to the South Seas and, since then, have twice been to the Bay of Islands in northern New Zealand where all New England whalers on the South Pacific grounds gathered annually about May or June. Twice I have had the pleasure of visiting the beautiful tropical island of Roratonga (Cook Islands) where, in spite of treacherous reefs, many whalers made regular stops for fresh fruit and water. Most whalers made the Azores their first stop after crossing the Atlantic, and there I had the dubious pleasure of increasing my knowledge by seeing and smelling a bloody 20-foot lower jaw bone, teeth still in, of a recently killed sperm whale.

It was not until this year, however, that I managed to travel to the Chatham Islands where Albert had spent more time than on any other whaling ground. As early as 1845, it was recognized that the Chatham grounds were on the route of the sperm whale migration during the "Down Under" summer months of December through March. Albert spent at

least ten seasons whaling in the Chathams, and was wrecked there; so it seemed important to me to get the feel of this island group. Planning the trip was easier said than done. My first letter to a New Zealand government tourist agency asking about transportation was written in June, 1975. Six months later I was told that "The only flights to the island are infrequent freight services which operate on demand only. There is no longer any accommodation on the Chatham Islands." Fortunately, by this time I had learned more about travel to the islands than most New Zealanders and was not discouraged.

Persistence won out, and on a rainy January day at Wellington, I boarded a World War II Bristol air freighter fitted with a "passenger capsule." Four hundred odd miles and three hours later the plane landed on a grass strip on Chatham Island. Fortunately, "Safe Air Ltd." provided minibus service to the other side of the island where the Chatham Hotel (8 rooms) is located. Once at Waitangi the bus did not stop at the hotel, and there I was with a heavy suitcase and no taxis on the island. I had my first experience with the friendliness of the people, when a kindly couple drove me down the hill to the hotel on the beach. An advance letter to the hotel inquiring about going to Pitt Island, second largest in the group, had resulted in circulation of the news of the impending visit of an "American lady." Often on my windy walks I was invited by friendly islanders to come in for tea.

A brief description and historical note on these not-too-well known islands seems in order. Chatham, the main island, has a number of cone-shaped hills, a 15-mile lagoon on its east coast, and many swampy areas, making sections of its unpaved roads impassable in some seasons. Pitt Island is southeast of Chatham and the only other inhabited island. It has a more hilly terrain with rugged cliffs and little low-lying land. The highest point in the group is 950 feet on Mangere Island west of Pitt. Population totals a little over 800, of which about 50 live on Pitt.

Although these islands are only about 450 miles from New Zealand to the west, one could sail due east from them on the 44th parallel for nearly 5,000 miles without sighting land until raising the southern coast of Chile. The only protected harbor in the islands is at Waitangi, the capital, and I have seen the sea there so rough that the anchored fishing boats bobbed like tops. Experienced sailors are very wary of the rocks and reefs in the island waters and know that the weather is subject to sudden changes, bringing violent gales and heavy seas with little warning. The gnarled trees, leaning to the east, are witness to a steady west wind most of the time. A Pacific Islands Year Book sums it up: "The Chathams are considered a danger zone for ships, and 'Beware of the Chathams' was the slogan of every mariner voyaging from New Zealand to Cape Horn in the days of the sailing vessels."

For millennia the Chathams lay in splendid isolation uninhabited by any land creatures except birds. About 1000 A.D. Polynesians known as Morioris migrated there, but it was not until 1791 that discovery by the Europeans occurred. In the 1830's Maoris came from New Zealand and conquered the Morioris. At about the same time sealing and whaling vessels began provisioning at the islands. Sheep and cattle were brought to the islands in 1841, and a year later the group was officially claimed as a part of New Zealand.

For some years whalers traded with the Maoris for supplies, mostly at Chatham Island. However, an enterprising Englishman by the name of Hunt migrated there via New Zealand and settled on Pitt Island in 1842. He had bought the island from a Maori chief for 100 sovereigns. He soon learned of the lucrative trade with whaling vessels and before long took most of the business away from the main island. In his autobiography he tells that he advertised in American papers that the waters surrounding Pitt were excellent whaling grounds and that his residence at "Flower Pot" was the most convenient

place to get supplies such as sheep, cattle, chickens, and potatoes. The small bay at Flower Pot, however, was only an anchorage and afforded little protection for the ships stopping there.

Albert often went to Pitt Island for provisions, and it was at Flower Pot, or Hunt's Place, on his second voyage that he had the experience of being shipwrecked. The *Franklin* had sailed to the South Pacific via the Azores and St. Helena and then made two stops on the eastern coast of New Zealand's South Island. Less than a year out the ship suffered serious enough damage when struck by lightning to make it necessary to go into the Bay of Islands for repairs. Captain Richmond spent the summer season of 1858-1859 on the Chatham grounds where whales were found to be plentiful and 380 barrels of sperm oil were taken. The wreck occurred while the ship was anchored at Flower Pot taking on supplies. During the night of April 11 there had been a heavy sea but only light winds. At daylight the next morning the *Franklin* parted her chains and was driven ashore. At first there was hope that complete disaster might be averted, but by an unkind fate the wind rose and came strongly from the west, and pounding waves battered the stranded *Franklin* beyond saving. The crew all survived but only about 100 of the 700 barrels of sperm oil on board were salvaged.

From a book listing New Zealand shipwrecks by C. W. N. Ingram, we learn that another ship was wrecked earlier the same morning on neighboring Chatham Island. This was the Bark *Terror* which was driven on the reefs at Okawa Point by the same vicious west gale and cruel sea which hit the *Franklin*. Again, no lives were lost and nearly all the *Terror's* oil was salvaged.

Most wrecked whaling vessels seem to have been battered to pieces on reefs, leaving very little sizable portions of the ships. In the case of the *Franklin* which was driven ashore where Fred Hunt had his settlement, the strong planks from the wrecked ship were saved and used to



The author's grandmother with residents of Pitt: seated left to right, Ann Hunt Langdale, Elizabeth Hunt Gregory, unidentified; standing, unidentified and Emma Wilcox Thomas. (Credit: Sylvia Thomas)

build a cottage. I had with me on my trip some very old unidentified photographs. Some of these had been sent to my grandfather by Fred Hunt who had become his lifelong friend. It was an exciting moment when I learned from Fred Hunt's great great grandson, Stephen Gregory-Hunt, that one of the pictures (taken in the 1860's) was of the cottage at Flower Pot built from the *Franklin* planks. Also identified for me by Steve was a photo of my grandmother with four other ladies whom I had guessed to be other whaling captains' wives. He, however, immediately recognized two of the ladies as his great grandmother, Elizabeth Hunt Gregory, and great aunt, Ann Hunt Langdale. I was pleased to be able to give him a copy of the picture as well as of a letter describing in detail a festive Christmas spent by my grandmother and father with the Hunts on Pitt Island in 1873.

Steve Hunt's great grandmother, Elizabeth, was the first European born in the Chatham Islands. When captain of the *Albion*, my grandfather took her and her fiancée from Pitt Island to Waitangi to be married. It was another highlight of my visit there when I found at the Waitangi Courthouse my grandfather's signature on

the record of their marriage in June, 1868, which he witnessed.

Over a hundred years later, the same strong winds kept my plane from its scheduled flight and gave me three extra days to appreciate the friendliness of the

islanders. Rough seas during the full week I was there made it impossible for me to realize a hoped-for visit to Pitt Island. Circumstances thus gave me an opportunity truly to understand, as my whaling captain grandfather certainly did, the admonition "Beware of the Chathams."

—Sylvia Thomas

AINA Projects and Staff News

GEORGE BASS directed the first season of excavation of a medieval shipwreck at Serçe Liman, Turkey, during June, July, and August. The project was supported by the National Geographic Society, the Corning Glass Foundation, Texas A&M University, and AINA. Members can read about the exciting results of the work in forthcoming issues of the *National Geographic Magazine* and the AINA Newsletter. Dr. Bass has scheduled lectures this fall in Cleveland and Detroit, and around Texas. He will be the featured speaker at the annual meeting of the Texas A&M Research Foundation . . . CYNTHIA EISEMAN participated in the Serçe Liman excavation and in the University of Texas (Austin) excavation at Metaponto, Italy . . . DONALD FREY excavated at Serçe Liman, and then went on to Lipari, Italy, to direct the second season of excavation on the Secca di Capistello wreck (see AINA Newsletter Vol. 3, No. 2); he was assisted by Donald Keith and Faith Hentschel. The project was undertaken with the cooperation of

Sub Sea Oil Services, S.p.A., Milan. During the previous winter, Dr. Frey participated in the Mombasa Shipwreck Project . . . MICHAEL KATZEV continues his work on the publication of the Kyrenia shipwreck. Over the summer, he excavated at Corinth, Greece . . . DAVID OWEN joined Tel Aviv University's excavation at Tel Aphek, Israel, as epigrapher . . . ROBIN PIERCY directed the second season of excavation of the *Santo Antonio de Tanna*, in Mombasa, Kenya, during winter months. He is preparing a report for AINA members on the project, which is sponsored by the Fort Jesus Museum, Kenya (see AINA Newsletter, Vol. 3, No. 3). Mr. Piercy also participated in the Serçe Liman project . . . JOSEPH SHAW returned to Kommos, Crete, for a second season of excavation (see AINA Newsletter, Vol. 3, No. 2) . . . DAVID SWITZER directed the excavation of the *Defence* in June and July, and conducted AINA's fifth annual field school (see AINA Newsletter, Vol. 4, No. 1, Vol. 3, No. 1, and Vol. 2, No. 2). He is preparing

a report on this summer's project, which is co-sponsored by AINA, the Maine Maritime Academy, and the Maine State Museum . . . J. RICHARD STEFFY once more joined the *Defence* project, lecturing field school students on ship construction and working on models of the *Defence* with David Wyman. This fall he tours the east coast, speaking to seven societies of the Archaeological Institute of America; he will address the National Sea Grant Students Conference in Corpus Christi, Texas, and the Naval History Symposium, Annapolis, Maryland. Mr. Steffy is serving as Reconstructor on the Brown's Ferry Project, under the auspices of the Institute of Archaeology, University of South Carolina . . . FREDERICK H. VAN DOORNINCK, JR. joined the AINA staff at College Station, Texas, and the faculty of Texas A&M University last spring. He served as Co-Director for the Serçe Liman project in Turkey over the summer, and will deliver a paper at the Naval History Symposium in Annapolis.

Miss Koehler Joins AINA Staff



Carolyn G. Koehler, newly appointed Research Associate for Amphora Studies, rounded out her fourth consecutive year at the American School of Classical Studies at Athens during the past summer. In September, she joined the Classics faculty of the University of Tennessee in Knoxville, where she is teaching archaeology and Latin. Her Ph.D. in Classical Archaeology is expected to be conferred by Princeton University by the end of the year.

Miss Koehler began her study of transport amphoras under the guidance of Virginia R. Grace of the Agora Excavations of the American School in 1971, and continues to use the rich archives housed in the Athenian Agora as her base.

Tracing the two types of amphoras which Corinth produced in the Greek period, the subject of Miss Koehler's dissertation, has led her to many other points around the Mediterranean, from Marseilles to Israel. Recent findings of Corinthian A and B jars together in several cargoes raised from the sea off Syracuse, Brindisi, and Taranto first introduced Miss Koehler to underwater archaeology, and in a paper at the Fifth International Congress on Underwater Archaeology at Lipari in June, 1976, she revealed how these groups, along with several from excavations on land, establish the chronological development of both Corinthian series.

When she takes time off from chasing amphoras around the Aegean, Miss Koehler practices cooking *à la grec*.

Correction

The last issue of the AINA Newsletter, Vol. 4, No. 1, was incorrectly dated "Summer 1976." It should be "Spring 1977." We apologize for any confusion this error may have caused. —Ed.

1978 AINA Field School 6 weeks in June and July

The 1978 field school will be conducted during the fourth season of excavation of the American Revolutionary warship *Defence*, in Penobscot Bay, Maine. Directed by Prof. David C. Switzer, the project is held in cooperation with Maine Maritime Academy and Maine State Museum.

AINA considers applications from advanced undergraduates, graduate students, and scholars or professionals

whose career or professional interests would be advanced by practical experience in the techniques and application of nautical archaeology.

Only those affiliated with a supporting institution of AINA are eligible for participation (see the list on the back page of this Newsletter). Those whose institutions are not supporting members must satisfy this requirement by enrolling in the Summer School of Texas A&M University.

For application forms and additional information write:

Mrs. Cynthia J. Eiseman, Chairman
AINA Admissions Committee
314 S. Philip Street
Philadelphia, Pa. 19106

Deadline for applications is January 15, 1978.

The AINA Field School admits students of any race, creed, sex, and national or ethnic origin.



AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF NAUTICAL ARCHAEOLOGY

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The American Institute of Nautical Archaeology is a nonprofit scientific/educational organization whose purpose is to gather knowledge of man's past as left in the physical remains of his maritime activities and to disseminate this knowledge through scientific and popular publications, seminars, and lectures. The AINA Newsletter is published periodically by AINA and is distributed to its members and Supporting Institutions to inform them of AINA's current activities. AINA is an equal opportunity organisation.

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