

WHALING ADVENTURE

by Darlene Polachic

Some years ago, a yellowed letter penned in 1891 was discovered in an old trunk, glued to pages of 'The Model Encyclopedia.' Written by George Healy, Jr., to his father who lived in Port Hope, Ontario, the missive proved to be more than a nostalgic link to the Healy family's past. It contains a detailed, first-hand account of the voyage George, Jr., took to Siberia on a whaling ship in 1889. The letter gives a frank, unbiased look at the North American whaling industry which was at its height in the 19th century, and closely paralleled the better-known commerce of fur trading.

The whaling industry is an ancient one. The first peoples known to hunt whales for commercial purposes were the Basques who hunted in the Bay of Biscay as early as 1100 A.D. **2 p5** Between 1400 and 1550, their range expanded to the North Atlantic and the New World, and shortly after the arrival of the Pilgrims, wholesale whaling in North

America began off Nantucket. New Bedford, Massachusetts, became the hub for whaling activity.

The nineteenth century was the 'golden age' of North American whaling; 1846 was its busiest year. But there was a problem; whalers were running out of whales in the Atlantic. They soon turned their attention to the Pacific, and then the northern seas. In 1848, the first whaleship sailed through the Bering Strait and discovered the rich new whale resources of the Arctic Ocean. The industry was given a further boost in 1851 by Herman Melville's novel, *Moby Dick*, a story based on a real-life whale known as 'Mocha Dick.'

With the focus of the industry shifting to the west coast, it was inevitable that New Bedford would give way to San Francisco as the new whaling capital. **2 p159** There was a drawback; the 1848 gold rush in the American southwest meant that whaling ships calling at San Francisco often lost entire crews to gold fever.

It was at San Francisco that George Healy, Jr., signed on as a crew member with the whaling ship *Triton*. He was one of 36 on board the vessel that towed out of San Francisco Bay on December 20, 1889.

In the letter to his father, George describes the *Triton* as "a barque of 251 tons. Her keel was laid in New

Bedford, Mass. some 70 odd years ago. She was built of live oak and I am informed that her timbers are as sound today as they ever were. She was commanded by Captain S. G. Gifford of New Bedford."

He added: "*The Triton is an ugly looking craft but as a sea boat she 'gets there' with any of the whaling fleet."*

Whaleships were typically heavy, squat vessels built for strength, not speed or appearance. They had to be broad enough to handle a 60-ton whale carcass hanging alongside, and the masts and rigging needed to be sturdy enough to withstand the incredible strain of hoisting bulky strips of oil-soaked blubber aboard with a block and tackle. **2 p92**

Paradoxically, George Healy's Arctic whale hunt adventure began with the *Triton* heading south. Its first stop was the Maria Islands, about 60 miles from the Mexican coast, where they took on wood before sailing even further south to look for sperm whales.

There are two distinct suborders of whales or *Cetacea*. One, *Odontoceti*, has teeth; the other, *Mysticeti*, has strips of baleen in place of teeth. **2 p3**

Baleen is a horny substance, much like human fingernails, which grows from the whale's upper gums. The inner edge of each baleen piece (also called whalebone) is

frayed and bristly. Baleen or *Mysticeti* whales feed on fish and plankton. **2 p4** When the whale opens its mouth, baleen descends like a curtain across the opening. The animal takes in a mouthful of seawater, then forces it back out through the baleen which acts as a sieve to hold back the fish and plankton food. Individual baleen plates can grow to a length of twelve feet or more.

The sperm whale, found in deep waters, was prized for its spermaceti, a waxy substance found in a reservoir or 'case' in its head. Spermaceti was made into candles that burned brilliantly and odourlessly with an almost smokeless flame. **2 p47** They were far superior to the wax or tallow candles of the day.

Occasionally a whaleship found a lump of *ambergris*, a waxy, amber-grey substance secreted in the lower intestine of the sperm whale. **2 p53** Weighing anywhere from a few ounces to several hundred pounds, this strange material commanded an extremely high price and was valued as an aphrodisiac, as well as a fixative in the perfume industry.

The first whales to fall victim to whale hunters were the slow-swimming right whales of the North Atlantic. Docile in temperament, slow-moving in life, and bouyant after death, they were easy prey for whalers. **2 p2; 2 p20**

When the hunt for the gray whale had all but exterminated that species, hunters to move southward to the sperm whale grounds and then northward to capture the Arctic-dwelling bowhead.

"All whalers that leave here in the months of November and December go south to look for sperm whales until it is time to go north for the spring, at which time of year whales are migrating to the Arctic region," Healy informed his father. *"Another reason for leaving this port (San Francisco) so early and going south is to 'break in' green crews to the working of the ship and overhauling sails and rigging, etc so that by the time they start for the north everyone is supposed to understand his business."*

A typical whaling ship left port with a crew of about 30: the captain, four mates, four harpooners, a cooper, a blacksmith, cook, steward, and cabin boy, and a complement of ordinary seamen. **2 p95** Captains were generally professional New England whalers. And while most of the regular hands were young and inexperienced, it was not unusual for well-educated, even professional men who had fallen on hard times to sign on. **2 p95,97** George Healy may well have been one of those.

According to Healy's account, the sailors spent much of the southward voyage fishing. Besides providing a

gainful activity to fill their spare time, the catch offered some welcome variety to the sailors' dietary fare of hard tack (a hard, baked biscuit or loaf made from flour and water with no salt), salt beef (often horse meat), pork and cheese. **3 p55**

At one point, *Triton* sailors harpooned a shark and hauled it up to the edge of the rail. *"It seemed almost impossible to kill it,"* Healy wrote. *"After its head had been chopped off and pieces hacked out of its body, as soon as it was dropped back into the water it swam off just as if nothing had happened."*

The *Triton's* circuitous route took it south, then west to the Hawaiian, or as Healy calls them, Sandwich Islands. They arrived in Honolulu harbour on March 13 of 1890, nearly three months after embarking from San Francisco.

"Whalers very seldom anchor at Honolulu because if they did their crews would desert ship," he told his father, George Healy, Sr., adding: *"A whaler's life is not a very pleasant or happy one by any means and this is generally found out by green hands long before they get to Hawaii."*

While the *Triton* waited for a San Francisco steamer to bring its first mate, *"we did nothing but backwards and*

forwards in the harbour and at night run out to sea for 20 or 30 miles.

"On March 18, we took on some supplies sent to us from San Francisco. Captain and mate came aboard and at 4:00 p.m. Were headed for the Behring Sea northeast by north."

Weather made the voyage north a dangerous one.

"There was a gale blowing and the ship carrying everything but the 'main royal.' I tell you we were just plowing through the water and it seemed almost impossible to keep her on her course. On the morning of the 23rd, the flying jib parted and the sail split. This caused a great commotion for a time as it made a terrible racket, but the damage was soon fixed up. By this time it was getting cold and heavy clothing became the order of the day.

The further north the Triton progressed, the colder it got. In early April, she passed Fox Island in the Aleutian Archipelago. There was such a gale blowing at the time that "two men at the wheel could not keep the ship steady."

On the morning of April 16, the Siberian coast was sighted. "To say it was bleak, barren and cold with perpetual snow is a mild way to express it. It began to snow and it was not long before there was a foot of snow on the deck.

"The ice floe moving south was sighted on April 17 and went into it on the evening of the same day. Seven other blubber hunters had got ahead of us and we had them for company. Visiting other ships is a great pastime of the officers as they have a great time drinking and smoking. Some of them are sure to get drunk. We had officers on our ship that were not any exception to the rule."

Navigating through the ice was a dangerous and monotonous task. "'Port,' 'Starboard' and 'Steady' is all you can hear and then when a hole of any size is reached 'By the wind' is the cry from the crow's nest. Then until another opening is found it is 'Stand by the stays' or 'Wear ship' until we get sick and tired of taking and laying up rigging. The ice encountered in the Behring Sea is very large, but no comparison to the Arctic ice. Ships have plenty of trouble getting through but it is a case of necessity in order to get to spring whaling grounds on time.

"Seals sleeping on the ice is a common sight and the officers amuse themselves trying to shoot them.

"I think the most innocent animal I have seen is the pup seal. These little fellows will look at a ship with great astonishment and some will swim toward it to see what it is. Then is the time the officers get in their sport—

killing and wounding these innocent creatures. These are the hair seals. The larger ones that are killed are brought on board and take the place of fresh beef and I can assure you that seal meat is not 'hard to take' after living so long on hard tack and salt horse (salt beef) varied down south occasionally with porpoise stew.'

All of this was small talk. Healy and his crew, like all the other whalers in the area, were primed and ready for the serious work of whaling. Every ship was anxious to be the first to sight 'a blow' and make the first whale kill. The *Triton's* opportunity came on the 22nd of April at 7:00 p.m.

"We lowered the boats for the first blow. Every ship carries five whale boats, three on the port side and two on starboard. These are equipped with all the necessary implements for capturing the fish. Harpoons, lances and lines as well as other stuff so crowd the boats that not much room is left for the crew. My boat, the first mate's boat, was the largest and was the newest and fastest of the five. Six men comprise a boats crew, the boat steerer who stands in the bow with a harpoon ready to throw when close enough to a whale, an officer at the rudder and four men to man the oar when not using sail. As we were in a hole in

the ice when we lowered, notwithstanding a stiff breeze blowing, the water was quite smooth but it was very cold.

"Soon after we left the ship we discovered that there were two whales spouting. Three other ships then lowered boats and scattered out waiting for the next rise. My mate saw one close to the ice and we immediately 'got in fighting trim.' We were about 200 yards away but it did not take long to get up to him. Our boat went clean over his back just as the harpoon was driven into him and the bow landed on a cake of ice. We were not long in getting clear of the ice and found that the whale was killed on the first clout. Fastened to the harpoon is a bomb gun attachment which forces into the whale's carcass as soon as the harpoon enters the blubber deep enough to press the trigger. The bomb contains explosive matter and a gas that soon kills the animal struck near a vital spot."

The bomb gun or darting gun that Healy mentions was invented in 1865 by Ebenezer Pierce, a New Bedford whaling captain. About 21" long and armed with time-delay fuse, the bomb-loaded harpoon was fired from a shoulder gun by a mate standing in the bow of the whaleboat. **2 p120,144** When the harpoon was securely embedded in the whale, the bomb was detonated. The animal died quickly from massive internal injuries.

Previously, the killing process was more drawn out.²
p20,21, 50 Harpooners would hurl their barbed lances into the whale, then chase it until it became weakened and exhausted. The chief harpooner had the honour of dealing the fatal blow. He took up a long spear-like lance and plunged it into the whale, churning it up and down repeatedly in search of the heart or lungs. When the blowhole spouted blood the harpooner knew a vital organ had been pierced. The whale went into violent death flurry, then died.

Healy describes the *Triton's* first kill this way: "As *this whale only took out about fifty feet of line the boat steerer knew that the bomb had done its work. Our other boats immediately came up to assist us in securing the fish and at 9:00 p.m. we had it alongside the ship.*

It was about fifty feet in length and yielded 1600 lbs of bone and 85 bbls. (barrels) of oil.

The oil came from the thick layer of blubber that envelops the whale. Much like a blanket, blubber insulates a whale and keeps its body temperature constant. It is also an energy storehouse when food is scarce. The thickness of blubber varies from two inches to two feet. It is a white, fibrous, fatty material honeycombed with large cells filled with an amber-coloured oil that separates from the fibres

when exposed to high heat. In the days before gas and electricity, whale oil was valued for lighting, heating, and lubrication. It was also used as a cleanser in the woollen textile industry, a basic ingredient in the manufacture of soap, varnish, paint, and later on, of margarine. **2 p3; 30**

The bones of the whale also contain oil which was considered superior to blubber oil. These components would be hoisted aboard the ship and hung from the rigging so that holes could be drilled into the bones to allow the bone oil to drain out. **3 p54**

Whalers were delighted to discover that Arctic whales were unusually fat. One catch could yield up to 300 barrels of oil, a valuable harvest since whale oil was worth more than \$15 a barrel according to 1850 prices. **2 p151**

And then there was the baleen. Demand was enormous for the flexible, elastic strips of whalebone. The versatile commodity was used to make skirt hoops, corset stays, umbrella ribs, ramrods, snuff boxes, hairbrushes, walking sticks, fans, fishing rods, buggy whips, carriage springs and the like. Cut into fine strips, it was also used in the manufacture of sieves, nets and brushes.

In 1875, whalebone or baleen was worth \$1.12 a pound. Three years later, it had soared to \$3.25, thanks largely to the fashion industry and the popularity of hooped skirts and tightly corseted waists. In 1890, at the time of Healy's whaling adventure, by-products from one good-sized whale could realize between \$10,000 and \$15,000. **2 p147**

"There was great excitement in cutting in the blubber and getting the head on board ship," George wrote. "By referring to Goldsmith's Animated Nature you will see that the whalebone of commerce (the baleen) is situated in the upper jaw of the whale. As a head of bone is valued all the way from \$5,000 to \$8,000 you can imagine that every precaution is taken to get that valuable article on board."

Baleen was separated from the jawbone, piece by piece, using sharp wedges. Each piece was subsequently scrubbed clean, dried, bundled and stowed away. The teeth from the lower jaw were removed and cut into chunks for the scrimshaw industry.

The process of stripping the carcass of blubber was known as flensing. **2 p52** It began as soon as the dead whale was lashed alongside the ship and the head was detached and hoisted aboard. One of the boat-steerers would clamber onto the whale's slippery back, cut a hole in the skin and blubber near the animal's eye and insert a hook connected

to a series of ropes and pulleys which were, in turn, attached to the ships's windlass. While flensers on the whale used their sharp spades to cut strips of blubber one to two feet wide, their counterparts on board would crank the windlass to peel back and lift and the 'blanket piece.' Dripping oil and blood, it was winched above the deck where the strip was cut free and lowered through a hatch into the blubber room below deck. The hook was then attached to the next piece and the process began again. Slab by slab, the flensers stripped the blubber from the carcass until only a bloody mass of bones and entrails remained. The headless carcass was released to drift free and provide food for polar bears and other sea creatures.**2 p60**

Flensing was a dirty and unpleasant business. The sides of the ship became splattered with blood and fat, the rigging was slick with oil, and the decks were so grimy and slippery it was almost impossible for crewmen to keep their footing. Sawdust was sometimes sprinkled around work areas to counter the problem, but it was soon tracked into the cabins and forecastle until the whole ship reeked with stench of whale.

As George Healy put it: "*The cutting up part of the business takes several hours and everyone and the deck of*

the ship is nothing but oil and grease. It is impossible to get whale oil out of clothes.

The blubber is 'tried out' at once. Every ship carries two immense copper cauldrons set in a brick furnace with the necessary attachments for draining the oil into coolers before being barrelled up for the market. The trying out business is horrible work and when carried on during a heavy snowstorm with the thermometer hovering near zero F. it is not very pleasant."

Blubber went rancid quickly **3 p 53** and had to be 'tried out' immediately. Crewmen armed with sharp cleavers cut the blanket pieces into small rectangular 'horse pieces' which were sliced thin like the pages of a book. Known as 'Bible leaves,' these paper-thin pieces were fed into the trypots and boiled until all the oil was extracted. **2 p53**

"Such," wrote George, "was the case with our first whale. The work is carried on night and day until it is finished. The blubber scraps are used for fuel in the tryworks and they make a very hot fire."

Following the *Triton's* first catch, the crew were given an unexpected opportunity to rest. A storm blew up, effectively trapping the whaler in an ice jam. The time of inactivity was used to 'smoke' the ship. "Everybody turned out of their quarters during the whole day. At night the

hatches were taken off and the cabin and forecastle opened again for occupation."

Once the ice loosened, the *Triton* continued on, inching its way slowly northward through the ice. On April 30th, it came out at Cape Hagan on the desolate coast of Siberia.

"A handful of half starved natives subsist near Cape Hagen," George told his father, *"and as soon as we got near enough to shore they put off in their skin canoes or boats to our ship to trade what few furs they had for flour and tobacco. They were a forlorn looking lot and seemed to be almost starved. We gave them some hardtack and they fairly stuffed themselves with it. (Kow kow is their word for food.)"*

The next morning our starboard boat killed the second whale and the trying out performance was again gone through. The capture of this whale was a blessing to those Esquimaux for the raw skin is a dainty dish for them and they just swallowed it whole, filling themselves and their canoes. We had whale meat and black skin several times. Being properly cooked it is quite good. The crew preferred whale meat to that of seal, and this is my choice also.

Following the second kill, the *Triton* cruised around Cape Hagan for a couple of days, only to be caught in what

Healy described as "a terror of a storm. Terrible wind sprang up at 2 a.m. All hands were called to furl the sail... The way the ship did plunge and roll was something I shall never forget. The sea was running the proverbial 'mountains high' and every wave that broke over us froze as soon as it struck the deck. We got the sails under gaskets and scudded along under one topsail. We were uncomfortably close to land and had to get out into deeper water the best way possible."

Eventually the gale subsided and the whaler was able to continue. A few days later, they dropped anchor at Indian Point, also on the Siberian coast. There, Healy wrote, they found a great number of 'Esquimaux,' the best-looking and the cleanest of any he had seen to that point.

"Trading was the order of the day and the ship was swarming with them every day while we were at anchor. Twenty other ships were anchored there, all getting their skins and boots for their crews. The little boots I sent you this morning I got for two plugs of tobacco.

The legs of all their boots are made of sealskin and the soles of walrus hide. Whalers put them on as soon as they can get them. They are very warm when worn with insoles and two pairs of socks. It would be impossible to

go through a whaling cruise with ordinary leather boots or shoes. I suffered dreadfully from cold feet."

The *Triton* spent several weeks cruising around the area, visiting St. Lawrence Bay and Port Clarence on the Alaska side, before heading north again. On the evening of July 5, it passed the Diomedes Islands and was at last in the Arctic Ocean.

They made a stop at Cape Lisbon where the crew spent three days hauling coal from a coal mine for the ship's donkey engine and the galley. At the same time, a tender sent from San Francisco replenished their diminishing supplies.

The *Triton's* next stop was Point Barrow.

"On this Point the government has a station and the revenue cutter 'Bear' was laying off shore when we arrived. It is a long low point of land and barren is no name for it. Here we found between 100 and 200 natives who came from the interior at this season of the year to meet the ships and trade off their furs for flour, whiskey and tobacco. It is contrary to the law to give these natives liquor but it is done year after year. There would not be much difficulty finding out what ships furnished it. When the natives start in on a trade the first thing they ask

about is liquor. If they cannot get this the next thing they ask for is tobacco and then comes kow kow.

We stayed at Point Barrow until the 27th. The time being taken up with duck hunting, trading, visiting other ships and generally lounging around. A word about ducks in these waters. They are found in countless numbers, raising their young and feeding them and themselves on the jelly fish of which there is an abundance. They get so fat that they can scarcely rise from the water when a boat gets near them and one shot fired into a flock will generally bring down from 3 to 6 ducks. The noise they make flying sounds like a wind squall.

We were not sorry when we weighed anchor to go to the west although this was the most dangerous part of the cruise, as it blows nearly all the time in the Arctic and the fall whaling is done in the open sea with no ice to break the force of the waves as in the Behring Sea. It now commenced to get colder and all hands were clothed in Esquimaux clothing from head to foot.

The Aurora Borealis was seen here in all its beauty and its appearance is a sure indication of a blow and sure enough the sign did not fail. We did not meet with much ice until September 15th when it began to get heavy. On the evening of the 18th we sighted Herald Island one of the most

dangerous places in the Arctic Ocean. We did not linger around here very long. From the 1st of September it blew a gale almost all of the time with more or less snow. The forward rigging was one mass of ice and it was risky work going out on the jib boom to do any work. Every time a wave would come and break over it, it would add to the ice already formed on the rigging and deck. During this time it was almost impossible to keep the ship on her course. She would not answer the rudder and 'the old man' (the most universal sobriquet among sailors for the captain) would get 'on his ear' occasionally, but the crew as a general thing took no notice of him as neither he nor any of his underlings were liked.

On September 25th our third whale was killed and on the 26th the larboard bow boat struck another, but the iron drew and the whale being dead sank, there being no second iron in it to hold. On the 27th, 28th, and 29th we lowered regularly, staying down nearly all day for whales where seen in all directions, but these were not our lucky days. Other ships' boats were getting them right along. On the 30th we got our fourth and last whale, and also on this day, our starboard boat capsized while fast to a whale, throwing the crew into the water. Fortunately our boat saw the occurrence and immediately started to their assistance. We

did not get up to them any too soon, for they were all nearly used up from exposure in the icy cold ewater. They were hanging on to the keel of the boat and we had quite a time getting them into our boat. The whale got away taking with it about 600 feet of line. In a day or two the men got over their ducking and could get around as well as any of us.

Young ice was beginning to form and the wind and cold was increasing so our skipper began to think about starting home. Whales were still numerous, but it would have been the height of folly to lower the boats in such seas as were running. On the 5th of October we 'squared in' for home with a heavy northwester blowing.

It increased so that the bow boats were almost carried away with the waves and the larboard boat was almost smashed to pieces by one wave that struck us. On the 6th, 7th and 8th it blew a hurricane accompanied by snow. We passed the Diomedes on the afternoon of the 8th and on the 19th we were in the Behring Sea. The 10th and 11th were bad days for the crew as it was next to impossible to stand up or lie down. Another ship (the Eliza) started for home the same day as we did. She ran ahsore on St. Lawrence Island in the Behring Strait and went to pieces, the crew escaping with great difficulty. They were picked up by a whaling

steamer in a starving condition and brought to San Francisco."

The *Triton* dropped anchor back in San Francisco Bay at 4:00 o'clock on the afternoon of November 5, 1890. Wrote George, Jr.: *"Everyone was glad to get back to civilization."*

The whaling 'cruise' had taken eleven months. All in all, it seems to have been an experience that Healy did not care to repeat. The last paragraph of the letter to his father articulates a profound distaste for the whole whaling business and those who participate in it:

"I was intending to say something about the officers, but concluded not to. Our satellite (subordinate officers) behaved themselves pretty well. They understood that if anyone of the crew was ill-used it would be made interesting for them on their return to San Francisco. The officers of the whaling fleet, with very few exceptions, are a low, selfish unprincipled lot. They are nearly all drunkards and one of the captains who visited our skipper was so drunk when he was ready to go back to his own ship that he fell overboard in attempting to get into his boat. If anybody should ask my opinion of whaling I could not find adjectives strong enough to expres my disgust of the

business and those engaged in it. (Mr. W. R. Wing excepted).

Why then, we wonder, did George Healy, Jr. go on this whaling expedition? It certainly wasn't the money. Crew members received wages in the form of a 'lay,' or a percentage of the net value of the cargo. The lay was paid at the end of the voyage when the size of the cargo had been calculated. Under the best of circumstances, a lay averaged about \$321.21 or 26¢ a day. It was common practise, however, for sailors to take advances on their lay throughout the voyage to purchase such things as tobacco, clothing, needles and thread, blankets, knives, and the like from the ship's store or 'slop chest.' At the end, they often owed more than their entitled lay. **2**

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This may have been the case for George Healey. "I made nothing out of the trip," he told his father. "I was glad to get back with my life. Two boat crews were lost last season, several men killed falling out of rigging and not a few died of disease brought on by exposure. It is a horrible life and no respectable man has any business on the deck of a whaler."

If it wasn't the money, what did take George, Jr. whaling?

One can only speculate. At the time he joined the expedition, George, Jr. was 38 years of age.

1 He was born in Port Hope, Ontario, in 1851 to George Millman Healy (the recipient of the letter) and Margaret Robinson Healy. George, Jr., had been married; the Port Hope Guide newspaper carries an account of his marriage to Ida Hastings on December 20 of 1871, as well as an item five years later reporting the death of their ten-month-old son Alvah George Healy. The family was living in Toronto at time.

1 Another letter from George, Jr., to his father has survived. In it he describes his journey from Detroit to Butte City, Montana in 1885. There is no mention of his wife, so it would appear that she, too, may have been deceased.

When the letter with the account of his whaling expedition to Siberia was written, George, Jr., was living in Oakland, California working as a compositor for the Pacific Press Publishing Company, which he calls 'the voice of the Seventh Day Adventist Church.'

So, why did he go? Perhaps the call of the open sea was in his blood. At one time, his father was a sea captain on the '*Signet*,' but George, Sr., had given up the

life of sea captain some twenty years earlier to become the town clerk for Port Hope.¹

Perhaps the opportunity came through the intervention of George, Sr., for his son writes: *"I had quite a chat with Mr. W. R. Wing (one of the owners of the Triton) a few days after my return and I thanked him for the kindness extended to you and to myself. He told me I could use his name for a reference in looking about the city for employment. I have not seen him since I came across the Bay and I presume by this time he is back in New Bedford as all his ships on this side have gone whaling again. He is a very fine man and a thorough gentleman. If you should write to him remember me very kindly."*

George Healy, Jr., is mentioned in father's April 19, 1907 obituary as living in the U.S.A. A pictorial history book of Port Hope listing prominent business men from the community places him in Alaska. ¹ No other factual evidence regarding George Healy has survived.

What does remain of George Healy, Jr., is his letter through which we have a far more detailed glimpse into his personality and character than any amount of statistical data could afford. The letter also serves a valuable historic purpose; it gives a frank view of a centuries-old

industry that, by its own abuse, would soon enough bring about its own demise.

The whaling industry continued into the 20th Century, but clearly, it's viability was waning. The value of whale oil had declined when rapeseed oil became the cleanser of choice in the woollen textile industry, and coal gas proved superior as an illuminant. **2 p78** The price of whale bone fell off dramatically after 1907 as fashions changed and there was no longer a demand for skirt hoops or corset stays.

More important, by the end of the 19th century, there simply weren't enough whales left to hunt. With the development of exploding harpoons, speedy catcher boats and giant factory ships, whalers were able to scour the globe in search of their prey. **2 p5** Like any other natural resource, whales were harvested with little regard for their conservation.

Between the 1920s and 1970s, more than two million whales were killed and several species were reduced to the verge of extinction. Populations of blues, fins, humpbacks and seis in the southern hemisphere were ravaged. **2 p2** Sperm whale numbers were decimated. In the entire northern region, there are thought to be no more than a few hundred bowheads remaining, fewer than were slaughtered in one

summer by whalers early in the 19th century. The only baleen species that survive in healthy numbers today are the minke and Bryde's whale which exist in the southern oceans.

Thankfully, since the 1970s, the massacre has slowed. In 1982, members of the International Whaling Commission agreed to a moratorium on commercial whaling in order to assess the condition of the world's whales. The moratorium went into affect in 1986. It was recommended that the blue, right, and bowhead whale should be listed as endangered species and spared from further killing.

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SOURCES:

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(Phyllis White is a descendant of the Healy family and an avid family historian)

2 'A History of World Whaling' (see above) by Daniel Francis