Catherine M. Green. NINETEENTH-CENTURY NORTH AMERICAN FIGUREHEADS FROM THE MARINERS' MUSEUM COLLECTION: AN HISTORICAL OVERVIEW, AND A STUDY OF TWENTY-TWO CARVINGS IN THE MUSEUM'S COLLECTION (Under the Direction of Dr. Timothy J. Runyan) Department of History, July 2003.

This thesis provides an overview of ships' figureheads and researches the histories of specific nineteenth-century North American figureheads in the Mariners' Museum in Newport News, Virginia. In many cases this research establishes or confirms a figurehead's identity and places it in a timeline of nineteenth-century carvings.

Nineteenth-century North American figurehead designs, subjects, and carving styles were influenced by European ship carving traditions. This five-thousand-year evolution is explored in an historical overview. Published sources on European and American folk art, ship construction, figure carving, ship carvers, maritime history and nautical archaeology are synthesized into a timeline of bow decoration on vessels. Special attention is given to the stylistic changes and subject choice of nineteenth-century North American figureheads, in particular, which comprise the majority of the museum's collection and the focus of this study.

This thesis scrutinizes documents from curatorial, registrar, and conservation records, and incorporates additional information from resources in the Mariners' Museum's library, archives, and photography department for each of the twenty-two figureheads considered. Each figurehead is also subjected to comparative analysis in order to establish its place in a stylistic and historical timeline. The result for the museum is a representative typology of nineteenth-century North American figureheads and a comprehensive understanding of twenty-two carvings in their collection. This

provides a solid foundation for a dedicated ships' figurehead exhibit and a base for further research into the identities of specific carvings.

NINETEENTH-CENTURY NORTH AMERICAN FIGUREHEADS FROM THE MARINERS' MUSEUM COLLECTION: AN HISTORICAL OVERVIEW, AND A STUDY OF TWENTY-TWO CARVINGS IN THE MUSEUM'S COLLECTION

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The Mariners' Museum also lent financial assistance for this research through the 2000-2001 Harold S. Sniffen Fellowship. Without this award honoring the museum's late Curator Emeritus and maritime art scholar, this project would not have been possible.

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Introduction

The Mariners' Museum in Newport News, Virginia houses one of the largest ships' figurehead collections in the world. The museum's collection of over ninety figureheads encompasses nineteenth- and twentieth-century ship-carving traditions from both North American and European vessels. Prehistoric to modern seafarers decorated the bows of their vessels for various reasons, from superstition to glorification. The symbolism contained in figureheads transforms these finely crafted pieces of folk art into complex artifacts. Whole chapters of maritime history, such as the New England whaling industry, the evolution of the United States Navy, the clipper ship era, and polar exploration are related through individual Mariners' Museum's figurehead carvings.

This study focuses on nineteenth-century North American figureheads in the museum's collection. This focus curtails the scope of research to a manageable dataset, and provides a comprehensive overview of North American figurehead styles and subjects over the course of the 1800s.

Research for this thesis was done under the auspices of the Harold S. Sniffen Fellowship, awarded to the author by the Mariners' Museum in 2000. This biennial research fellowship, established to honor the museum's late curator emeritus and noted maritime art scholar, Harold S. Sniffen, provides financial assistance to an individual undertaking scholarly research related to the Mariners' Museum's collections.[1] The information garnered from this research in this thesis provides the museum with a

[1] Letter from Willam B. Cogar, Chief Curator, TMM to The North American Society for Oceanic History Newsletter, September 10, 1999.

summary of the history of ships' figureheads with an emphasis on nineteenth-century North American figurehead carvings, the heart of the museum's collection. This study also supplies the museum with an in depth analysis of twenty-two ships' figureheads in their collection, confirming their identities where possible, and relating the histories of each carving. The inherent value of these bow decorations increases exponentially when this historical context is established. By introducing these figureheads as "spokespersons" for nineteenth-century maritime history, the museum can transform these beautiful works of art into invaluable historical resources.

A variety of published works on ships' figureheads laid a firm foundation for a comprehensive survey of the art of ship carving. Two well-researched works, *American Figureheads and Their Carvers* by Pauline Pinckney (1940), and M.V. Brewington's *Shipcarvers of North America* (1962), provide important insights into the creation of North American figureheads. Additional works such as Peter Norton's *Ships' Figureheads* (1976), Hans Jürgen Hansen and Clas Broder Hansen's *Ships' Figureheads* (1990), P.N. Thomas's *British Figurehead and Ship Carvers* (1995), and L.G. Carr Laughton's 1925 work, *Old Ship Figure-Heads and Sterns*, detail the history of European decorative naval architecture, which inspired the unique ornamental carving traditions of North America.

While secondary sources lend considerable historical context for the Mariners' Museum figureheads, the main source of documentation is contained in the Mariners' Museum (TMM) itself. Documentation on the museum's figureheads and their vessels

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[1] Letter from Willam B. Cogar, Chief Curator, TMM to The North American Society for Oceanic History

are found in the Mariners' Museum library, archives, and photography department. These publications, documents, and photographs enhance the information contained the museum's curatorial files, the main repository for information regarding items in the museum's collections.

Each figurehead in the museum's collection has an "OF" accession number and a corresponding curatorial file. The Mariners' Museum acquired all of the figureheads considered in this study in the 1930s and 1940s, early on in the institution's collecting, and documentation from this period at times proves vague or inconsistent. Additional registrar and conservation records are also found in a figurehead's "OF" file, as is related correspondence and ancillary documentation regarding a figurehead's vessel and carver, if known. For the majority of figureheads in the museum's collection, however, little or no historical information was provided at the time of accession, relegating many figureheads to an "undetermined" designation.

Figurehead consultant Carol Olsen's 1982-3 research on twenty-four Mariners' Museum figure carvings, and folk art historian Ralph Session's 1998 survey of the figurehead collection clarify or amend data in museum files.[2] Olsen's summaries, in particular, present a carefully researched and thoughtful approach to deducing the identities and expanding the histories of the figureheads she studied. Her comparative analysis of a number of these carvings placed many of them in a stylistic timeline that was used to date figureheads whose provenience was previously unknown.

Newsletter, September 10, 1999.

Conclusive association with specific vessels is not recorded for a many of the figureheads in the Mariners' collection, but nine of the figureheads in this study can be traced to their original nineteenth-century vessels, providing an exciting opportunity for interpretation in the museum's galleries. Far from worthless, the remaining thirteen "tentatively identified" or "undetermined" nineteenth-century North American figureheads highlighted here still contain great historic value and illustrate a maritime tradition preserved in only a handful of maritime collections around the world. Surprisingly, a small proportion of the figureheads in this study are displayed in the Mariners' Museum exhibit halls today. Viewed either as a collection, or as multifaceted individual artifacts, the Mariners' Museum should proudly display its unique figurehead collection.

Ancestral Ground: An Historical Overview of European Figureheads

The collection of figureheads in the Mariners' Museum highlights the evolution of bow carvings in nineteenth century. However, the practice of decorating the bows of vessels extends much further into the annals of history. This superfluous piece of carving played a prominent role in maritime history for thousands of years. Even though no structural reason exists for the inclusion of a figurehead it remained requisite equipment aboard ships for thousands of years, evolving with the profile of the bow. Consequently, figureheads represented something more than aesthetically pleasing decorative carving. Superstitious and religious underpinnings elucidate the reasons people have affixed carved representations on a vessel's bow since prehistoric times. The need to imbue a vessel with anthropomorphic qualities also can explain the figurehead tradition. Less ethereal motivations such as vessel or merchant promotion and identification as well as national pride also played significant roles in the decisions of early shipbuilding peoples to use figureheads. When studied as a progression of developments paralleling the evolution of ship construction, the ancient and obscured early history of bow decoration, spanning thousands of years and a multitude of nations, provides a multifaceted context to the maritime carving practices of the nineteenth century, facilitating a greater appreciation for these more modern carvings.

Early Traditions

Although people decorated the bows of their vessels since watercraft evolved from floating logs into man-made canoes and rafts, the origins of bow decoration can be traced back in the archaeological and historical record to the early seafaring civilizations of the Mediterranean. The oldest known depictions come from pre-dynastic Egyptian examples over five-thousand years old. Representations of watercraft on pottery from between 3,000 and 4,000 BC clearly depict decoration on the bow (figure 1a). The repetition of such images suggests that this kind of embellishment proved to be the rule rather than the exception.[1]

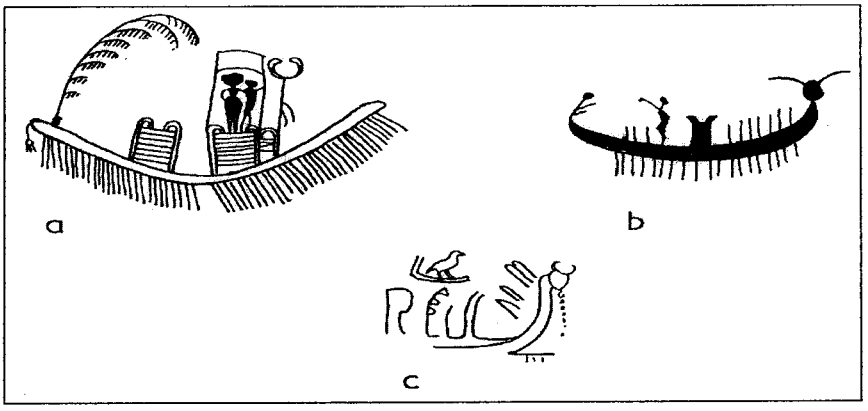

Figure 1. Early Egyptian boats: a, Gerzean pottery shards; b, Nubian rock drawings; c, Bone plate of first dynasty (Norton, *Ships' Figureheads*, 14).

Many of these early occurrences of bow decoration hold sacrificial significance. To the peoples of Southern Egypt, as evinced in Nubian rock paintings, the sacrifice and placement of a horned animal on the bow of a vessel either appeased fickle gods, provided luck, or announced impending doom to those who chose to stand against these

[1] Peter Norton, *Ships' Figureheads* (Barre, Massachusetts, 1976), 13.

ships (figure 1b).[2] Artifacts from the first Egyptian dynasty depict bull heads in particular (figure 1c).[3] These sacrificial animals also became the inspiration for later carved animal figureheads. British geographer James Hornell compiled a considerable body of research on the ancient practices of decorating ships. He not only found animal sacrifices to have taken place in the past, he found examples in the Mediterranean and Asia where symbolic or actual animal sacrifices still occurred in the twentieth century. Observing the launch of a catamaran in India in the 1940s, Hornell described the ritual of, "a pumpkin, previously injected with turmeric and vermilion...placed just ahead of the vessel so that when it be dragged seawards the pumpkin shall be crushed and, squelching, shall spray spurts of red and yellow juice over the excited crowd, in simulation of the blood splashed ejected when a human victim was sacrificed."[4] Nonetheless, animal rather than human sacrifices most likely propitiated the gods in most cases, and eventually, carved representations of a fleece or animal head replaced an actual blood sacrifice. The Western world also maintains vestiges of this ceremony to this day with the breaking of a champagne bottle on the bow at a ship's launching, suggesting the more gruesome ceremony that inspired the tradition.

In addition to the sacrificial roots of bow carvings, early Egyptian reed boats, with graceful upturned extremities, often inspired the decorative form of later carved wooden stems. This is illustrated in the Royal Ship of Cheops c2650 BC found in a limestone pit

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[2] *Ibid.*
[3] *Ibid.*
[4] James Hornell, "The Prow of the Ship: Sanctuary of the Tutelary Deity," *Man – A Record of Anthropological Science* Vol. XLIII (November- December 1943): 122-128.

near the Great Pyramid of Giza (figure 2).[5] "From the very beginning the Egyptians never chose the motifs with which they decorated their ships haphazardly. They grew organically from constructional forms, one example being the lashings on papyrus boats, which were later adopted as ornaments on wooden ships."[6]

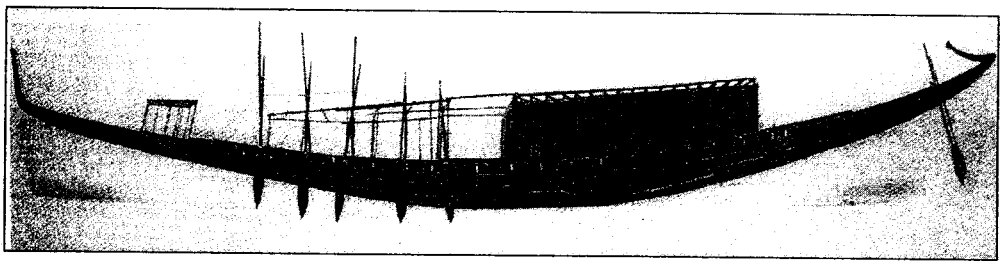

Figure 2. The Royal Ship of Cheops c2650 BC has carved cedar papyriform stem and stern (Paine, *Ships of the World, An Historical Encyclopedia* (New York, 1997), 345).

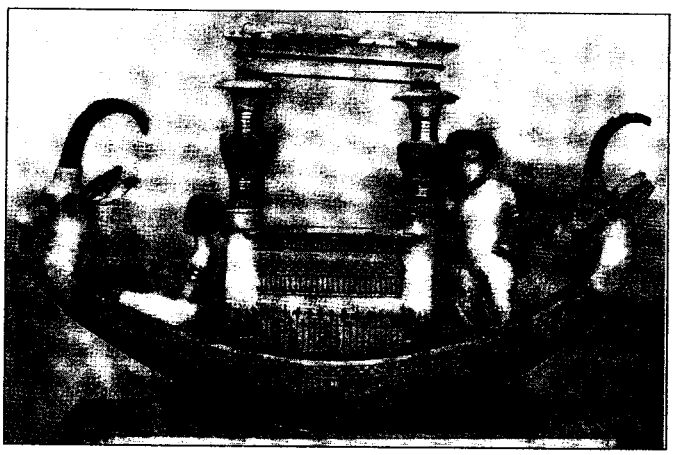

Figure 3. Model of a Nile boat from the tomb of Tutankhamen, c1350 BC decorated with large ibex heads at the bow and stern (Hansen, *Art and the Seafarer,* 10).

These upswept stems progressed from carved papyriform decorations to embellishments representing stylized flowers and plants, to more complex emblems enmeshed in the intricacies of Egyptian religious beliefs. Ship models, funerary vessels,

[5] J. Richard Steffy, *Wooden Ship Building and the Interpretation of Shipwrecks* (College Station, Texas, 1994), 23-29.
[6] Hans Jürgen Hansen ed., *Art and the Seafarer* (New York, New York, 1966), 85.

and drawings on the walls of Egyptian tombs portray an array of solar discs, hawks, ibex, water birds, and even pharaoh heads sitting atop the stems and sterns of vessels throughout dynastic Egypt (figure 3).[7]

Another long held tradition of Egyptian origin is the painting of oculi upon the bows of ships. The mystical "oculus of antiquity" remains one of the earliest recorded symbols used on watercraft. While oculi are not a form of bow carving per se, a discussion of this ancient anthropomorphic device, which is still used in some Mediterranean and Eastern traditions, "can help us to get a clearer insight into the history of the ship figurehead as we have it today."[8]

Undeniably, imbuing a ship with animate attributes, giving the vessel eyes or a face, was an element of North American figurehead carving in the nineteenth century. Eyes painted or carved on a ship's prow have been documented on many traditional twentieth-century fishing boats along the Portuguese, French, and Italian coasts, and on boats of Maltese and Sicilian fishermen.[9] Many modern mariners, in fact, still refer to the bow as "the eyes of the ship."[10]

British geographer James Hornell comprehensively studied evidence of oculi on Mediterranean vessels from early Egyptian depictions to twentieth-century fishing craft. While holding obvious anthropomorphic qualities, Hornell asserted that the eye not only instilled life into a vessel, it also represented the ever vigilant, ever searching eye of

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[7] Dilwyn Jones, *Boats*. The Egyptian Bookshelf (Austin, Texas, 1995), 67.
[8] Pauline Pinckney, *American Figureheads and Their Carvers* (New York, 1940), 20.
[9] James Hornell, "Survivals of the Use of Oculi in Modern Boats," *Man – Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* Vol LIII (1923): 289-321. 302.

Horus, a symbol integral in the Egyptian religion.[11] Horus was the avenging son of Osiris, who is identified with the sun-god Ra. Horus is fabled to be ever searching for the scattered remains of his father's body, and is accordingly pictured standing at the bow of his ship, often accompanied by a keen sighted hawk or falcon.[12] Funerary, commercial, and pleasure craft show similar representations of this sacred eye.[13] Whether it began as a deific symbol or an anthropomorphic attribute, to the early seafarers, the oculus of antiquity undoubtedly served the dual role of a religious symbol of direction and vigilance, while also lending a sense of living spirit to the vessel itself.[14]

Mediterranean Traditions

Although likely incepted in the Egyptian religion, the metaphorical imagery of the oculus on ancient craft - enabling a ship to see its way safely through the water – became disassociated with the legend of Horus as it passed from the Egyptians to the Phoenicians, Greeks, and Romans, who had their own deities to worship. Nonetheless, as revealed by excavated coins, the Phoenicians held onto the Egyptian convention of oculi on their vessels' bows. Resultant of their contact with Egypt, Greek and Roman coins dating back to the fifth and sixth centuries BC reveal that those civilizations adopted the

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[10] Carol Olsen, "Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Figureheads from the Mystic Seaport Museum Collection," (Master's Thesis, Texas A&M University, 1984), 3. From personal communication with J. Revell Carr at Mystic Seaport Museum.
[11] Hornell, "Survivals of the Use of Oculi in Modern Boats," 306-320.
[12] Pinckney. *American Figureheads and Their Carvers,* 20.
[13] Hornell, "Survivals of the Use of Oculi in Modern Boats." 302.
[14] Peter Kemp, *The Oxford Companion to Ships and the Sea* (London, 1976), 302.

oculus as well.[15] The Greeks, in particular, took on the use of oculi, clearly illustrated below on a fifth-century Attic vase depicting Odysseus and the Sirens (figure 4).

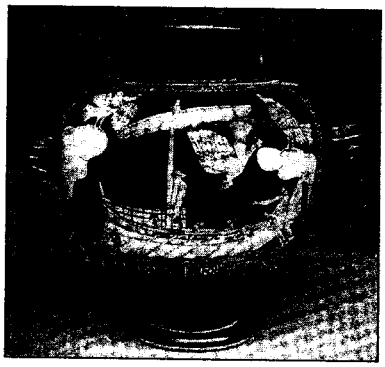

Figure 4. Odysseus and the Sirens; fifth-century Attic vase (Kemp, *Oxford Companion to Ships and the Sea*, 613).

Beyond the all-seeing eye, however, the ancient seafarers often incorporated bow and stern carvings onto their vessels.[16] The design and form of these carvings were strongly influenced by the ship construction, and more specifically, bow shape. Like their predecessors, the upright stem and stern posts of the Mediterranean merchant ships and war galleys encouraged decoration by providing a seat for carved wooden or bronze cast images. The subject and style of ancient bow decoration varied from culture to culture, and different traditions combined and diverged, evolving in the relatively insular environment of the Mediterranean.

Research indicates that the Phoenicians, in addition to oculi, frequently embellished the prow their trading vessels with a carving of a horse's head, signifying speed.[17] Evidence for this comes from an Assyrian relief from 706 BC from the palace of

[15] Pinckney, *American Figureheads and Their Carvers,* 21.
[16] Hornell, "Survival Survivals of the Use of Oculi in Modern Boats", 303-306.
[17] M.K. Stammers, *Ships' Figureheads* (Aylesbury, England, 1990), 5.

Sargon at Khorsabad, and now in the Louvre, which shows Phoenician cargo vessels called *hippoi* with a horse's head on the stem (Figure 5).[18]

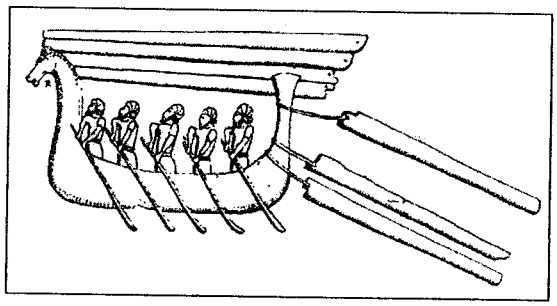

Figure 5. After an Assyrian relief from 706 BC from the palace of Sargon at Khorsabad, and now in the Louvre showing Phoenician cargo ships with horses heads (Anderson, *The Sailing-Ship*, 33).

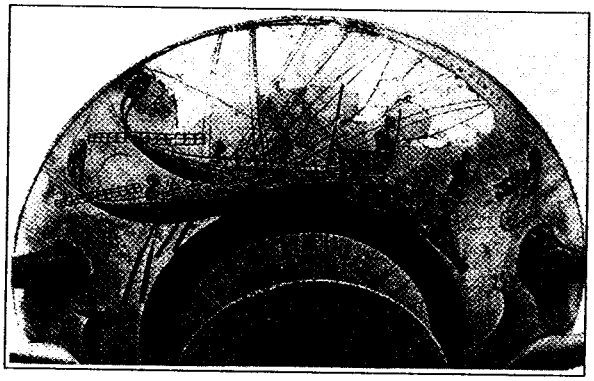

Figure 6. Greek bowl depicting galleys under sail, c530 BC. The oculus and bow ram have been incorporated into boars' heads at the base of the stems (Casson, *The Ancient Mariners*, figure 25).

Rather than mount a carved figure atop the stem, the Greeks preferred to decorate the rams that protruded at the waterline of the bows of their warships, converting their triremes into charging beasts. By lowering the painted oculi, the transformation was complete. Astonishingly similar to the bows of late nineteenth century iron-clad ships, the vertical stem of the ram-bowed Greek galleys have been depicted as a ram, boar, and

[18] Hansen, *Art and the Seafarer,* 86.

even an elephant (figure 6).[19] Figurehead researcher Pauline Pinckney notes that while the decorated ram was not figurehead, "it is noteworthy, for it shows a definite tendency to continue decorating ships with figures of living objects, thereby symbolizing the idea that the boat had life."[20]

Greek ship imagery from the archaeological record is enhanced by contemporary written accounts of vessels displaying animate qualities, as found in the *Odyssey*, Homer's epic chronicling the voyages of Jason and the Argonauts. During his journeys, Jason received advice from the "speaking oak" set in the prow of his ship, the *Argo*. Placed by the goddess Athena herself during the building of the vessel, the magic piece of oak came from her father Zeus' sacred oak at Dodona and proffered advice to Jason on his quest of the Golden Fleece. In this legend, we see life permeating the very timbers of the ship, in this instance giving it the power of speech, as well the protective influence of the gods.[21] Ironically, the same speaking prow fell off and killed the aged Jason as he slept in the shade of the beached and rotting hull of the *Argo*.[22] The legend does not indicate the carved form of the bow, but the story demonstrates that the bow signified the life and protective spirit of the ship. The Greeks passed this sentiment on to the Romans.

Although not great seafarers in the early Republican Period, the Romans expanded their maritime activity as their state grew. These "lubbers who became lords of the sea in spite of themselves" would eventually absorb the seamen and shipping of the

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[19] L.G. Carr Laughton, *Old Ship Figureheads and Sterns* (London, 1925), 63, and Norton, *Ships' Figureheads,* 31.
[20] Pinckney, *American Figureheads and Their Carvers,* 21.
[21] *Ibid.*, 21-22.
[22] David Taylor, *Figureheads* (London, 1992), 2.

Mediterranean nations and likewise adopt their shipbuilding traditions.[23] Oculi, as well as carved or bronze representations of gods and goddesses, classical busts, seahorses, and even crocodiles graced the prows of Roman merchant and war ships (figure 7).[24]

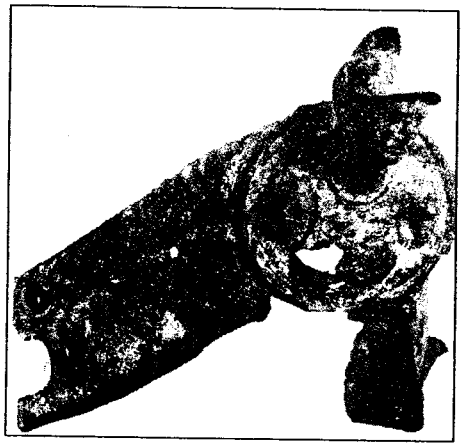

Figure 7. A small bronze Roman figurehead of the god Hermes dredged from the sea near Actium, possibly from a vessel lost when Mark Antony followed Cleopatra in retreat from Octavian in 31 BC (Norton, *Ships' Figureheads,* 30).

An enormous fleet of Roman merchant ships plied the Imperial waters, from the British Isles to North Africa, fueling Rome in its insatiable bid for conquest. Although similar in appearance to their Phoenician and Greek predecessors, Roman merchant vessels were much larger than earlier watercraft, some ranging from 300 to 600 tons.[25] Depictions of Roman merchantmen and warships show them carrying not only figureheads, but often a distinguishing swan's head or decorative scroll on the stern as well (figure 8).[26]

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[23] Casson, *The Ancient Mariners,* 143.
[24] Norton.,*Ships' Figureheads,* 32,and Evan W.H. Fyers, "A Roman Figure-Head," *Mariners' Mirror,* XIII, No.3 (1927): 280. Fyers describes and sketches an oak-carved classical bust from a Roman ship dredged from the harbor of Bizerta, Tunisia in the 1890s. The present location of this unique artifact is unknown.
[25] Peter Throckmorton ed., *The Sea Remembers – Shipwrecks and Archaeology* (New York, 1987), 61.
[26] Pinckney, *American Figureheads and their Carvers,* 21.

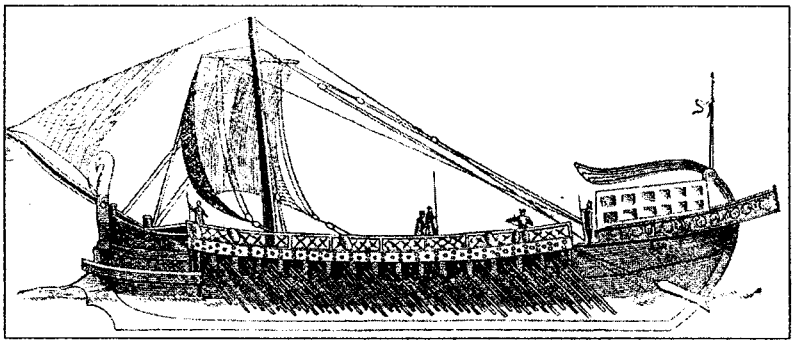

Figure 8. A Roman ship decorated with a bird figurehead and scroll stern. After a painting at Pompeii (Frere-Cook, *Decorative Arts of the Mariner*, 11).

When the Romans needed to intimidate the barbarians in their outlying territories, their figureheads contributed. A carving found in the Moselle valley from about 300 AD, portrays a Roman river ship laden with wine barrels, its stem ending in a dog-like beast head rising above oculi, perhaps meant to remind local populations of Roman power (figure 9).[27]

Figure 9. Roman grave monument from c300 AD depiciting a beast head with oculi (Hansen, *Ships' Figureheads*, 13).

Decorative devices on ships in the ancient period invoked superstitious or religious beliefs, or extolled the power of the nation. They also gave the vessel a unique

identity. Examinations of contemporary images and documents demonstrate that in antiquity, bow carvings on merchant ships often related to their cargoes. Olsen points out that carvings of Liber, god of wine, are found on Roman ships that likely transport cargoes of amphora filled with wine.[28] Although it appears that figureheads corresponding to a ship's name had been used to some degree as early as 1000 BC in Egypt, Pickney suggests that the use of figureheads, "similar to our modern employment of them can be traced to Roman vessels as early as 50 AD."[29] Figureheads played a more secular role, differentiating one vessel from another, signifying national, city, or merchant associations, and perhaps indicating cargo. Norton concurs that, for the Romans, the figurehead served as an identifying symbol on the vessel, and in his research also found that figureheads served as logos on bills of lading and other trade documents.[30] Additionally, carvings were not the only device Romans used to distinguish one ship from another. Many Roman vessels also employed bronze name plaques called *parasemon* on either side of the stem post, the predecessors of the nineteenth-century name board.[31]

As discussed above, multiple associations with superstitious, religious, national, and commercial themes demonstrate complexities in deciphering a figurehead's symbolic intent. In her examination of figureheads in the Mystic Seaport Museum, Carol Olsen points out that, "increasingly my research on later ship figureheads shows that bow

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[27] Hans Jürgen Hansen and Clas Broder Hansen, *Ships' Figureheads, The Decorative Bow Figures of Ships* (West Chester, Pennsylvania, 1990), 11.
[28] George F. Bass, *A History of Seafaring Based on Underwater Archaeology* (New York, 1972), 86.
[29] Pinckney, *American Figureheads and their Carvers,* 21.
[30] Norton, *Ships Figureheads,* 32.
[31] *Ibid.*

decorations are not frivolously chosen and that often there are several levels of meaning to them. I suspect this was true in earlier historical periods as well."[32] The ancient associations and symbolism of figureheads would eventually mesh with traditions outside the Mediterranean, when northern and southern European seafaring civilizations collided in the Middle Ages.

The collapse of the Roman Empire in the fifth-century AD dissolved the extensive Imperial trading network. Even though Roman vessels had sailed to northern European waters, the shipbuilding and decorating traditions handed down by the Egyptians remained confined to the Mediterranean. Even the omnipresent oculus never made it much farther than the Straits of Gibraltar. The Egyptians gave their ship construction and ship carving legacy to the classical world; the barbarians in the north formulated a different type of ship construction suited to the harsher sailing conditions on the North Sea. They also developed a distinct manner of decorating their vessels that conformed to their own superstitions and religious beliefs.

Northern European Traditions

Bronze Age rock carvings of ships found in Norway and Sweden dating to c1000 BC depict animal heads riding above the stems of the ships (figure 10).[33] The predecessors of later Viking traditions, these bestial heads were the prevalent bow decoration throughout northern Europe, indicating Scandinavian customs as the dominant

[32] Olsen, "Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Figureheads," 3.
[33] A.W. Brøgger and Haakon Shetelig, *The Viking Ships: Their Ancestry and Evolution* (London, 1951), 24-32.

influence on shipbuilding and ship carving in the region through the Middle Ages.[34] Norton hypothesizes that, "the violent and predatory activities of the Norsemen ensured that their superbly designed ships were seen everywhere in the area."[35] y the ninth and tenth centuries, Viking forces had invaded large coastal expanses of northern Spain, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Russia, England, and Ireland, as well as the remote Atlantic islands of Iceland and Greenland.[36]

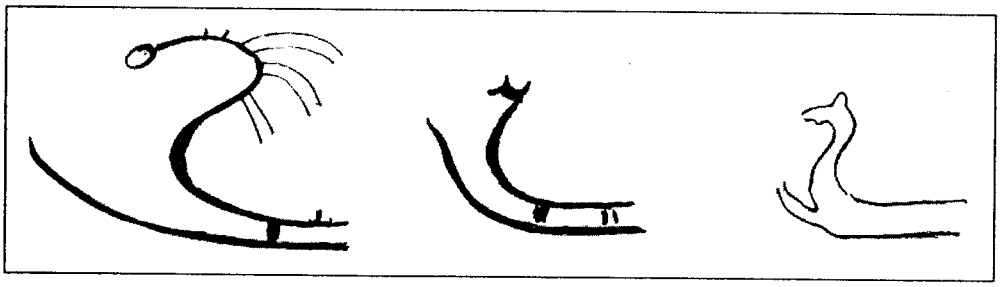

Figure 10. Norwegian Bronze Age rock carvings c1000 BC (Norton, *Ships' Figureheads*, 35).

The Vikings possessed sea superiority in part because of their sturdy clinker-built longships.[37] Archaeological remains of many longships are devoid of decoration; however, a few extraordinary finds illuminate Viking ship decoration. Excavated from a large burial mound on the west side of the Oslo Fjord in 1904, the Oseberg ship (c800 AD), "shows us what the Viking Age woodcarver could achieve at his very best (figure 11)."[38] Elaborately carved from bow to stern, the seventy-foot clinker-built longship is decorated with intertwining figures that form a sophisticated frieze. The carving

[34] Hansen, *Ships' Figureheads,* 14.
[35] Norton, *Ships' Figureheads,* 35.
[36] Archibald R. Lewis and Timothy J. Runyan, *European Naval and Maritime History 300-1500* (Bloomington, Indiana, 1985), 93.
[37] *Ibid.*
[38] Gervis Frere-Cook, *The Decorative Arts of the Mariner,* (Boston, Massachusetts, 1966), 14.

culminates into a coiled snake at the upswept prow, one of the two forms of bow decoration ubiquitous in the northern tradition, the serpent.[39]

Figure 11. The Viking longship, c800 AD, found at Oseberg, Norway. The intricately carved stem ends in a coiled serpent-head. (Sjøvold, Universitests Oldsaksamling, Oslo, Norway, 21).

Supplementing the archaeological record, sagas are interwoven with stories of Viking ships and voyages. One of the most famous sagas centers on King Olaf Tryggvason and his ship the *Long Serpent*, supplying literary support to the serpent device found in the archaeological record at Oseberg.[40]

In addition to the serpent head, dragon heads also decorated Viking warships (figure 12). The serpent and dragon heads on the stems of Viking ships served as talismans to protect the ship and bring it luck, and were more analogous to a mythical

[39] *Ibid.*, 13.
[40] Brøgger and Shetelig, *The Viking Ships: Their Ancestry and Evolution*, 138-140.

creature than a slithering snake.[41] These beast heads also symbolized strength and power, inspiring fear to many who beheld them. In fact, Viking law required these fear-inspiring heads be unshipped when returning to home waters to avoid frightening the good spirits – or people – of the homeland.[42] Orders not to take ships bearing dragon heads into Icelandic waters, to avoid frightening away the protective spirits of the island were contemporary to Leif Ericsson's voyages.[43] Another account purports that the native Icelandic populations, believing the decorated ships were sea monsters, would run and hide from dragon headed vessels.[44] This was an understandable mistake as the large, oared Norse vessels called *drekkars,* or dragon ships, not only carried hideous heads, but were carved with an upswept tail at the stern. They compounded the illusion of a sea monster with the appearance of many moving legs provided by the sweeping oars protruding between the scale-like shields hanging on the gunwale.[45]

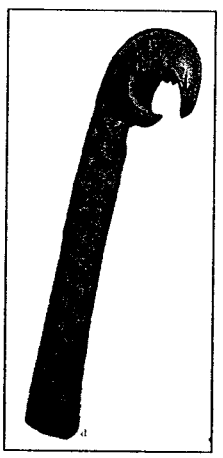

Figure 12. Removable dragon head found in the Scheldt River c400 AD (Hansen, *Art and the Seafarer*, 68).

[41] Brøgger and Shetelig, *The Viking Ships: Their Ancestry and Evolution*, 112.
[42] Hansen, *Ships' Figureheads*, 12.
[43] Brøgger and Shetelig, *The Viking Ships: Their Ancestry and Evolution*, 112.
[44] Pinckney, *American Figureheads and their Carvers,* 17.
[45] *Ibid.*, 17-18.

Medieval Traditions

Figure 13. Bayeux Tapestry circa eleventh century, detailing the events surrounding the 1066 invasion of England "Winds force his [Harold Godwinson's] ships aground on land belonging to Count Guy of Ponthieu" (L. Musset, *The Bayeux Tapestry,* City of Bayeux Collection (Carquefou, Nantes, no date).

It is the legacy of these Viking carving traditions that is clearly illustrated in the Bayeux Tapestry, which depicts Viking descendent William of Normandy's conquest of England in 1066 (figures 13 & 14). Created in the eleventh century, this unique historical testimony of the Norman invasion of England includes dragon-headed representations of William and Harold's ships traversing the English Channel. Both sail and oar powered craft bear fierce bestial heads mounted atop the stem and stern.[46]

Figure 14. Bayeux Tapestry circa eleventh century, detailing the events surrounding the 1066 invasion of England "The fleet sails for England" (Musset, *The Bayeyx Tapestry*).

[46]L. Musset, *The Bayeux Tapestry,* City of Bayeux Collection (Carquefou, Nantes, no date).

Northern European rounded, sturdy, primarily sail-powered versions of longships had evolved into larger transports that bore the merchant trade in Medieval Europe. Viking *knarrs* capable of traveling long distances, as well as the *cogs, hulks*, and *keels* of the North Sea formed the merchant fleet that sailed between thriving northern ports, and even made forays into more southern latitudes.[47] While evidence indicates that these merchant vessels did not usually carry figureheads, the upward curved stem and stern design held true.[48] It was the progeny of these vessels and their southern counterparts that eventually assisted Europeans answering the call of Pope Urban II at the Council of Clermont in 1095, for rich and poor alike to take up arms against the Turkish infidel in the Holy Lands, forming the first Crusade, and laying the foundation for the seafarers of northern Europe to renew contact with the vestiges of the classical world.[49] Once the northern and southern shipbuilding traditions began to converge, they steadily influenced each other. By the late fifteenth century, Mediterranean and northern traditions had melded into a uniquely European style that would ultimately be carried across the oceans to North America.

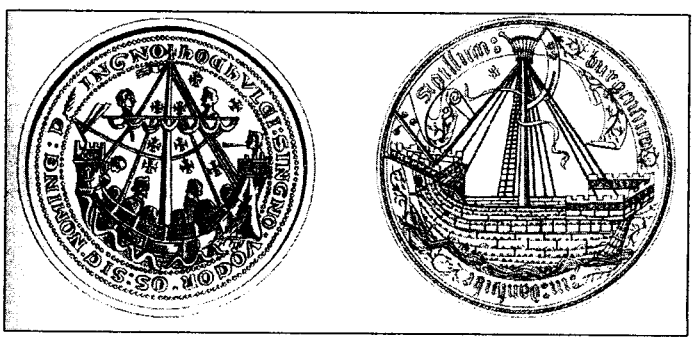

Figure 15. Medieval city seals. Seal from New Shoreham 1295 (left), and seal from Danzig 1400 (right) depicting overhanging forecastles on medieval 'hulks' (R.W. Unger ed.,*Cogs, Caravels, and Galleons*, 44).

[47] Lewis and Runyan, *European Naval and maritime History 300-1500,* 108-109.
[48] Hansen, *Ships' Figureheads,* 14.
[49] Richard Armstrong, *The Early Mariners* (New York, 1967), 103-112.

Illustrative evidence of ship design and ship carving between the eleventh and fifteenth centuries is limited to city seals of medieval seaports, church carvings, and illuminated manuscripts (figure 15).[50] In these images, forecastles encumber the bow making mount any sort of bow decoration virtually impossible. Instead of an ennobling figurehead, heraldic shields often surrounded the prominent castles. Not confined to northern Europe, an illustration of a fifteenth-century Mediterranean vessel depicts overhanging castle structures that largely preclude a traditional figurehead (figure 16). Obviously, the mystical qualities of bow carvings had been moderated to make room for more emblematic and heraldic decorations that would not interfere with the overhanging fighting platforms that engulfed the bows of late medieval vessels.[51]

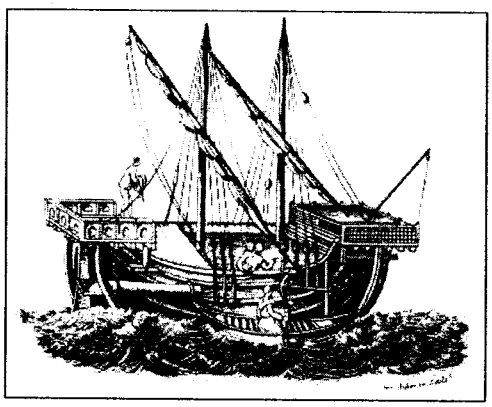

Figure 16. Mediterranean sailing vessel of the fifteenth century, castles overhang the bow and stern (from Creuze, *Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Naval Architecture*, in Hamilton, *Silent Pilots*, 13).

Fifteenth and Sixteenth Century Traditions

The figurehead would survive this chapter of vessel evolution due to its long held anthropomorphic and superstitious significance, as well as its ennobling qualities.

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[50] R.W. Unger ed., *Cogs, Caravels and Galleons* (London, 1994).
[51] Norton, *Ships' Figureheads,* 38-39.

Figurehead design adapted to the bow structure of European carracks and caravels in the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. When discussing the reemergence of the figurehead, many authors note the earliest surviving ship model, which dates from 1450 and is now housed in the Prins Hendrik Museum at Rotterdam. This carrack votive model, widely known as the Catalan Ship, hung in the sanctuary of St. Simeon de Mataro and depicts a spar protruding from the lower forecastle rail ending in a carved beast head with gaping jaws (figure 17).[52]

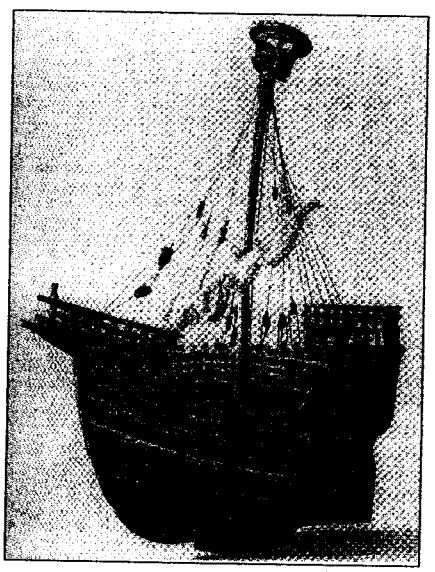

Figure 17. Votive model of c1450 ship from the church of St. Simon de Mataro, Mataro Spain showing a small beast head projecting from the forecastle's lower rail (Hansen, *Art and the Seafarer*, 25).

The supplemental spar carving was integrated below the bowsprit, affording additional footholds for sailors manipulating unwieldy head-sails. An even more practical use for bow carvings appears in Han Holbein's 1532 drawing depicting a small

[52] Stammers, *Ships' Figureheads,* 6.

carrack head carved into the shape of an open-mouthed beast, supplying an aperture to stow the spritsail yard (figure 18).[53]

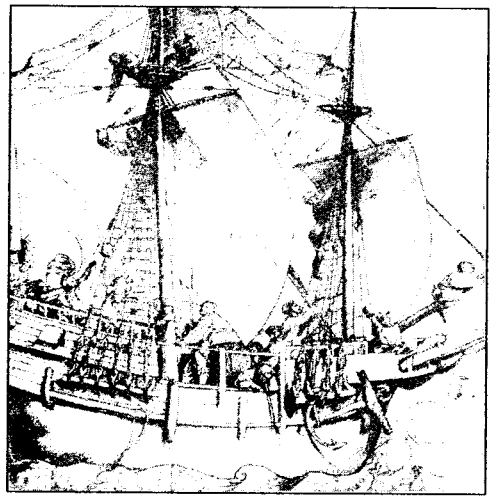

Figure 18. Han Holbein's drawing of 1532 depicting a carrack with carved beast head stowing the spritsail yard (Norton, *Ships' Figureheads*, 41).

Although useful fighting platforms, the projecting superstructure of the carrack hindered the ship's maneuverability.[54] The sleeker profile of the galleon, inspired by Mediterranean galley design, supplanted earlier vessel types. Once more, bow decoration changed to reflect the alterations in ship construction; the supplemental spars seen on later carracks evolved into the beakhead found on sixteenth-century galleons. Contemporary illustrations of two French prizes in the service of England's King Henry VIII depict the *Salamander* and *Unicorn* of 1544 with figureheads sitting atop a small beakhead below the bowsprit, their subjects corresponding to the ship names (figure 19).[55]

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[53] Norton, *Shps' Figureheads,* 41.
[54] Georgia Hamilton. *Silet Pilots: Figureheads in Mystic Seaport Museum,* (Mystic, Connecticut, 1984), 12.
[55] H.S. Vaughn, "Figure-Heads and Beak-Heads of the Ships of Henry VIII," *Mariners Mirror,* Vol IV, No.2: 37-43.

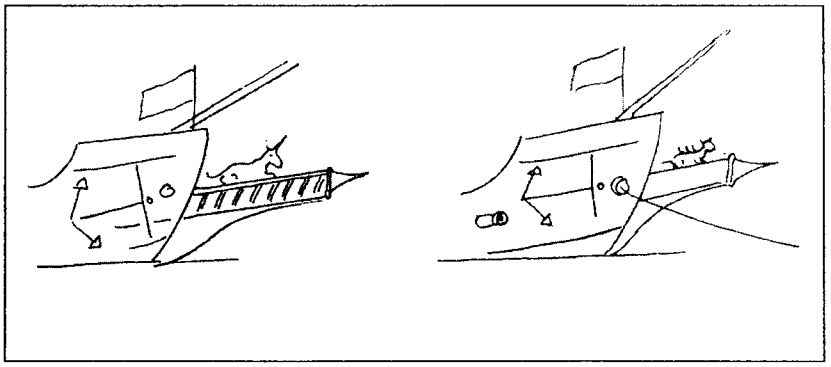

Figure 19. The bows of the ships *Unicorn*, left, and *Salamander*, right. After the *Roll of Henry VIII's Galleasses, 1546* (Norton, *Ships' Figureheads,* 43).

By the time the Spanish Armada threatened the English Channel in 1588, both countries had adopted galleons as the primary warships. The long and low projection of the beakhead became more ornate as the century progressed, and the figurehead was now located at its terminal end. The earliest known scale drawings of English warships, *Fragments of Ancient English Shipwrightry* from 1586, in the Pepysian Library at Magdalene College, Cambridge, depict plans of Elizabethan ships, attributed to master shipwright Matthew Baker (1530-1613), with outstretched carved beasts at the end of the beakheads (figure 20).[56]

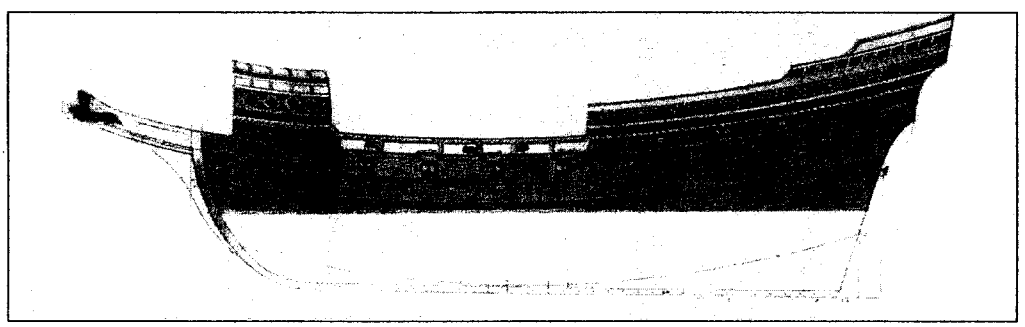

Figure 20. Elizabethan galleon attributed to Matthew Baker 1586 (from *Fragments of Ancient English Shipwrightry*, in the Pepysian Library at Magdalene College, Cambridge, in Laughton, *Old Ship Figure-Heads and Sterns*, plate 5).

[56] Unger, *Cogs, Caravels and Galleons*, 105.

Seventeenth Century Traditions

A list of figurehead subjects from the end of Queen Elizabeth's reign records five lions, five dragons, one unicorn, one tiger and one Jupiter sitting on an eagle.[57] The dragon, which had been so integral in northern European carvings, fell out of favor during the seventeenth century, and was replaced by the lion. The English, French and Dutch navies all chose the royal emblem of the lion as the predominant subject for their figureheads (figure 21).[58]

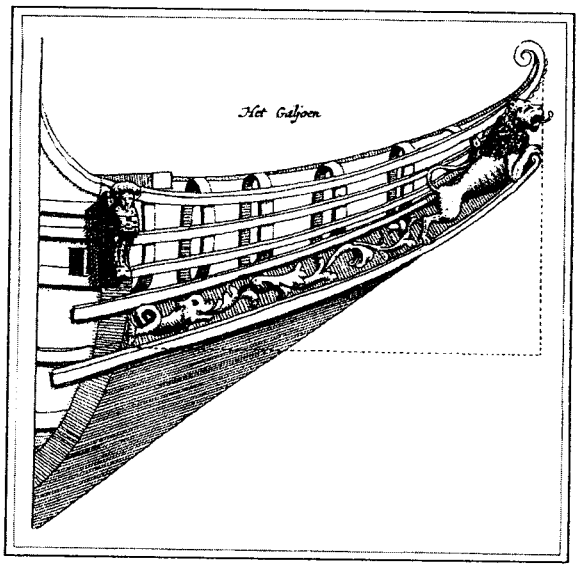

Figure 21. A Dutch example of the characteristic galleon beakhead with lion figurehead. (Nicholas Witsen, *Architectura Navalis et Regimen Nauticum*, 1671, in Unger, *Cogs, Caravels and Galleons*, 100).

The horizontal orientation of the beak in early seventeenth-century galleons dictated that the carved lion be nearly prone, stretched out as if leaping ahead. The lion figurehead depicted in a Dutch painting by Vroom of the ship *Royal Prince* entering

[57] Norton, *Ships' Figureheads*, 51.
[58] Hansen, *Ships' Figureheads*, 17.

Flushing in 1613, shows this design (figure 21a).[59] One of the oldest existing figureheads, the lion head from the Swedish flagship *Wasa* of 1628, also carries a characteristic inclined lean cat of this period, with its tail further elongating the image (figure 23). The angle of the *Wasa* lion is slightly more vertical than its 1613 predecessor, a trend that continued throughout the seventeenth and into the eighteenth century, at first increasing the angle and later by an upward convex curve, as shipwrights adapted the horizontal galleon-head, inspired from Mediterranean rowing galleys, to the rough seas of the Atlantic (figure 22a-d).[60]

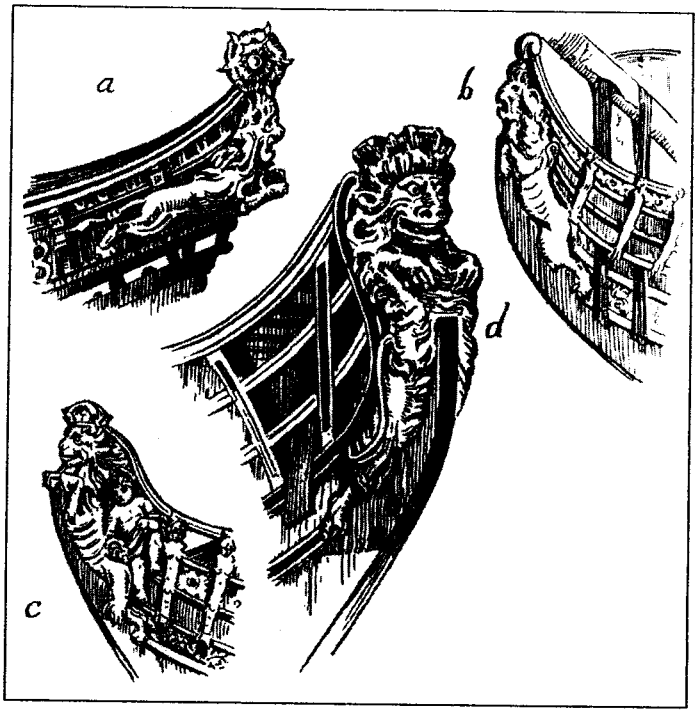

Figure 22. The changing form of the lion figurehead:a, After Vroom's 1613 painting of the *Royal Prince*; b, After Van de Valde's drawing of the *Victory* of 1665; c, After a ship model of c1670 in the Royal Naval Museum in Greenwich, England; d, After a model of a 60-gun ship c1750 in the Science Museum, South Kensington, England (Laughton, *Old Ship Figure-Heads and Sterns*, 70).

[59] Norton, *Ships' Figureheads,* 53.
[60] Hamilton, *Silent Pilots*, 13. Norton states that by mid-seventeenth century, the beakhead angled 30° to the horizontal, by the end of the century it had taken an even steeper angle, "culminating in an almost vertical attitude for the figurehead." Norton, *Ships' Figureheads,* 53.

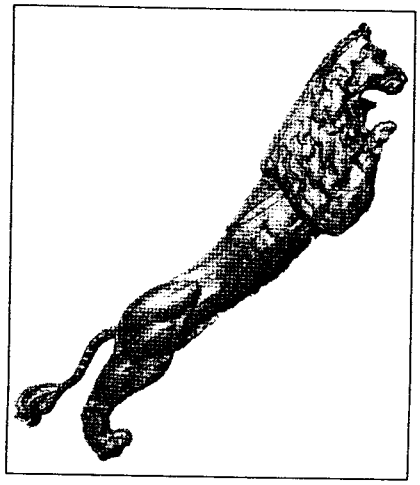

Figure 23. Figurehead lion from the Swedish flagship *Vasa* of 1628, recovered in 1961, now in the Statens Sjöhistoriska Museum (*The Swedish Warship Wasa*, 36).

The stern quarters of the galleon continued to soar in the seventeenth century as the bow became more upswept. Moreover, the brightly painted geometric patterns prevalent in Tudor England (figure 20) gave way to a baroque profusion of gilt carvings covering the entire ship, as seen in the English ship *Sovereign of the Seas* of 1637 (figure 24).[61] Not exclusive to English vessels, the large warships of all the ambitious seagoing European nations, exemplified by the top heavy Swedish flagship *Wasa*, demonstrated this weighty facade of carving.

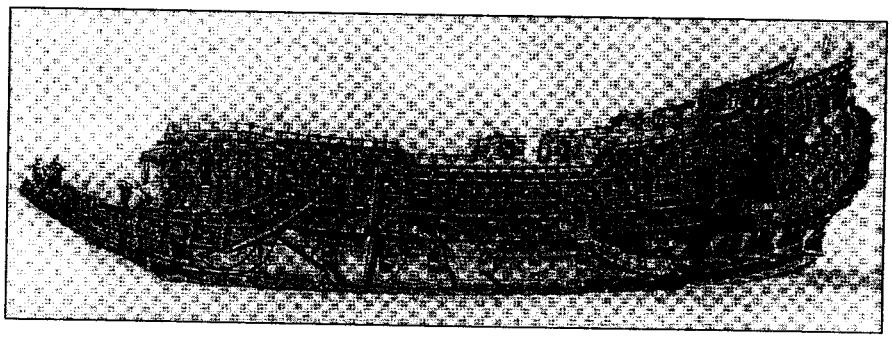

Figure 24. The elaborately carved English *Sovereign of the Seas* of 1637 (From a draught by Van de Velde, the elder, in Laughton, *Old Sip Figure-Heads and Sterns*, plate 9).

[61] Hansen, *Art and the Seafarer*, 29-30.

Locked in the ongoing battle to achieve naval superiority, the English and French raced to build huge multi-decked warships, rife with carvings.[62] While the lion remained consistent on most English ships, the largest English vessels, the first-rate warships often discarded the king of beasts for more ornate and complex carvings of multiple figures, frequently of equestrian design.[63] This explosion of carved and gilded decoration is well documented in the Naval Dockyard models of the late seventeenth-century. A model of the *Naseby* depicts one of the grand ships from Oliver Cromwell's Commonwealth Navy of 1649-1660 (figure 25). Contemporary accounts describe the figurehead depicting, "Oliver on horseback trampling six nations under foot: a Scot, Irishman, Dutchman, Frenchman, Spaniard, and English, as was easily made out by their several habits."[64]

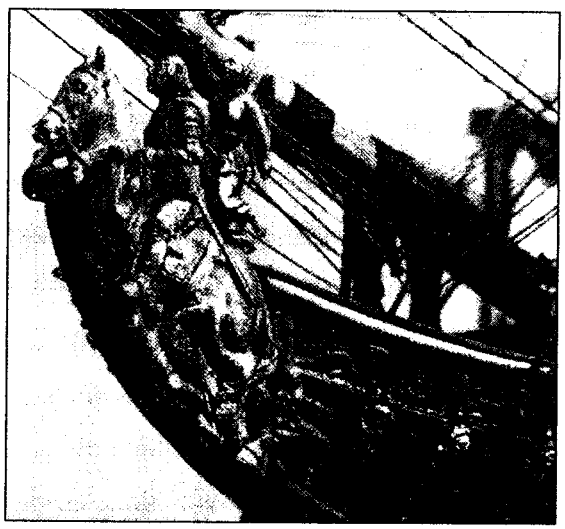

Figure 25. Figurehead of the British ship *Naseby* of 1655. The equestrian head depicts Oliver Cromwell trampling six nations underfoot (from *Naseby* ship model, in Hansen, *Art of the Seafarer*, 34b).

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[62] *Ibid.*, 41.
[63] Pinckney, *American Figureheads and their Carvers*, 25. Also see figure 24, the *Sovereign of the Seas*' figurehead consists of a armored knight with raised sword on a charging horse.
[64] Kemp, *Oxford Companion to Ships and the Sea*, 303.

While English carvings grew more elaborate, French bow decoration usually remained a single figure, often incorporating classical themes in elegant and often more realistic figureheads (figure 26). Even English figurehead historian L.G. Carr Laughton begrudgingly admits that the French carving style, "it must be confessed, was both graceful and effective".[65]

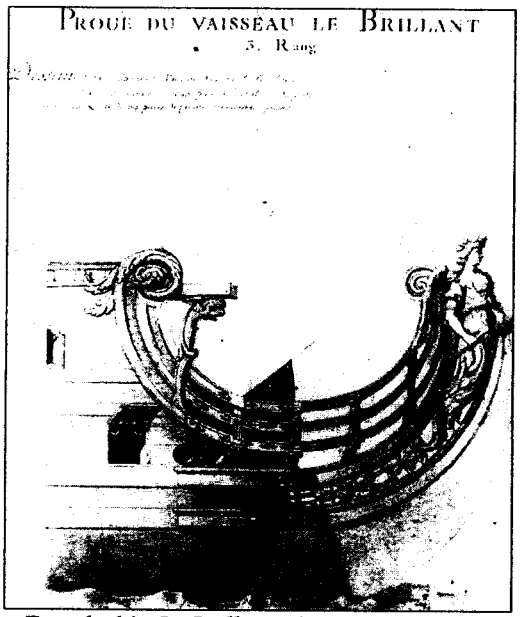

Figure 26. Figurehead of the French ship *Le Brillant* of 1690 is typical of seventeenth-century French carving. Note the classical dress of the graceful single figure (Musée de la Marine, Paris, in Norton, *Ships' Figureheads,* 61).

This practice can be attributed in part to the French Naval Affairs Minister Jean Baptiste Colbert (1619-1683). "Nothing," he wrote, "is more impressive nor so befits the majesty of the king than that his ships bear the finest ornamentation yet seen on the high seas."[66] Colbert enlisted acclaimed artists to design and carve figures, and established

[65] Laughton, *Old Ship Figure-Heads and Sterns*, 96.
[66] Norton, *Ships' Figureheads*, 60.

schools for ship carvers in naval dockyards.[67] Yet, even Colbert recognized the need for efficiency and practicality in the Sun King's navy, thus restricting carvings in 1674.[68]

Colbert, it turned out, was a visionary. It became apparent that, at a certain point, grandiose carving practices hindered a ship's maneuverability. Accounts document crews covering figureheads in cages to prevent entanglement with running rigging.[69] Moreover, frustrated captains had even been reported to cut away carved protrusions once at sea.[70] Shipcarving had reached its ebullient height in the seventeenth century. Necessarily, these intricately carved floating manifestations of a country's naval prowress were subjected to the process of curtailment at the turn of the eighteenth century.

Eighteenth Century Traditions

Too large, and too expensive, most European navies around the turn of the century issued regulations restricting the amount of carving.[71] Size, amount and expense of carvings were all restricted by an English Navy Board order issued in 1703. Complex figureheads were forbidden without express order, and the lion was to be the singular figure astride the bow. However, the Board often granted special dispensations for first-rates and some second-rates, allowing the groupings of figures on the largest of ships to continue.[72] Unpopular orders in 1727 and 1742 further restricted carved works.

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[67] Laughton, *Old Ship Figure-Heads and Sterns,* 96.
[68] Hamilton, *Silent Pilots*, 14.
[69] Hanne Poulsen, *Figureheads and Ornaments on Danish ships and in Danish Collections* (Copenhagen, 1977), 74.
[70] Hamilton, *Silent Pilots,* 15.
[71] Norton, *Ships' Figureheads*, 66.
[72] Laughton, *Old Ship Figure-Heads and Sterns*, 75.

Despite these limitations, incredibly intricate figureheads are seen throughout the mid-1700s. The *Royal George* of 1756 carried an elaborate double equestrian head, a style popular on British ships of the eighteenth century (figure 27). Notice that the figure is carved astride the cutwater of the bow. This configuration, the figurehead integrated into the structure of the head, would characterize the carvings of the late 1700s. One of the most elaborate heads commissioned was the original figurehead for the *Victory*, in1765. This gaudy conglomerate of figures survives in the form of carver William Savage's model (figure 28a). Perhaps fortuitously, by 1802 the original complement of carvings had rotted away and a new, much simpler and more practical carving was carried by Nelson to victory at Trafalgar. It was replaced in 1815 to the present carving, which features a shield flanked by two cherubs (figure 28b).[73]

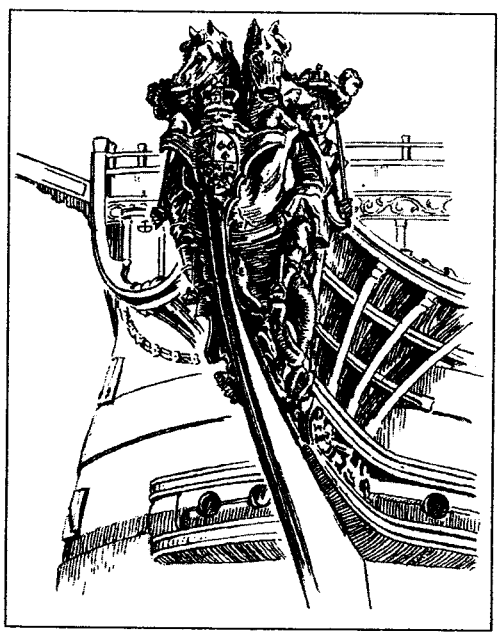


Figure 27. Double equestrian figurehead of the *Royal George* of 1756 illustrates the elaborate carvings on larger Royal Naval vessels in the eighteenth century (Johnson, *The Royal George*, ii).

[73] Norton, *Ships' Figureheads,* 72-76.

a.

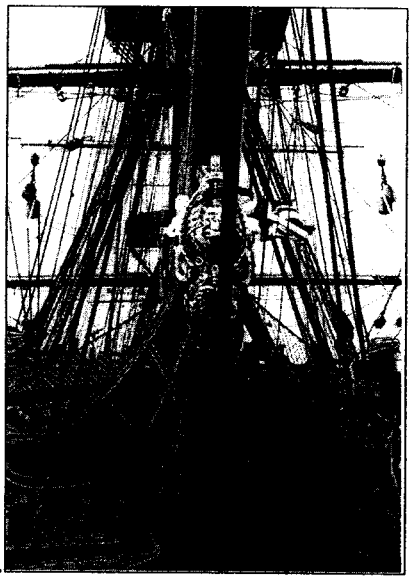
b. 

Figure 28. The *Victory's* figureheads: a, Carver William Savage's model of the *Victory's* first, and most elaborate "group" figurehead of 1765 (Norton, *Ships' Figureheads*, 73); b, Current, relatively simple figurehead, carved 1815, on *HMS Victory* in Portsmouth, England (photo Russell T. Green, 2000)

One only sees reduction of the extravagant carvings on Royal Navy ships after the dramatic order issued by Lord Spencer in 1796. Spencer directed the Royal Navy, "to explode carved work altogether on board HM Ships that may be built or repaired in the future, except where necessary for the moulding about the scroll or billet head, and the stern and quarters."[74] This order proved intensely unpopular with superstitious sailors and officers alike, who still believed that the figurehead held some degree of either life or luck, and every effort was made to avoid complying with the regulations. Peter Norton writes that, "generally a combination of sea-officers and dockyard officials contrived to circumvent [the order]," meeting with a modicum of success as there is no sudden disappearance of figureheads after 1796. [75] In the next century, however, merchant ships

[74] Laughton, *Old Ship Figure-Heads and Sterns,* 80.
[75] Norton, *Ships' Figureheads,* 80.

took the lead in ship decoration, surpassing their naval counterparts with beautiful and pioneering figurehead designs.

Mention must be given to the realistic human forms depicted on French vessels which proved an invaluable well of inspiration for North American carvers after the American Revolution (figure 29). British ships had been the dominant influence on colonial carvers before American Independence. Once free from the yoke of British trade restrictions, Yankee ship carvers soon incorporated the flowing style and varied subjects of French carvers into their artful renderings.

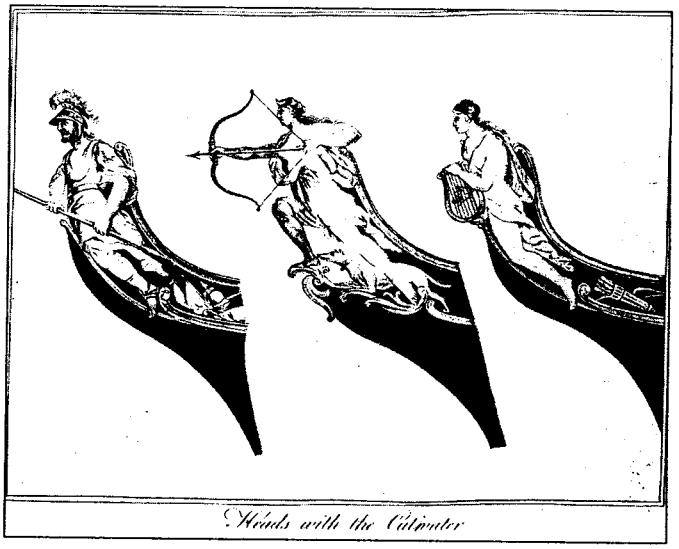


Figure 29. French figureheads of the late eighteenth century. The refined figures are much more lifelike than the stiff, yet regal British carvings of the same period. (P. Ozanne, *Sketches of Shipping 1794*, 4).

From this historical overview, one can trace the lineage of bow decoration back to prehistoric times, retrieving many of the symbolic meanings of these carvings. Founded as sacrificial symbols or superstitious charms, bow carvings quickly gained additional layers of significance. Figureheads identified a vessel to populations that were largely illiterate, describing what they carried and whence they came, often inspiring fear or

reverence and exuding strength and power. At the height of the ship carving tradition, the urge to symbolize a nation's greatness in a profusion of carved figures came at the expense of a vessel's sailing qualities, not to mention the king's purse. Eventually, shipbuilders and ship owners stuck a balance that retained the symbolic importance of figureheads, while maintaining swift maneuverable vessels at a reasonable cost. Meanwhile, those who sailed aboard vessels carrying these magnificent figureheads never lost sight of the underlying anthropomorphic and superstitious symbolism that inspired their reverence of the figure at the bow.

Nineteenth-century North American shipbuilders inherited their European ancestors' shipbuilding and shipcarving traditions. They continued to add layers of meaning to their iconic carvings, incorporating their political ideals, contemporary heroes, and national icons into the brilliant figureheads now in the Mariners' Museum.

And at the Bow an Image Stood: Nineteenth-Century North American Figureheads

> "As we view these relics from famous ships, we are better able to comprehend the spirit of the nation and its naval heroes and to more clearly understand our maritime past and the part that vessels of all kinds have played in the creation of the American free-enterprise system."[1]
>
> Clarence P. Hornung, *Treasury of American Design*

Figureheads carved after the American Revolution incorporate a unique style reflecting American forms and ideals. They serve as a distinctive form of folk art that often expressed the artistic, political, economic, and vessel design changes of the dynamic nineteenth century. The artisans who carved these figures, the ship owners who commissioned them, and the sailors who made seaborne war and commerce possible, all had a hand in influencing a figurehead's motif, form, and its placement upon the vessel. A discussion of nineteenth-century American figureheads reflects the maritime world influencing these graceful carvings and provides context to the disconnected statues now occupying the galleries and storerooms of maritime museums.

While later chapters address specific figureheads in the Mariners' Museum collection, this chapter offers an overview of the evolution of nineteenth-century figureheads in North America, as well as addressing aspects of the maritime world that influenced their carving. The Mariners' Museum figurehead collection fairly represents the carving styles, subjects, and vessels of nineteenth-century North America. This chapter utilizes Mariners' Museum examples to illustrate the discussion wherever

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[1] Clarence P. Hornung, *Treasury of American Design* (New York, 1950), 33.

possible. However, figureheads from other institutions punctuate the conversation when deemed most effective.

Laying the Foundation for American Traditions

Shipcarving depended first and foremost on the shipbuilding industry. Since its humble beginnings in 1607 with the construction of the thirty-ton pinnace *Virginia* at the mouth of the Kennebec River, North American shipbuilding proved a profitable business whose products were in high demand throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.[2] The inexpensive, high-quality timber available in the vast forests of North America enabled colonial shipbuilders to produce vessels cheaper than their English competitors and Europe's incessant warfare compounded the continent's demand for vessels. Domestic shipping also expanded as the colonial population and port cities grew. Furthermore, American-built merchantmen and privateers held a reputation for being not only economical, but also sturdy, swift and durable. This allowed the American shipbuilding industry to thrive, first in the service of the British, and later to their detriment when the colonies rebelled against the subjugation of English colonial rule.

Shipyards flourished along the length of North America's East Coast. Adjacent to many of these yards, shipcarvers' shops turned out figureheads, trailboards, and stern carvings.[3] Documentary evidence from the eighteenth century indicates while not all sailing vessels carried figureheads, the larger ones did, ensuring steady demand for a

[2] Howard I. Chapelle, *The History of American Sailing Ships* (New York, 1935), 6.
[3] Jean Lipman, et al., *Young America: A Folk-Art History* (New York, 1986), 104.

shipcarver's services.[4] Not alone in their interdependent relationship with the shipbuilding industry, a symbiotic web of support industries profited alongside the shipyards of North America. Shipcarvers, riggers, sail makers, rope makers, caulkers, and ship chandlers thrived alongside the American shipbuilding industry.

A brief description of the artisans who created figureheads and comprised the shipcarving industry adds context to the Mariners' Museum carvings. American shipcarvers have been fairly thoroughly researched in two comprehensive works, Pauline Pinckney's *American Figureheads and their Carvers* and M.V. Brewington's *Shipcarvers of North America.* These studies reconstruct the American shipcarving industry from local newspaper advertisements, United States Navy drafts, Customs House entry descriptions, and contemporary accounts. Pinckney and Brewington identified over seven-hundred carvers as a result of their research. The description of the American carving trade complements the story of the carvings themselves.[5]

From their waterfront shops often overlooking the shipyards, carvers supplied a variety of ornamentation to decorate all manner of vessels. Successful carvers trained apprentices to assist in their work. No carving schools, like the ones instituted by Colbert in France, existed in North America.[6] The apprenticeship system remained the sole venue for a budding American craftsman to learn the trade. Assisted by books and prints,

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[4] William Sutherland, *The Ship-builder's Assistant* (London, 1711), 62. At this early date, Sutherland referred to the figurehead exclusively as the 'Lyon' when describing its positioning on the Head.
[5] M.V. Brewington, *Shipcarvers of North America* (New York, 1962). Pauline Pinckney, *American Figureheads and Their Carvers* (New York, 1940).
[6] Pinckney, *American Figureheads and Their Carvers*, 30.

shipcarvers passed the skill of their trade to generations of artisans, often from father to son, causing regional stylistic similarities.[7]

Figure 30. Early nineteenth-century shipcarvers' shop sign, from the shop of Samuel Winsor on Commercial Street, Boston (Pinckney, *American Figureheads and Their Carvers,* plateV).

Shipcarver Samuel Windsor passed on not only his carving secrets, but his shop sign as well, as subsequent carvers occupying his shop continued to use the well-worn sign of "Ship Carving Upstairs"(figure 30). Shipcarvers in the larger shipbuilding centers also advertised with printed cards announcing their profession and shop location. The 1830 card for Levi L. Cushing advertises his skill as a shipcarver, providing illustrations of his work as well as his location and ability to carve "models of any kind executed at the shortest notice" [8] (figure 31).

[7] Carol Olsen, "Stylistic developments of ship figureheads of the United States East Coast," *International Journal of Nautical Archaeology and Underwater Exploration*, 8.4 (1979): 321-332.
[8] Pinckney, *American Figureheads and Their Carvers* (New York, 1940), 134-5.

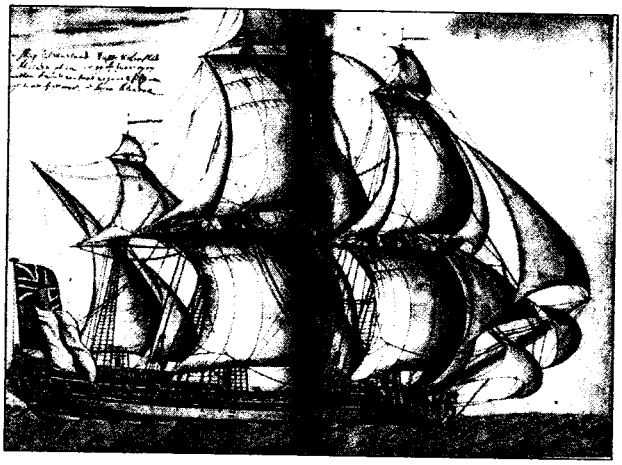
Figure 31. Levi Cushing trade card, 1830 Boston (Pinckney, *American Figureheads and Their Carvers*, 135).

Surviving sketchbooks show that carvers often drew out preliminary designs for approval by the vessel's architect, builder, and owner. The shape of the bow obviously played an integral role in the figurehead's design, and often, the architect laid out in chalk the lines of the vessel's bow on the shop floor to insure the carver properly configured the figurehead to the ship's lines.[9]

Once the parties reached agreement regarding the figurehead's design and placement, the carver set to work with his chisels. North American carvers usually chose soft, native pine, which was plentiful and easy to carve, as opposed to the hardwoods preferred by European carvers.[10] Larger than a single tree trunk, figureheads often necessitated several sturdy blocks of wood joined with wooden dowels or iron spikes to form a solid block large enough for a full-sized figurehead. Outstretched arms and other

[9] Jean Lipman and Alice Winchester, *The Flowering of American Folk Art, 1776-1876* (Philadelphia, 1974), 129.

projecting pieces could be carved separately and fastened to the main carving with mortise and tenon joints. This allowed these ancillary elements to be removed from the bow during long periods at sea and replaced when entering a port.[11]

a. 

b.

Figure 12. Sixteenth-century lion figureheads: a, The twenty-gun merchant ship *Cleveland*, built in Philadelphia in 1707. Note the lion figurehead adheres to the British design shown in figure 4b (Labaree, et.al., *America and the Sea: A Maritime History*, 65); b, English figurehead lion from a contemporary carver's draught, 1720 (Laughton, *Old Ship Figure-Heads and Sterns,* plate 10).

What did the earliest American figureheads look like? No examples of colonial figureheads survive. The historical record, however, provides a glimpse of early American forms and motifs. For colonial America, England remained the sole artistic paradigm available to shipcarvers. English ship carving traditions and trade restrictions contrived under the Navigation Acts, restricted the colonies' exposure to foreign figurehead designs. Prints of early and mid-eighteenth century North American harbors depict all the vessels, English and American-built, bearing lion heads.[12] (figures 32a and b) How closely the colonies imitated British lion design remains unproven with the

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[10] Georgia W. Hamilton, *Silent Pilots: Figureheads in Mystic Seaport Museum* (Mystic, CT, 1984), 20.
[11] Lipman, *Flowering of American Folk Art, 1776-1876,* 129.
[12] Prints of the harbors of New York (1717), Boston (1725), and Philadelphia (1720, 1735, 1751) all depict lion figureheads. Brewington, *Shipcarvers of North America*, 6 and 10.

absence of extant American figureheads from this period. In her study concerning United States East Coast figureheads, researcher Carol Olsen theorizes, "it can be expected that the East Coast work was less elaborate [than British figureheads] since colonial products were often simplified and because on the East Coast, carvers generally used a soft pine wood which lent itself to broad surface cutting rather than intricate detail."[13]

Both English and North American vessels in the mid-eighteenth century broke away from the lion motif and adopted figurehead designs, often human figures, symbolizing the vessels name.[14] Contemporary illustrations indicate that even with this latitude in motif, designs continued to be stylistically indistinguishable, the colonies following the conventions of the motherland. Leading up to the Revolutionary War, it was the British navy that preserved much of the surviving information on colonial figureheads. A1773 British Admiralty order commanded that a "complete draught with stern, head, and carved works sketched thereon" should be prepared of vessels built or bought for the Royal Navy.[15] Captured American vessels purchased into British service, received this level of documentation, and the resultant draughts are the only surviving evidence of pre-Revolutionary North American figurehead carving. In these examples, one can see the flowering of American styles and motifs that depart from British convention.

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[13] Olsen, "Stylistic developments of ship figureheads of the United States East Coast," 322.
[14] Lipman, et al., *Young America: A Folk-Art History*, 104.
[15] Admiralty Navy Board 2508, No. 642. In L.G. Carr Laughton, *Old Ship Figureheads and Sterns* (London, England, 1925), 83.

Independent America

In his *Treasury of American Design*, Clarence Hornung succinctly describes the transformation of American figurehead carving that occurred with the advent of the Revolutionary War:

> "After 1776 our native carvers who made their headquarters in the major shipbuilding centers – near the waterfront of India Wharf in Boston, on South Street in New York, or on Front Street in Philadelphia – needed a new vocabulary to express their new-found spirit of independence. The British lion, the coiled serpent, or the fire-breathing dragon gave way to the proud eagle. The figures of Miss Liberty and Columbia replaced the mythological gods and goddesses. Figures of presidents and statesmen, characters from literature of history, as well as ordinary men and women were placed at the bow."[16]

With the break from England, figurehead design, motif, and underlying symbolism became uniquely American.

Shipcarvers annunciated their creative spirit and the American motifs in the first warships commissioned by the Continental Congress. The newly established governing body ordered the building of thirteen frigates, the first seeds of an American Navy, by an act passed December 13, 1775.[17] The Marine Committee established the size and design of each frigate; however, individual master shipwrights determined the carved work that would decorate the vessels. A letter from John Hancock, a member of the Committee, to Thomas Cushing, the superintendent of the two vessels built in Massachusetts, illustrates this arrangement. Hancock wrote, "let the heads & Galleries for the Ships be neatly carv'd and Executed, I leave the Device to you, but by all means let ours [those built in

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[16] Hornung, *Treasury of American Design*, 9.
[17] Paul H. Silverstone, *The Sailing Navy, 1775-1854* (Annapolis, 2001), 1.

New England] be as good, handsome, strong & as early completed as any building here in Philadelphia."[18]

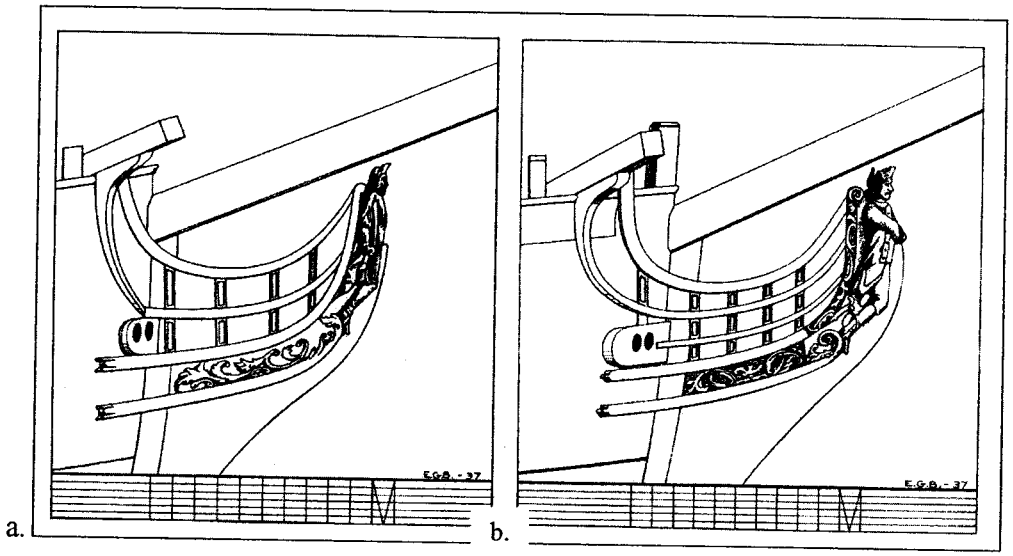

Figure 33. Continental frigate figureheads: a, Figurehead of the Continental Frigate *Raleigh*, 1776; b, Figurehead of the Continental Frigate *Hancock*, 1776. Both from plans in the Admiralty Collection (Brewington, *Shipcarvers of North America*, 13).

These frigates afford the researcher a cross section of the finest examples of contemporary American figureheads, as they were built at various shipyards throughout the Colonies. From one of the northern yards came the frigate *Raleigh*, built at Portsmouth, New Hampshire (figure 33a). Captured off the coast of Maine in the fall of 1778, the Royal Navy made the requisite draughts when they took her into the British ranks. The Admiralty draught clearly depicts the full-sized figure at the bow: "an effigy of Sir Walter Raleigh with a face heavily bearded, a body dressed in the carver's conception of the doublet, stockings, sashes and corselet, sword in hand, and steel casque

[18]Hancock to Cushing, Cannarroe Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania. In Brewington, *Shipcarvers of North America*, 12.

on his head"[19] Likewise, the Admiralty draught of the Continental frigate *Hancock* depicts a full length portrait of John Hancock, then president of the Congress dressed in "yellow Breeches, white stockings, Blue Coat with Yellow Button Holes, small cocked Hat with a Yellow Lace"[20] (figure 33b). Admiralty dispatches clearly describe these figureheads painted vividly "to life" as opposed to the solid white scheme seen on many nineteenth-century figureheads.[21]

The Continental Congress chose the names of those first frigates cognizant that they would serve as sentinels in the worldwide perception of the new country. The preserved Admiralty draughts of captured American vessels provide evidence that late eighteenth-century figureheads regularly reflected the name of the vessel, so even without pictorial representations, one can infer that the frigates *Washington, Montgomery, Randolph, Trumbull, Effingham, and Warren* adhered to the same convention as the *Raleigh* and *Hancock*: a full length figure of the distinguished American patriot namesake.[22]

Named for the proud cities of *Providence* and *Boston*, the tenacious states of *Virginia* and *Delaware* and for the resolute *Congress*, the remaining frigates, no doubt, sought to impart the uniquely irascible American spirit onto the bow carvings. Symbolic figures, then, would have to do. Admiralty records shed light on only one of these

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[19] Admiralty Draught, *Raleigh*, National Maritime Museum. In Brewington, *Shipcarvers of North America*, 12-14.

[20] Admiralty Draught, *Iris*, ex-*Hancock*; Admirals Despatch, 487, August 28, 1777. In Constance Lathrop, "A Vanishing Naval Tradition – the Figurehead," *U.S. NavalInstitute Proceedings,* Vol.53, No.11 (November 1927): 1166-1168.

[21] In addition to keep colors true to life, early American shipcarvers strove to let the coarse nature of the wood characterize the finish of the carving rather than aspiring to carve polished, stone-like figures.

[22] Howard I. Chapelle, *The History of the American Sailing Navy: The Ships and Their Development* (New York, 1949), 52-114.

figureheads. A British spy described the figurehead of the *Boston* as "An Indian with a Bow and Arrow in Hand."[23] A Native American was a universal symbol of the North American continent in colonial times. The depiction of that Native American, however, would differ dependent on which side of the Atlantic it was portrayed.

a. b.

Figure 34. European depictions of Native American female symbols: a, *America* symbolized as a savage Native American woman, as portrayed in a Dutch engraving of 1671; b, *Reconcilliation* 1782. This cartoon features a less brutal female Native American, symbolizing America reconciling with her mother England.[24] (Horwitz, *The Bird, the Banner, and Uncle Sam: Images of America in Folk and Popular Art*, 76-77).

English, Dutch, Flemish, German, and Italian prints and atlases reaching back to the seventeenth century symbolize the North American continent with a dangerous looking Native woman (figure 34a and b). Conversely, early American sources, such as colonial seals and weathervanes, depict a male Native American warrior instead of the

[23] Admirals Despatch, 487, August 28, 1777. In Lathrop, "A Vanishing Naval Tradition – The Figurehead," 1166-1168.

[24] This illustration also contains the symbolic liberty cap, which America sports atop her spear. A long held symbol of freedom derived from classical times, stocking-like hats were worn by liberated slaves, showing they had been freed.

fierce queen or princess in European publications.[25] The Native warrior motif was used on figureheads during the American Revolution as seen in an Admiralty draught of the captured privateer *Rattlesnake* of 1781 (figure 35).[26] Their popularity increased once the native inhabitants of North America no longer threatened settlers in the eastern states, and carved wooden Indians became the most popular subject for trade figures.[27] More skillfully rendered than their cigar-store brothers, Native American figureheads remained popular on the bows of American vessels in the nineteenth-century. Despite their ironic popularity as symbols of the nation, the accuracy of folk art author Peter Welsh's words rings true: "It is perhaps sentimental and romantic but it is still a disillusioning fact that at a time when the Indian was being ruthlessly dispatched in the West that in the East the production and display of these silent and unnatural wooden figures reached its peak."[28]

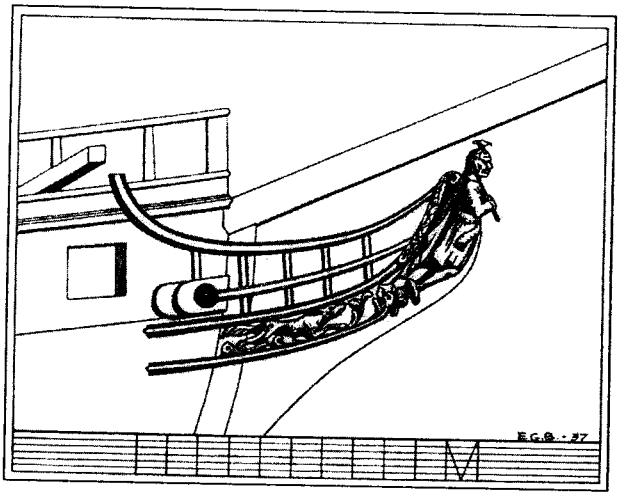

Figure 35. Figurehead of American privateer *Rattlesnake,* 1781. (After plans in the Admiralty Collection, in Brewington, *Shipcarvers of North America*, 15).

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[25] Elinor Lander Horwitz, *The Bird, the Banner, and Uncle Sam: Images of America in Folk and Popular Art* (Philadelphia, 1976), 75. Horwitz writes that the reason Europeans adopted the female Indian is most likely inspired by Pocahontas.
[26] Admiralty Draught, *Cormirant*, late *Rattlesnake*: Brewington, *Shipcarvers of North America,* 14.
[27] William C. Ketchum Jr., *All-American Folk Arts and Crafts* (New York, 1986), 37.
[28] Peter Welsh, *American Folk Art, The Art and Spirit of a People* (Washington DC, 1965), 22.

In addition to the enduring image of the Indian brave, by the turn of the nineteenth century, an influx of classical expression in America had transformed the Indian woman that symbolized North American continent in the eyes of Europeans, into an American symbol of liberty. The neoclassical revival in Europe caught hold in the new United States by the 1780s. An interest in ancient Greek and Roman mythology and literature, architecture, and ornament characterized the movement. In her work on American images in folk art, Elinor Horwitz explains, "the dusky female Indian evolved into a neoclassical Goddess of Liberty, who carried olive wreaths along with her sword and shield."[29] Now called "Columbia", "Liberty", "Miss Liberty", or "the Goddess of Liberty", the native female figure had laid down her tomahawk in return for a toga. Readily adopted by the American people, the Goddess Liberty would become a familiar image upon the bows of the nation's ships (figure 36).

In addition to presenting the new nation with her first patron saint, Miss Liberty, neoclassicism also inspired shipcarvers to include figures from Greek and Roman history and mythology in their repertoire of American motifs. Indeed, the figure of Hercules first decorated the bow of the most famous American frigate, the *Constitution,* at her launch in 1797.[30]

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[29] *Ibid,* 10.

[30] Lathrop, "A Vanishing Naval Tradition – the Figurehead," 1167. The *Constitution's* Hercules figurehead was carved by John Skillin of Boston on the recommendation of William Rush. The two comprised the most famous and talented shipcarvers of the day.

Figure 36. Engraving of "LIBERTY. In the form of the Goddess of Youth; giving Support to the Bald Eagle" by Edward Savage, published in Philadelphia in 1796. "A Grecian-gowned symbol of America offers sustenance to a dramatic eagle. Striding over the Order of the Garter and the key to the Bastille, she promises to lead the world in the way of civic virtue and humanitarian rights."[31] (Garrett, *The Arts of Independence*, 33).

The classical revival transpired concurrently with the new patriotic iconography that inspired the folk artists and craftsmen of the new Republic. The allegorical figure of Liberty was joined by the most enduring patriotic symbol of the United States, the bald eagle. In her study on patriotic symbols in American folk art, Elinor Horwitz states that, "Ever since its official adoption as the symbol on the Great Seal of the Unites States [in 1782] the eagle has been an unrivaled favorite."[32] This certainly holds true in American figurehead carving, where decorative eagles fly to the top of steamship and riverboat pilot houses at the turn of the twentieth-century after most vessels had abandoned a figure at the bow.

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[31] Elisabeth Donaghy Garrett, *The Arts of Independence, the DAR Museum Collection* (Washington DC, 1985), 33. Other patriotic symbols such as the American flag topped with a liberty cap and a view of the liberated harbor of Boston lay in the background. This engraving was well known in its day, and became the source of many folk art interpretations of the goddess Liberty.

Figureheads clung tightly to their traditional place on the bow at the turn of the nineteenth-century, not threatened by the plumb-bowed steamships that would follow. Figurehead motifs continued to proliferate, heroes and patriotic symbols of the nation keeping company with historic and literary champions.[33] Ordinary citizens also were the subject of figureheads in the nineteenth century as portrait figureheads depicting ship owners and their family members became one of the most popular American figurehead motifs.

The Nineteenth-Century Form of the Figure

Examples of American figurehead carving before 1800 come only from documentary evidence. The first American figurehead extant is a piece carved by Samuel McIntire (1757-1811), currently displayed in the Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Massachusetts (figure 37). The McIntire figurehead, a diminutive female figure holding a medallion depicting the profile of a visage thought to be Thomas Jefferson, came from a relatively small and lightly built coasting vessel.[34] The placement and proportions of this two-foot high female figurehead reflect those of her larger, frigate-bowed predecessors. This figurehead perfectly illustrates the design elements one sees in the Admiralty drawings of the Revolutionary period, as Brewington indicates, "the same mathematical position, the same crudeness in handling the draperies, and precisely the same manner of

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[32] Horwitz, *The Bird, the Banner, and Uncle Sam*, 35.
[33] Christensen, *Early American Wood Carving*, 19.
[34] Pinckney, *American Figureheads and Their Carvers*, 76.

placing the image astride the knee in high relief becoming full-round only above the waist."[35]

Figure 37. "Straddle" figurehead (c 1800) attributed to Samuel McIntire in the Peabody Essex Museum Collection (Brewington, *Shipcarvers of North America*, 24). Note that the figure stands astride the head knee, signifying this piece dates to the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century.

In all of the descriptions of American figureheads included thus far, the figures uniformly sit astride the head knee up to the waist. This style, called a "straddle head" distinguishes colonial and turn of the century figureheads from the vast majority of nineteenth-century figureheads, which are often described as "cut clear and through." One readily detects the static straddle heads' lack of the flowing, forward movement that characterizes the later style. This development can be explained, in part, by the evolution of the bow, which required an increasingly inclined figurehead to fit the progressively sharper bow shape, rather than an upright figurehead astride a sturdy knee supported by numerous rails on a relatively bluff bow.

[35] Brewington, *Shipcarvers of North America*, 23.

The decisive change in figurehead form can also be explained by American independence from England. Freedom from trade restrictions allowed artistic influences from other countries, namely France, to become available to American carvers. These sources inspired carvers to literally step away from the traditional, stiff, cleaved figureheads previously used, contributing to the development of unique North American figurehead styles and patterns.

Indicative of the "free artistic expression of the very spirit of the flowering of American democracy,"[36] the work of carver William Rush (1756-1833) of Philadelphia evinces a realism of form and motion that quickly spread through the carving community. From Maine to the Carolinas, American figureheads strode into new territory. Two French frigates, *La Danae* and *La Gloria,* with their lively female figures, inspired Rush when he observed them under repair in Joshua Humphreys' Philadelphia shipyard in 1783.[37] The legacy of Colbert's shipcarving schools in France had infused fine art into what the English considered an element of ship construction. The French figures' graceful strength along with Rush's background in anatomical realism pervades his figurehead for the frigate *Philadelphia*, carved in 1799 (figure 38).[38] This elegant group figurehead of Hercules slaying the seven-headed Hydra blends the figures and trailboards into a congruous design.[39] In his 1811 address to the Society of Artists in Philadelphia,

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[36] Michael Owen Jones, "The Study of Folk Art Study: Reflections on Images," *Folklore Students Association,* Preprint Series 1. Nos 2-10, Vol.1, No.9 (1973): 2.
[37] Hornung, *Treasury of American Design*, 20. Brewington, *Shipcarvers of North America*, 33.
[38] Rush's knowledge of anatomy is demonstrated in the surviving sectional models of the human body that he made for the Medical School of the University of Pennsylvania, which were still in use well into the twentieth century. Brewington, *Shipcarvers of North America,* 38.
[39] The *Philadelphia's* figurehead was too large to be carved from one block, so many of the extending elements of the carving, such as the arms, were carved separately and attached to the figure with dovetail

Benjamin Latrobe explains of Rush's work, "There is a motion in Rush's figures that is inconceivable. They seem rather to draw the ship after them than to be impelled by the vessel."[40]

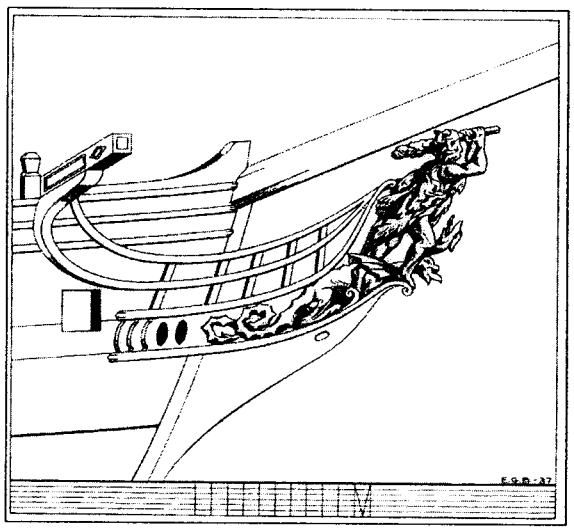

Figure 38. Figurehead of the US frigate *Philadelphia*, 1799, carved by William Rush. From the spar plan in the Franklin Institute (Brewington, *Shipcarvers of North America*, 32).

Other carvers quickly followed Rush's lead by carving full-length striding figures "cut clear and through", dressed in swirling draperies.[41] The full-length striding figurehead by noted Boston carver Isaac Fowle illustrates the more graceful and natural appearance of a figure uninterrupted by the bisecting head knee (figure 39).[42] Fairly uniform in design, the walking figures often stood atop scrolls crowning the head knee,

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slip joints. The exposed appendages were unshipped at sea and replaced when returning to port. This was not unusual for larger nineteenth-century figureheads. *Ibid.*, 141.

[40] J.T. Scharf & T. Westcott, *History of Philadelphia 1909-1884, Vol. II* (Philadelphia, 1884), 1066. In Olsen, "Stylistic developments of ship figureheads of the United States East Coast," 324. Benjamin Latrobe (1764-1820) was an American architect most noted for his work on The White House and the Capitol in Washington. Firmly entrenched in the artistic classical revival, Latrobe played a key role in introducing Greek Revival architecture as the style of American National architecture.

[41] The folds carved in the draperies followed the grain of the wood. This practice kept the carving structurally sound, as well as channeling water back and away, discouraging rot.

[42] Brewington, *Shipcarvers of North America*, 42.

and were frequently still supported from behind by the head rails sweeping to the shoulders of the figure. Like the earlier straddle head figures, this style of figurehead could fit a variety of vessels. Carvers simply modified the size and proportion of the carving to fit the hull, from fully-rigged ships to coasting schooners. Robust and buxom in appearance, the figureheads reflected the sturdy vessels upon which they stood. Regal bearing characterized these erect figures, charging forward with chin held high. Notwithstanding the exquisite improvement in the new style, sources indicate that the walking design did not completely replace the older straddle head immediately, the cruder figurehead design most likely surviving as late as 1815.[43]

Figure 39. Figurehead by Issac Fowle, circa 1820. Although never affixed to its intended vessel, this carving skillfully illustrates the beauty and grace that could be achieved with figureheads "cut clear and through" (Pinckney, *American Figureheads and Their Carvers,* plate X).

Human representations on the bows of nineteenth-century vessels were not limited to full-length carvings. Three-quarter and half figureheads also depicted the

[43]*Ibid.*, 51.

heroes, statesmen, and popular personalities guiding America's ships. "Jenny Lind," a mid-century three-quarter figurehead in the Mariners' Museum, exemplifies a three-quarter or "scroll skirt" style of figurehead (figure 40).[44] Like the striding full-length figures, rather than straddling the head knee, these figures sat atop the knee, on a transitional outward or inward turned scroll base, often floriated with acanthus leaves. This clever shift from hull to figure became the standard transitional device of the period.[45] This kind of fractional figure worked well with smaller vessels where a full-length figurehead would overwhelm the bow.

Figure 40. Figurehead circa 1850 known as "Jenny Lind," OF8, TMM (Pinckney, *American Figureheads and Their Carvers,* plate XVIII).

Even more scaled down than the fractional figures, the bust head also proved a popular nineteenth-century design. Instead of employing transitional carved leaves or drapery integrating the figure and the stem, bust heads often employed an undecorated scroll at the base of the figure atop the stem knee. This formed a bust upon a pedestal

[44] Sources conflict as to which vessel the "Jenny Lind" figurehead (OF8, TMM) originated.

that could pass for decoration in a fine nineteenth-century home.[46] However, the method of attachment, often a mortise and tenon joint at the base, differentiates these ship carvings from decorative busts (figure 41).

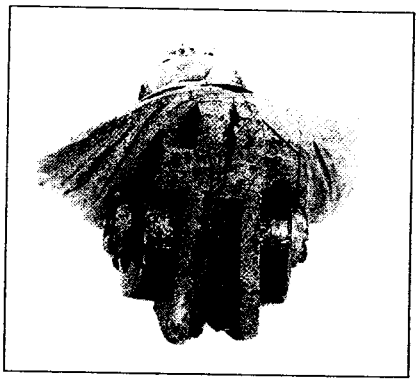
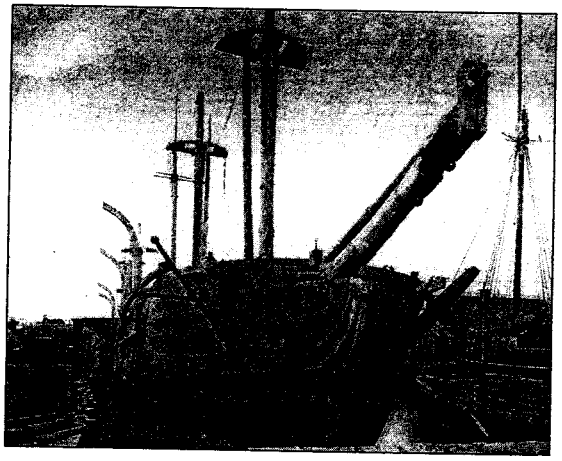


Figure 41. The mortise on the base of the figurehead fit over a notch on the stem ("Bust of a Man" in Mystic Seaport's collection. Hamilton, *Silent Pilots*, 21).

a.



b.

Figure 42. The *Commodore* Morris: a, The 1841 Massachusetts-built whaling ship *Commodore Morris*. Note the bust head supported by heavy rails (TMM Library photograph collection Vol.3 Pg.31); b, Figurehead from the *Commodore Morris* in the Mariners' Museum (OF18, TMM).

Designed to withstand the harrowing extended voyages required by their industry, the ships of the New England whaling fleet, in particular, often preferred a simple bust.

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[45] Hornung, *Treasury of American Design,* 20.
[46] *Ibid.* Georgia Hamilton, *Silent Pilots* (Mystic, Ct, 1984), 20-21.

Sitting upright with eyes straight forward, bust figureheads were often supported by rails that joined the figure at the shoulders, providing additional strength (figure42a). The figurehead from the Massachusetts-built whaling ship *Commodore Morris* from 1841 is typical of nineteenth-century bust heads (figure42b).[47]

Figure 43. Billethead attributed to the coasting vessel *Rebecca*, in the Mariners Museum (OB3, TMM).

Although not a figurehead in the strictest sense, billetheads adorned the bows of a great number of nineteenth century vessels, especially the smaller coasting craft that served much of the nation. A cheaper and easier to carve alternative to a figurehead, limitations on cost, time, or size probably inspired the billethead's development.[48] Considered in general use from 1830 to 1880, the billethead, like their figurehead cousins, were placed atop the head knee under the bowsprit. Described as a fiddlehead when the scroll turned upward, and as a scrollhead when the volute turned outward,

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[47] Commodore Charles Morris Unites States Navy (1784-1856). Morris was a popular naval hero depicted in numerous figureheads. Clarence Rodgers, *Ships Figureheads, Selections from the Collection of the Mariners' Museum* (Newport News, VA, 1946), 5. Pinckney, *American Figureheads and their Carvers*, 143-151.

[48] A billethead often replaced a figurehead after damage at sea, as was the case when the frigate *Constitution* fought Barbary pirates off the coast of Tripoli in 1803. Commodore Preble ordered the shattered figurehead removed when the ship was being repaired in Malta. One then sees a written report

billethead carvings incorporated elements such as acanthus-leaf foliage and rosettes to surround the graceful curves of the blossoming scrolls.[49] Richly carved and either gilt or colorfully painted, the billethead was proportional to the size of the vessel, and range from a foot to nearly six feet long.[50] The billethead attributed to the New England coasting vessel *Rebecca* is an outward turned scroll, painted yellow in imitation of a gold gilt finish (figure 43).[51]

Symbols of Speed: Greyhounds of the Waves

Figureheads still held their patriotic and superstitious sentiment as the century wore on. However, the competitiveness of shipping and shipbuilding industries by the 1840s caused many owners to curtail decorative carving on their vessels as a cost-saving measure.[52] It seemed the business of making money might consign the structurally unnecessary figurehead to the annals of history. An infusion of inspiration fortunately came with the advent of the clipper ship. Clipper ships traded the heavily-kneed bow of the frigate-built packet for the new raking lines of ships designed by builders such as John W. Griffiths and Donald McKay (figure 44).

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stating that, "the cutwater and billethead will be finished within six or seven days." Hornung, *Treasury of American Design,* 33.

[49] Erwin O. Christensen, *Index of American Design* (Washington DC, 1959), 56.

[50] Hornung, *Treasury of American Design,* 33.

[51] In a cost saving measure, many vessels in the later nineteenth century resorted to yellow paint instead of costly gold leaf.

[52] Olsen, "Stylistic developments of ship figureheads of the United States East Coast," 328.

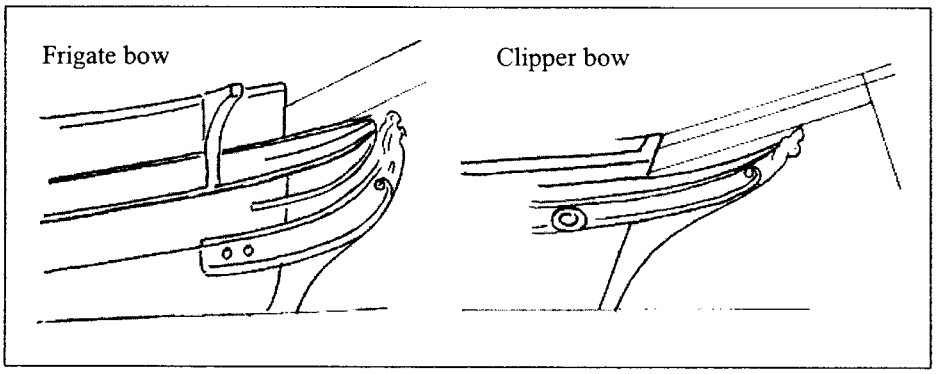

Figure 44. Compared to the frigate bow on the right, the clipper bow, seen left, is much sharper. The knee sits higher, necessitating a change of the figurehead's orientation (Norton, *Ships Figureheads*, 112).

Figure 45. Figurehead of Donald McKay's last clipper ship, *Glory of the Seas* (launched 1869) as photographed in 1900. The *Glory's* figurehead exemplified the look of classical marble statuary achieved on many clipper bows. (Michael Jay Mjelde, *Glory of the Seas* (Middletown, CT, 1970), 170).

Noted figurehead researcher M.V. Brewington compares these fast ships to Grecian athletes stripped bare "as they dashed from port to port as fast as wind and man power would allow" noting, "the only exceptions to their nudity lay in a light carved piece on the stern and a figurehead."[53] With the advent of clipper ships, shipcarvers distilled the decorative carving on a vessel, and the resultant figureheads from this era

remain some of the most attractive bow decorations ever created. One marble-like figurehead, accompanied by the beauty and grace of the ship itself, stood in antithesis to the profusion of the baroque designs covering seventeenth century vessels (figure 45).

Inherently expensive to build, operate, and maintain, competition for cargoes and passengers among these exceptional vessels was fierce.[54] Individual vessels endeavored to set themselves apart within the sea of towering sails and sleek, dark hulls. Speed proved paramount, thus clipper figureheads sought to portray a vessel's swiftness and dependability. Pioneering clipper ship builder John W. Griffiths understood the importance of the figurehead to the public's perception of his ships. Writing in his 1850 treatise *Marine and Naval Architecture* he states:

> "There is a certain fitness about the head of a ship which at once stamps an impression on the mind in relation to the entire ship, and why? We say that the head of a ship is like a portrait, we look at the physiognomy of the man and judge his intellectual endowments – of his internal and external qualities; so with a ship."[55]

Following this philosophy, Griffiths and his contemporaries affixed imprressive figureheads to their costly clipper fleets.

The names of the clipper ships personified alacrity and adventure. The motifs of these figureheads habitually corresponded to the name of the vessel. With names like *Race Horse, Flying Cloud, Comet, Shooting Star, Wild Pigeon, Flying Dutchman, Winged Racer, Eagle Wing, Neptune's Car, Antelope,* and *Flying Dragon,* a multiplicity

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[53] Brewington, *Shipcarvers of North America*, 57.
[54] Benjamin W. Labaree et al., *America and the Sea: A Maritime History* (Mystic, Ct, 1998), 306-310.
[55] John W. Griffiths, *Marine and Naval Architecture* (New York, 1850), 392.

of animals rode at the bows.[56] A gilt race horse decorated *Racer,* a snake on *Charmer,* and birds of all kind, especially the eagle, frequently represented the desirable clipper traits of speed and dependability.[57]

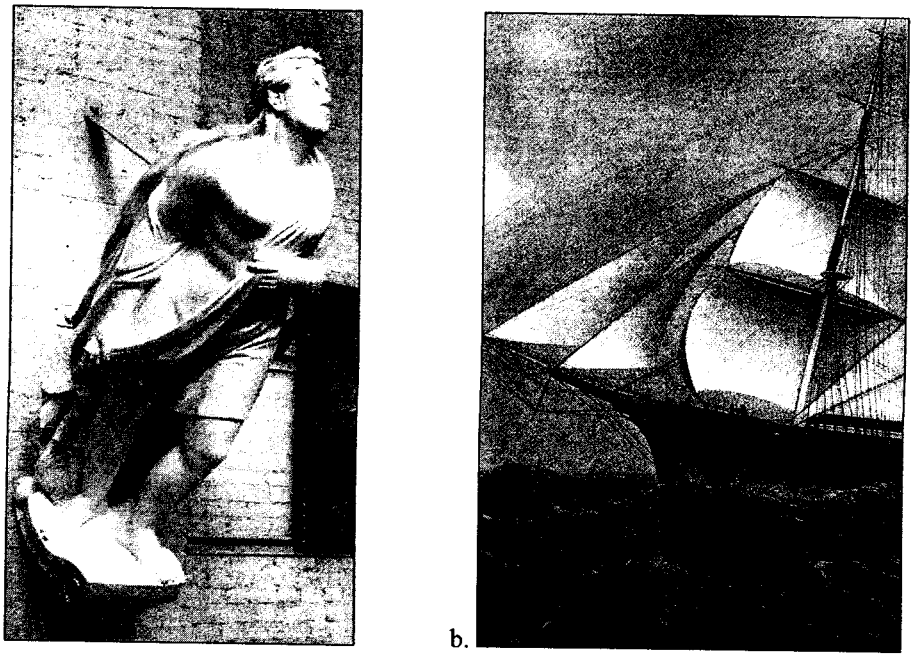

Figure 46. The clipper ship figureheads and bows: a, The figurehead from the clipper ship *Galatea* from the Mariners' Museum typifies the massive allegorical female figures that decorated ships of the clipper era. Note how high her chin is raised, necessitated by sharper profile of the bow (OF76, TMM); b, This painting of the 1853 clipper ship *David Crockett* shows the inclined positioning of the figurehead that characterizes clipper figureheads (Labaree, etal, *America and the Sea*, 276).

Among the host of charging stallions, gliding serpents, and glaring eagles, the human figures often proved the most striking. The massive dimensions of many clipper ships caused heroes to loom larger than life on the bows. Enormous drapery-clad allegorical female figures looked fiercely down from their perch on the concave bows of these towering ships, as seen in the figurehead from the clipper ship *Galatea* (figure 46a).

[56] Arthur H. Clark, *The Clipper Ship Era 1843-1869* (New York, 1911), Names of clipper ships taken from Appendix II: Record Passages of the California Clipper Ships made in 110 Days or Less from 1850 to 1860.

One of the most striking attributes of many of these female figureheads is the smooth, marble-like finish. This manifestation of classical statuary was heightened by painting the figurehead bright white, in opposition to the "to life" paint schemes used previously and adopted again by many vessels successive to the heyday of clipper ships.[58]

The charging steeds, swift birds, and rushing figures that overhung the docks in busy ports like New York and San Francisco, also distinguished themselves as clipper figureheads by the exaggerated horizontal orientation on the figure when compared to earlier bow carvings (figure 46b). The concavity of the clipper bow forced the figurehead, usually a full-length figure, to hold its head higher than earlier striding figures. This seemingly small posture change is indicative of the redesign of the head. Placed higher than on preceding vessels, the figurehead could now clear the seas and free itself from the supporting rails and brackets that prevented the figurehead from being rent from the bow when plunging directly into the waves. This raised positioning left no room atop the knee for a carved figure, instead, the figurehead relocated to the outer end and underside of the knee just below the bowsprit. [59]

Although still considered "cut clear and through," a portion of the back of the figure was now cut away to allow attachment flush against the bottom of the knee timber. One could say that the figurehead again straddled the knee, this time completely surrounding the underside of the knee in such a way that it did not interfere with the

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[57] Brewington, *Shipcarvers of North America,* 66.

[58] Olsen, "Stylistic developments of ship figureheads of the United States East Coast," 326. Note that the artist depicts the figurehead of the *David Crockett* (figure 19) as painted to life, so the solid white color scheme does not universally hold true. Interestingly, the *David Crockett's* figurehead, now displayed in the *San Francisco* Chamber of Commerce, is currently painted solid white.

outward appearance of the carving. Another method of attachment integrated a flat carved face along the upper side of the figurehead called the "lacing piece." The lacing piece provided a strong point of attachment to the vessel, allowing it to be directly bolted to the ship's structural elements. (figure 47a and b) Later clipper figureheads indicate further reduction and eventual elimination of the head knee, at which time the figure fixed to the top of the cutwater itself. In this configuration, shipcarvers attained the lightness needed for these often huge carvings, while also portraying the forwarding leaning pose that symbolized the speed of the ship.[60]

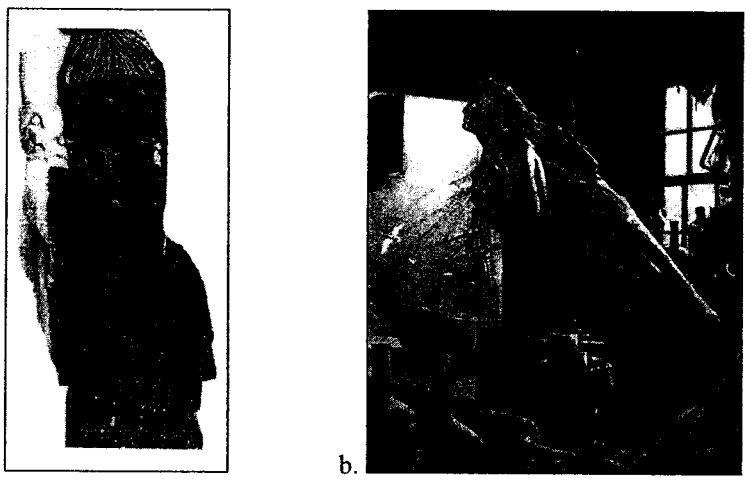

Figure 47. The lacing piece: a, Clipper figureheads often had a lacing piece which provided a flat face to bolt to the head knee or cutwater. The lacing piece of this carving has the four drift bolts still in place ("Woman with Gold Belt", Georgia Hamilton, *Silent Pilots*, 20); b, This painting of the figurehead of the 1879 bark *St. Michael* shows the flat face, or lacing piece along the back of the figurehead that allowed the figure to fit securely to the lower side of the head knee (OF file, TMM).

For all their innovation and amazing speed, the clipper ship era was short-lived. The California shipping boom that coincided with the development of the clippers prompted an oversupply of vessels by the mid-1850s. Competition from large British

[59] Pinckney, *American Figureheads and Their Carvers,* 122-134; and Brewington, *Shipcarvers of North America,* 57-76

composite vessels pushed American wooden-hulled clippers from the London to Canton trade as well. The expense of maintaining these hard-driven clipper ships with their huge crews, coupled with a shift in shipping patterns eclipsed the profit margin by 1860.[61] The figures at the bow were again in jeopardy with the demise of clipper ships.

Down-Easters and Downturns

The pinnacle of American sailing ship construction was 1855, when 1781 vessels slid down the ways. An economic depression in late 1856 and 1857 hit virtually every industry, including shipbuilding, causing the loss of contracts at the traditional shipbuilding centers.[62] Steam powered railroads and ships offered attractive transportation alternatives to sailing vessels. Shipping records record that in 1875, only 798 sailing vessels were launched. That number fell to 533 a decade later, and in 1895 only 397 new vessels joined the American merchant fleet.[63] Steam-powered ironclad ships in the navies of the world would eventually eliminate the use of figureheads on naval vessels. The official banishing of figureheads from US Navy ships did not come until 1909 when the US Secretary of the Navy ordered the removal of figureheads from all fighting vessels, with the exception of the gilt bronze bow decoration on Admiral

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[60] *Ibid.*
[61] K. Jack Bauer, *A Maritime History of the United States: The Role of America's Seas and the Waterways* (Columbia, SC, 1988), 92.
[62] John G.B. Hutchins, *The American Merchant Maritime Industries and Public Policy 1789-1914,* Vol.6, 170; Frederick Fried, *Artists in Wood, American Carvers of Cigar-Store Indians, Show Figures, and Circus Wagons* (New York, 1970), 6-7.
[63] *Report Commissioner of Navigation 1914, Table 10,* in Brewington, *Shipcarvers of North America, 77.*

Dewey's flagship *Olympia*, which had only been installed in 1901 to commemorate the victory at Manilla Bay (figure 48).[64]

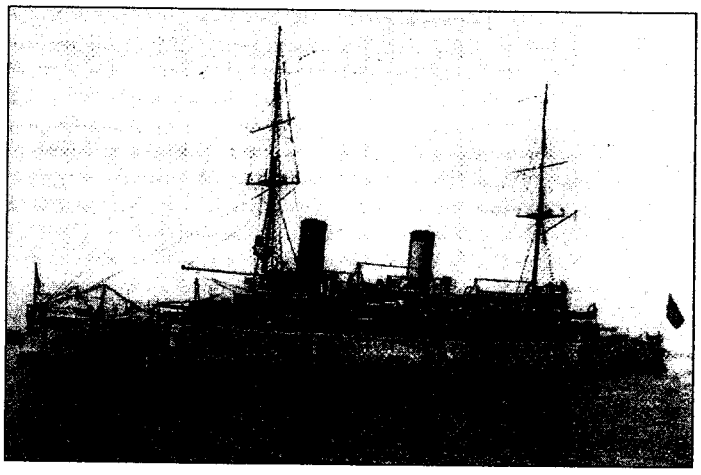

Figure 48. The US cruiser *Olympia* cira 1902-8. The bronze sculpture commemorating the victory at Manilla Bay by Augustus Saint-Gaudens (gilded swirls and volutes surrounding an eagle with wings outstretched) was spared in the 1909 order to remove bow decorations on US naval vessels (Benjamin Franklin Cooling, *USS Olympia: Herald of Empire* (Annapolis, MD, 2000), 151).[65]

As one can see in the above figure of the *Olympia*, the nature of the steamship's plumb bow and the iron plates that comprised the hull largely precluded wooden appendages, "the projecting prow with its elegant figurehead no longer had a place."[66] What is more, the Civil War called many shipcarvers, already struggling in their once grand profession, into service for their country, and by the war's end, very few could sustain themselves and their families in the trade. Some shipcarvers supplemented their

[64] Constance Lathrop, "A Vanishing Naval Tradition – the Figurehead," 1168. Also worthy of note, the British had abolished figureheads off their large ships in 1894. Norton, *Ships' Figureheads*, 96.
[65] The 1901 figurehead designed by noted sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens had been made, in part, from metal from torpedo ports carried by the *Olympia* at Manilla Bay. Cooling,*USS Olympia: Herald of Empire*, 131.
[66] Lipman, et al., *Young America: A Folk-Art History,* 104.

incomes by carving other items, such as shop figures, trade signs, and circus wagons, as well as items for steamships, such as pilot-house eagles and paddle-box decorations.[67]

The shipyards that continued to produce wooden vessels into the later part of the century lay principally in Maine, where timber was more readily available and labor unorganized, and therefore cheaper. [68] The figureheads that did emerge from the traditional shipbuilding ports of New York and Philadelphia in this period are largely pre-carved designs that could be purchased on demand. An advertisement in New York in 1868 by Charles McColley touted, "Carved Eagles and Billet Heads constantly on hand," pre-carved models supplying all but the most expensive vessels built in the area.[69]

The ascension of northern shipyards was marked by the appearance of the square-rigged deepwater cargo carrying ships known as "Down Easters." Not as fast as clippers, these relatively swift, large sailing vessels built in the 1870s and 1880s, "represented the culmination of American wooden cargo-ship design."[70] The figurehead styles used on these and other sailing ships for the remainder of the century largely held to the forms used during the clipper era; no radically new sailing ship designs or revolutionary bow shape necessitated the dramatic changes that revived the profession in the 1840s and 1850s. Concurrent with the large Down Easters, a great number of smaller fore and aft rigged coasting vessels were produced in Maine shipyards.[71] These versatile schooners

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[67] *Ibid.* A copy of a scrapbook belonging to Maine carver Edbury Hatch describes Hatch's "diversifying" his career to support himself in the late 1800s (OF file, TMM).
[68] Fried, *Artists in Wood*, 7. Even in Maine, costs had risen significantly, from $47 per ton before the Civil War to $75 per ton in post war years. Bauer, *A Maritime History of the United States,* 288.
[69] New York *Directory 1868*, advertisement. In Brewington, *Shipcarvers of North America*, 78.
[70] Labaree, et al., *America and the Sea*, 384-391.
[71] Bauer, *A Maritime History of the United States,* 257.

most often used billetheads or simple scroll decorations on their bows if any decoration was applied at all.[72]

Even though the need for figureheads diminished, the skill level of the limited number of working shipcarves remained true to this American folk art. New England Shipcarver C.A.L. Sampson worked for over thirty years, carving his most notable works while in Bath, Maine, after serving as a Lieutenant Colonel of the Third Maine Infantry in the Civil War.[73] Sampson's "Belle" series, *Belle of Bath* (1877), *Western Belle* (1876), and *Belle of Oregon* (1876) form a trio of fine examples of late nineteenth-century shipcarving (figure 49). These allegorical female figures not only symbolized the grace of these ships, they also represented the cargo the vessel carried. The *Belle of Oregon's* figurehead pictured below depicts Ceres, goddess of grain, with an ear of corn in her hand.

Figure 49. The *Belle of Oregon* figurehead (1876), carved by Charles A. Sampson of Bath, Maine typified the full-figures of the later nineteenth-century Down Easters. A depiction of the ship itself is seen in the background of the painting (*Belle of Oregon*, OF78 file, TMM).

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[72] William A. Baker, *Maritime History of Bath, Maine and the Kennebec Region* (Bath, Maine, 1973), 655.
[73] *Ibid.*, 661-666.

Figure 50. *George Skolfield* figurehead from 1885 depicts the owner of the Maine-built Skolfield feet of sailing ships. (The Mariners' Museum Collection, OF54).

William Southworth (1826-1909) and his partner Emery Jones continued supplying figureheads for southern Maine shipyards after Sampson's death in 1881.[74] Jones' figurehead for the *George R. Skolfield* (1885) exemplifies the type of "portrait" figurehead that remained popular in the American merchant fleet throughout the century (figure 50). In addition to the *George R. Skolfield*, the figureheads of the *Lady Edmonton, Brooks Walker, Irma Bently, Emma,* and *Marcia Allen* in the Mariners' Museum collection all likely represent later nineteenth-century portrait figureheads. In many cases, the ship owner, his wife or daughter, sat as a live model for the figurehead's

[74] William Southworth is quoted as saying that, "500 would not be overestimating in the slightest", when estimating the number of figureheads he had carved over the years. *Bath Independent and Enterprise*, April 10, 1909, Bath, Maine. In Baker, *A Maritime History of Bath*, 666-669.

carver.[75] Henry Wadsworth Longfellow immortalized this practice in his poem, "The Building of the Ship:"

> And at the bows an image stood,
> By a cunning artist carved in wood,
> With robes of white, that far behind
> Seemed to be fluttering in the wind.
> It was not shaped in a classic mould,
> Not like a Nymph or Goddess of old,
> Or Naiad rising from the water,
> But modeled from the Master's daughter![76]

Shipcarvers often used live models for portrait figureheads, as depicted in the below painting (figure 51). The carver could more accurately portray details, such as costume, hairstyle, expression, and attributes of a figurehead when working with a live model, even if he utilized the same pattern many times over.

Figure 51. A shipcarver and his apprentice working from a live model in his shop, unknown artist and date (OF file, TMM).

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[75] Irma Bently sat as a model for a shipcarver when she was a girl in 1908. Her father owned a fleet of ships out of Nova Scotia, and named one *Irma Bently* after his daughter. Ms. Bently visited the Mariners' Museum in the 1980s to see her figurehead (*Irma Bently,* OF 35 file, TMM).

[76] Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, "The Building of the Ship," In *English Poetry III: From Tennyson to Whitman.* Vol. XLII. The Harvard Classics (New York, 1909–14), 785.

Late nineteenth-century shipcarving featured not only portrait figureheads, but also some of the finest examples of eagle figures ever created, many of which by Maine carver John Bellamy (1836-1914). Working as a shipcarver for the navy in mid-century, Bellamy developed a remarkable ability to depict eagles.[77] Although numerous examples of Bellamy eagles remain, his most notable shipcarving is the figurehead carved in 1880 for the USS *Lancaster* (1858) preserved in the Mariners' Museum. This massive carving, with a wing span of over eleven feet, is the anchor of the museum's figurehead collection, and symbolizes the skill, distinctiveness, and innovation of the American figurehead that persisted until the end of the art (figure 52).

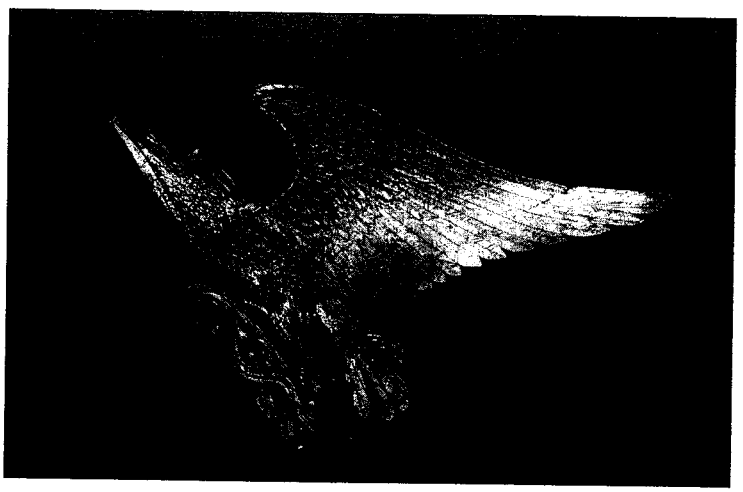


Figure 52. The figurehead of the USS *Lancaster* (OF31). With a wingspan of over eleven feet, this is Maine carver John Bellamy's largest eagle (TMM).

In the waning days of the sailing ship, bow decoration adapted to iron and steel hull construction as long as there was a place for the carving to go. The iron bark *Benmore* carried a wooden figurehead, the striking Columbia figurehead in the Mariners'

[77] Yvonne Brault Smith, *John Haley Bellamy Carver of Eagles* (Portsmouth, NH, 1982). Victor Safford, "John Haley Bellamy, The Woodcarver of Kittery Point," *Folk Art in America* (New York, 1935), 129-134.

Museum (figure 53a and b). Once sail power had been usurped by steam power, it did not matter if a ship was wood or iron; the bowsprit was eliminated and the plumb bow of steamships that so effectively cut through the waves did not present a head knee or sloping cutwater to mount a figurehead. The diminished mystical qualities of the figurehead in the scientific age also contributed to the figurehead's demise.

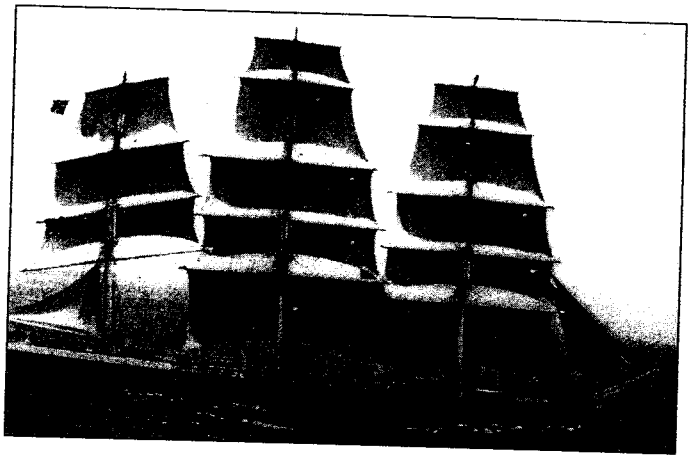
a. b. 

Figure 53. Iron bark *Benmore*: a, The Columbia figurehead on the bow of the *Benmore* (PO143, TMM Library photograph collection); b, The 1870 Scottish-built, American iron bark *Benmore* carried a wooden figurehead as did many of her iron contemporaries (APK52 v.2 , TMM Library photograph collection).

Twentieth-Century Survivors

Figureheads remain on a small number of vessels sailing today. Many historic sail training vessels have opted to keep their figureheads as a testament to the importance of the traditions of the sea. Traditional wooden or replica sailing vessels on occasion necessitate the carving of new figureheads. Twentieth-century shipwrights and shipcarvers still practice their trade constructing modern wooden vessel reproductions, as seen on the Revenue Cutter *Californian* (figure 54). Contemporary shipcarver Jay S. Hanna writes that the art of shipcarving is far from dead:

"it may be old and is surely tottering around with a cane, but it is kept alive by small injections of enthusiasm and skill from professionals and amateurs alike. It would be hard, these days, to find a William Rush, a John or Simeon Skillen, or a Samuel McIntire – for of the many highly skilled men who carved life-sized figures to grace the bows of ships in the late 1700s and early 1800s. But there's always someone around to do what little carving is needed."[78]

Figure 54. The figurehead of the Revenue Cutter *Californian*. Built in the 1980s, the *Californian* is a sail training vessel operated by the San Diego Maritime Museum (Photo by Catherine Green, 2002).

One must remember, however, that these carvings are being placed on vessels modeled on sailing ships of the past. Modern bulk freighters, container ships, and fiberglass cruisers remain devoid of the artistic expression seen in the figureheads of the nineteenth century. Maritime museums, like the Mariners' Museum are virtually the sole curators for these unique and significant maritime artifacts.

[78] Jay S. Hanna, *The Shipcarver's Handbook: How to Design and Execute Traditional Marine Carvings* (Brooklin, Maine, 1988), 1.

The Beasts of the Sea: The Figureheads of the *Lancaster* and the *Bear*

Every artifact collection must have its centerpiece, a piece that personifies the best elements of the whole collection. For the Mariners' Museum figurehead collection, two figureheads may be said to hold that title. The artistic centerpiece is the figurehead from the *USS Lancaster*. The *Lancaster's* large gilt eagle embodies the artistic skill as well as the patriotic fervor that drove naval and merchant vessels to ennoble their bows with all manner of carvings throughout the nineteenth century. Arguably, the rearing polar bear figurehead from the ice ship *Bear* forms the historic centerpiece of the Mariners' collection. The *Bear's* dramatic and diverse 83-year history, punctuated with heroic rescues and daring voyages of exploration, has been fully recorded in myriad sources, making the *Bear's* figurehead the most vivid historical portrait in the collection. These two beasts of the sea are incredible examples of nineteenth-century figureheads. By relating their stories and elaborating on the carvers and carving style, they are elevated to invaluable maritime treasures among the gathering of grand goddesses and staid heroes in the Mariners Museum collection.

USS Lancaster

The figurehead eagle from the *USS Lancaster* is probably the most outstanding, and certainly the best known figurehead in the Mariners' Museum collection. It retains that title not only because of its detailed carving, massive proportions, and elaborate gild

plumage, but also for its relationship to the 1858 steam frigate *Lancaster*, to which it was added in 1881. Significantly, we also know much about the figurehead's carver, John Haley Bellamy (1836-1914), one of America's most prominent nineteenth-century woodcarvers. The *Lancaster's* figurehead has become such an icon for The Mariners' Museum that it has appeared on the museum's stationary, Web site home page, and presently greets visitors as they cross the threshold of the main entrance (figure 55).

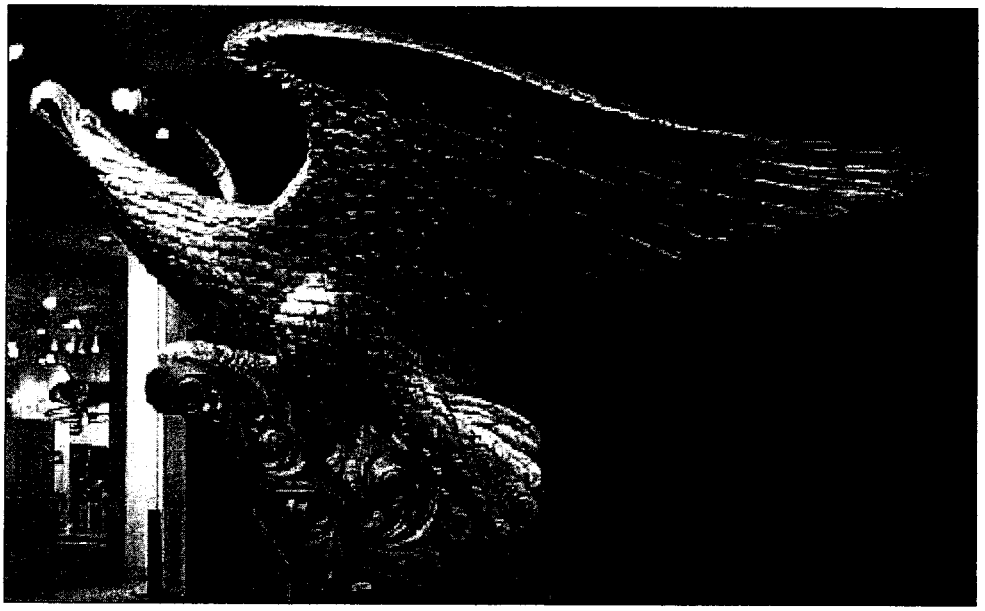


Figure 55. The figurehead of *USS Lancaster*. OF31 US Navy steam frigate, 1858. Carved by John Haley Bellamy, as it is currently displayed at the main entrance of the museum (TMM).

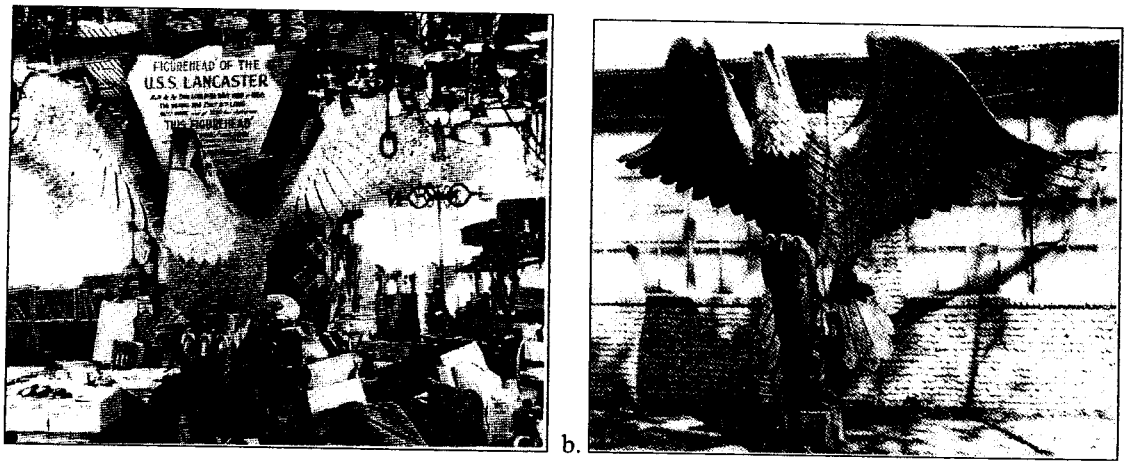
The figurehead stands 11.9' high on its pedestal, 12.8' deep, with a 19.4' wingspan. The large eagle weighs 3200 pounds.[1] The *Lancaster* eagle shimmers with a layer of gold leaf, which mimics the figurehead's original plumage. The museum restored the gilt finish in 1960 replacing the polychrome, true to life paint scheme it wore for many years (figure 56a and b).

Figure 56. The *USS Lancaster* figurehead: a, The *Lancaster* figurehead as it appears in the *Index of American Design*. This "to life" color scheme characterized the eagle for many years until it was restored to its original gold-gilt finish in 1960 (Issacson, *The American Eagle, 81*); b, The *Lancaster* eagle undergoing gilding in the Mariners' Museum main gallery in 1960 (*Lancaster,* OF31 File, TMM).

The carving came into the museum's collection in February 1934 when antiques dealer Earl B. Smith, representing the Mariners' Museum, purchased it from the Atlantic Marine Exchange, that had the figurehead in their Boston "Ship Chandler's Junk Shop" for nearly a decade (figure 57a).[2] After its purchase and transport to the museum in Newport News, Virginia by flatbed truck, the enormous figurehead took up a temporary roost displayed outside the museum on wooden blocks. The addition of guy wires secured the carving to the building (figure 57b). The completion of the museum's new main gallery in 1936 provided an enclosed venue for the carving, and the grand eagle eventually alighted on a large, permanent concrete base in 1957. The *Lancaster* eagle is one of the few figureheads currently displayed at the Mariners' Museum, positioned

[1] *Mariners' Museum Catalog Worksheet OF31 (34.37)*, TMM, 1988.
[2] *Registrar Sheet, OF31*, TMM, 1936. The museum bought the figurehead for $2,200, slightly less than the $2,500 asking price. The ship chandlery only paid $262.89 in 1923 when they bought it as condemned material from the US Navy. Yvonne Brault Smith, *John Haley Bellamy, Carver of Eagles* (Hampton, NH, 1982), 34.

prominently as the first thing museum visitor's see when they arrive through the main entrance.[3]



a. b.

Figure 57. The *Lancaster* figurehead before and after purchase by the museum in 1934: a, The *Lancaster's* figurehead in Ship Chandlers Junk Shop in Boston, 1930s (PO514, TMM Archives); b, The *Lancaster's* figurehead as originally displayed outside of the Mariners' Museum in 1934 (PO513, TMM Archives).

The *Lancaster* figurehead's importance to the collection transcends its history and its size. The subject itself, the American bald eagle, has long been recognized around the world as a symbol for the United States. Folk art author, Elinor Lander Horwitz asserts that, "no patriotic symbol has been used so commonly as the bald eagle or in such a stunning profusion of forms."[4] The emblem of the United States since the designation of the Great Seal of the United States on June 20, 1782, the eagle symbolizes the courage, liberty, and strength of the nation (figure 58).[5] The eagle has repeatedly been used as a symbol of statehood in Europe, from the Roman Empire to Charlemagne, and from

[3] *Lancaster,* OF31 File, TMM.
[4] Elinor Lander Horwitz, *The Bird, the Banner, and Uncle Sam* (New York, 1976), 35.
[5] Congress appointed a committee made up of Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, and Thomas Jefferson to decide the on the design in 1776. Their recommendation for a seal featuring the goddess Liberty was rejected. The fierce debate was only resolved after the work of three committees over six years. *Ibid,* 35-37.

Imperial Russia to the Napoleonic Empire.[6] However, the designation of the uniquely North American bald eagle set the United States apart, and the fierceness of that particular bird is often brought out in representations on everything from our currency, to embroidery.

Figure 58. The first die of the Great Seal of the United States. 1782 (National Archives. In Horwitz, *The Bird, the Banner, and Uncle Sam*, 37).

The bows, sterns, and mast heads of America's ships often displayed eagles, carrying them to foreign ports, quickly establishing the bald eagle as an international personification of America.[7] Bellamy's carving for the *Lancaster*, as articulated by biographer Yavonne B. Smith, was more than just a ship's figurehead: "it was conceived as bearing around the world on it broad spread of wings, the power and authority of the United States."[8] As such, this gilt eagle was a fitting figurehead for one of the last grand wooden-hulled steam ships in the United States Navy.

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[6] Philip M. Isaacson, *The American Eagle* (Boston, 1975), 1-16.
[7] Two examples of "eagle head" figureheads are the *Great Republic's* figurehead carved by S.W. Gleason & Sons in 1853, now in Mystic Seaport Museum, Mystic, Connecticut, and the eagle head from an unknown ship circa 1850 in the Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Massachusetts. Georgia Hamilton, *Silent Pilots, Figureheads in Mystic Seaport Museum* (Mystic, CT, 1984), 36. Edwin O. Christensen, *The Index of American Design* (New York, 1959), 54.
[8] Yavonne B.Smith, "The Lancaster Eagle – A Treasured Liability," *Yankee Magazine* (December 1971): 98-100; 201-203.

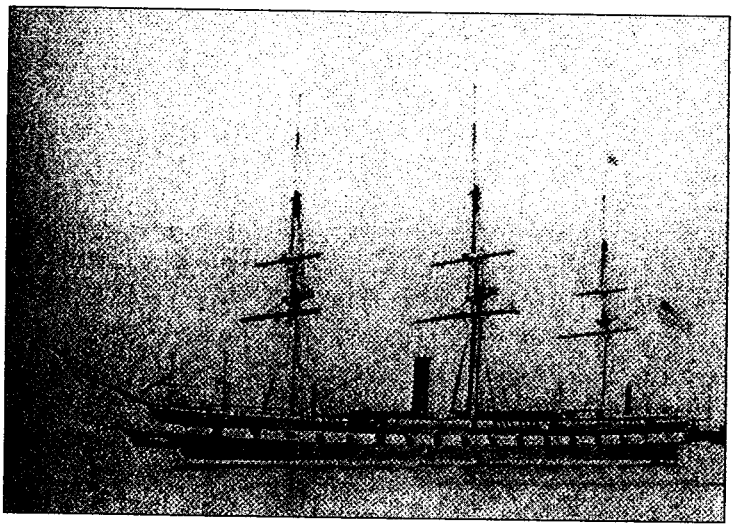

Figure 59. *USS Lancaster* before 1875, "the Most Substantial of Her Class" (Peabody Essex Museum. In Canney, *The Old Steam Navy, Volume 1, Frigates, Sloops, and Gunboats*, 1815-1885 (Annapolis, Maryland, 1990), 67).

Before she was decorated with John Haley Bellamy's graceful eagle, the steam frigate *Lancaster* sailed with a plain, undecorated bow for her first twenty-three years of service. Launched in 1858 as one of five *Hartford*-class screw sloops, the *Lancaster* was the largest of the five measuring 235 feet 8 inches long, 46 feet in beam and with 3,290 tons displacement. Named after the home town of President James Buchanan, the *Lancaster* became the flagship of the Pacific station the year of her launch. Her career in the Pacific remained fairly uneventful despite the raging of the Civil War (figure 59). [9]

[9] *Registrar Sheet, OF31*, TMM, 1934. Frank M. Bennett, *The Steam Navy of the United States* (Pittsburg, Pensylvania, 1897), 158. Donald L. Canney, T*he Old Steam Navy* (Annapolis, Maryland, 1990), 61, 66-67.

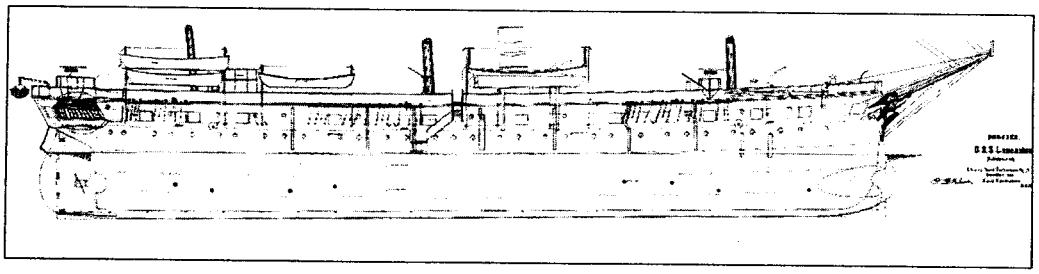

Figure 60. Outboard plans of the rebuilt *Lancaster*, 1881. Note the bow ram and eagle figurehead (National Archives. In Canney, *The Old Steam Navy*, 162).

The *Lancaster* remained in Pacific service until 1875 when she was the subject of, "the most thoroughgoing refit and alteration of the last years of the wooden steam navy."[10] From 1875 to her recommissioning in 1881, the *Lancaster* was remade from stem to stern.[11] Although the lines of the ship were not greatly altered, she was made finer below the waterline both forward and aft, in an effort to increase her speed. [12] Notably, her plain bow was completely reconfigured to include a cast bronze ram just below the waterline as well as the impressive eagle figurehead carved by Maine woodcarver John Haley Bellamy (figures 60 and 61).

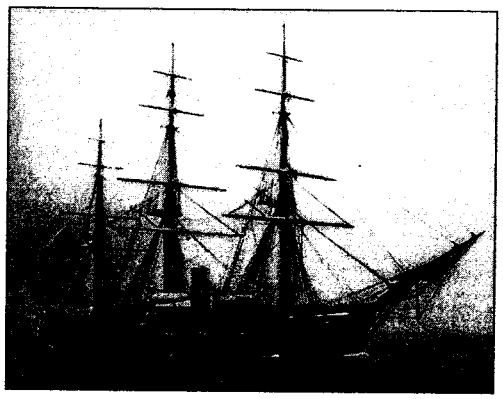

Figure 61. The *USS Lancaster* after the 1881 refit (National Archives. In Canney, *The Old Steam Navy,* 163).

[10] Canney, *Old Steam Navy,* 161.
[11] Although no statistics survive on the cost of the *Lancaster's* rebuild, it certainly exceeded a million dollars, significantly more than the $670,000 original built cost. *Ibid.*
[12] Smith, "The Lancaster Eagle – A Treasured Liability," 99-100.

A celebrated New England carver by the time of the figurehead's commissioning, John Haley Bellamy was born in Kittery Point, Maine in Sir William Pepperell mansion, the Bellamy family home. (figure 62) His father was US senator Charles G. Bellamy, and his family's financial status gave Bellamy the means to pursue, in addition to wood carving, the writing of poetic works. John, however, was not a hobbyist, and studied his art seriously in New York and Boston. In 1857, Bellamy apprenticed for a short time with to the renowned Boston carver Laban Beecher, who had carved among other things the first Andrew Jackson figurehead for the USS *Constitution* in 1834.[13]

Figure 62. Woodcarver John Haley Bellamy, circa 1860 (Farnsworth Library and Art Museum. In Smith, *John Haley Bellamy, Carver of Eagles*, xiv).

Records show that John Bellamy was making a fairly good living as a carver (and inventor) by the 1860s, partnering with D.A Titcomb, a Boston patent agent. Bellamy

[13] M.V. Brewington, *Shipcarvers of North America* (New York, 1962), 129-131. Phillip M. Isaacson in his *The American Eagle* (1975) calls into question Bellamy's apprenticeship to Beecher, but subsequent research by Yavonne Brault Smith (*John Haley Bellamy, Carver of Eagles* (1982)) disproves those claims and establishes, with letters and Boston City Directory listings, that Bellamy did work in Beecher's shop at 102 Commercial Avenue in 1857. Phillip M. Isaacson, *The American Eagle* (New York, 1975), 115. Smith, *John Haley Bellamy, Carver of Eagles*, 7-10.

received commissions for clocks, picture frames, brackets, Masonic emblems, often with allegorical subjects. [14] One of his employers was the United States Navy, for whom Bellamy worked at the Portsmouth Navy Yard and at the Navy Yard in Charlestown, Massachusetts over an impressive span of years beginning prior to the Civil War and ending in the twentieth century.[15] When not working at one of the Navy Yards, Bellamy spent his days at his Kittery Point workshop where many visitors, from retired Naval officers to Mark Twain, were reported to have wiled away hours with the intriguing carver.[16] Never married, John Bellamy outlived all his siblings and ended up living alone in the family estate. He kept busy carving in his Kittery Point shop until 1907 when, upon word of a close friend's death, he locked up his shop, never to return to it. He died April 6, 1914 much diminished from the artist who had made such a name for himself with his distinctive eagle carvings.[17]

Obviously proud of his carving style, Bellamy wrote to his father March 3, 1866, "There is one thing that I can say as to this work of mine. It is original with me and never known or heard of until I produced it."[18] Certainly the many decorative Bellamy eagles extant today bear this out. Many of his eagles are relief carvings complete with a banner proclaiming slogans such as, "Don't Give Up the Ship" or "Merry Christmas" (figure

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[14] Smith, *John Haley Bellamy, Carver of Eagles,* 15-19.
[15] Victor Safford, "John Haley Bellamy, The Woodcarver of Kittery Point," *Antiques,* (March, 1935): 102-107.
[16] *Ibid.,* 104.
[17] Smith, *John Haley Bellamy, Carver of Eagles,* 57-59.
[18] John Haley Bellamy to Charles G. Bellamy, March 3, 1866. In Smith, *John Haley Bellamy, Carver of Eagles,* 15.

63). Indeed many of these highly prized carvings were given as gifts to friends and family.[19]

Figure 63. Carved eagle on gilded and painted pine. The banner has a Latin motto: While we live, let us live. Detail view shows stylized eye, mandible and feathering. These fine points are found on all Bellamy eagles (From a private collection. In Smith, *John Haley Bellamy, Carver of Eagles*, 65).

Bellamy employed a number of uniform characteristics that identify his work. Dr. Victor Safford, Bellamy's nephew articulates the unique 'shelving' Bellamy applied to his birds' plumage:

> "An almost certain mark of identification in Bellamy eagles is the so called 'shelving' of the wings, by which is meant Bellamy's trick of introducing a fairly deep hollow beneath the upper line of the wing so as to achieve the semblance of an overhang, and by consequence a greater suggestion of lift and power in the spread pinions. This shelving, more than faintly perceptible even in the small carvings, is strikingly manifest in the splendid figurehead of the *Lancaster*."[20] (Figure 64)

The birds' facial features also distinguish Bellamy's highly praised style. Of the most noticeable Bellamy traits is the treatment of the beak. The shape is characterized by

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[19] Bellamy's nephew Dr. Victor Safford asserts that, "so many small eagles were presented to friends that their making seems to have been primarily a diversion." Safford, "John Haley Bellamy, The Woodcarver of Kittery Point," 103.

[20] *Ibid,* 107.

the broad and abruptly flattened appearance of the top and front of the beak. The hooking profile of the upper beak just overhangs the equally sharp end of the lower beak (figures 63 and 64). The bird's tongue inevitably appears between the mandibles, "thrusting forward like a weapon." The eyes of Bellamy's eagles are also distinctive, rimmed with a firm line that circumscribes the eyeball, and carries back beneath the level temple to, "terminate in a feather or to suggest the entire plumage covering neck and back."[21] This economy of line that implies the details that are not specifically rendered establishes Bellamy's substantial talent and testifies to the longevity of his popularity.

Figure 64. *USS Lancaster* figurehead, OF31. Note the 'shelving' of the feathers, the shape of the beak and depiction of the eye (TMM).

The *Lancaster's* eagle figurehead is the largest in the Mariners' Museum collection, and one of the largest figureheads extant anywhere in the world. Bellamy had to use all of his experience and innovation in carving the mammoth figurehead when commissioned for the project in 1881. Designing a system of affixing multiple blocks of

[21] *Ibid*, 106.

wood together, Bellamy found a way to carve the largest eagle of his career. Manageable blocks were carefully fitted together and affixed with a system of wooden pegs, screws and bolts to hold the pieces together. Iron straps across the back supported the substantial weight of the wings.[22]

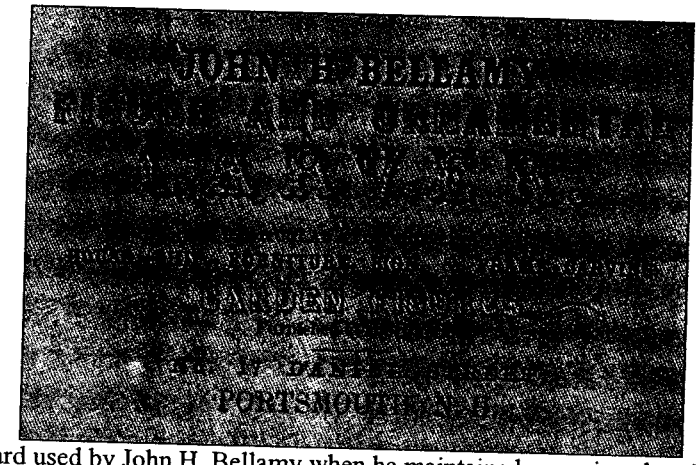

Figure 65. Trade card used by John H. Bellamy when he maintained a carving shop in Portsmouth, NH (Mr. and Mrs. Joseph W.P. Frost. In Isaacson, *The American Eagle*, 115).

Bellamy completely assembled the figurehead in his Portsmouth shop before he disassembled it and took it to the *USS Lancaster* (figure 65). Dr. Victor Safford recalls a scene from his childhood: "seeing John Bellamy on a platform directing the bolting of sections of the eagle together on the bow. This impressed me because I had previously seen the entire eagle assembled and held together somehow in the mould loft."[23] Bellamy worked over a week to reassemble the figurehead on the bow of the ship. No dedication ceremony marked the launching of the refitted *Lancaster* on September 12, 1881, and local papers did no more than mention the gilded eagle on the bow (Figure 66).[24]

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[22] Smith, "The Lancaster Eagle – A Treasured Liability," 202.
[23] *Ibid.* Smith, *John Haley Bellamy, Carver of Eagles,* 31.
[24] *Portsmouth Chronicle*, September 13, 1881.

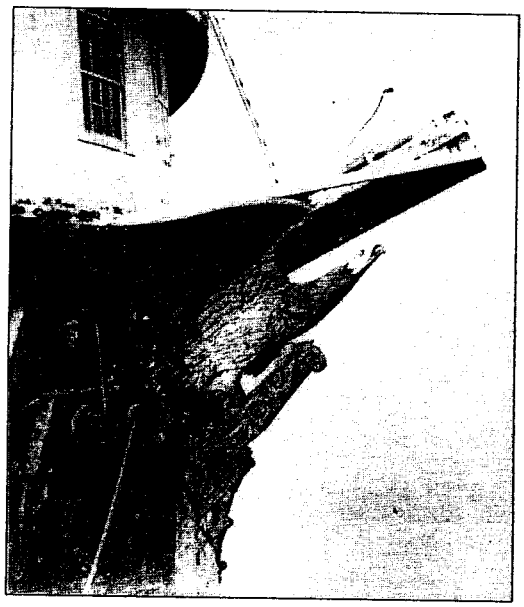

Figure 66. The figurehead eagle on the bow of the USS *Lancaster*, circa 1921 (PO 89, TMM Archives).

The *Lancaster* sailed into an "Old Steam Navy" that had already begun to fall into decay. The new iron and steel ships replaced the wooden-hulled anachronistic pre-Civil War craft. After the Spanish-American War in 1898, the *Lancaster* was used for gunnery training, followed by an ignominious assignment as a receiving ship and Public Health Service quarantine vessel in New York.[25]

Not completely forgotten, the gilt eagle was the subject of a series of naval memos in 1920 inquiring about the *Lancaster* figurehead's whereabouts and condition. There was an interest to install the eagle in a museum. The carving remained in good condition on the ship's bow, yet no action was taken to remove it at this time due to, "the considerable amount of money involved [for its removal]...and present conditions of

[25] Canney, *The Old Steam Navy,* 163.

funds."[26] Eventually, it was unshipped and sent to Boston Navy Yard in 1921 where it languished, rotting at the back of the chain yard. The Navy was unwilling to fund the repairs to restore the bird for public display.[27] The *Lancaster's* figurehead was listed in the *Boston Catalog of Sales of Condemned Material* on April 20, 1923, and it subsequently became the property of the Boston ship chandlers whom the Mariners' Museum acquired the piece from in 1934.[28]

As one of the most striking nineteenth-century figureheads anywhere, the *Lancaster's* figurehead offers a unique platform to introduce museum visitors to American folk art, the carvings of John Haley Bellamy, the United States Steam Navy, and the iconographic history of the eagle. As an outstanding example of American folk art, this graceful carving evinces a careful attention to detail, economy of lines, and freedom of movement that marks it as a national treasure. As a centerpiece of John Haley Bellamy's career, the *Lancaster* eagle shines as the culmination of the carver's unique style. As a tangible piece of American maritime and naval history, the *Lancaster* eagle gives voice to the career of a ship that took part in the dramatic changes adopted by the United States Navy over the later half of the nineteenth-century. The *Lancaster* eagle also successfully portrays the most recognizable symbol of the United States, evincing strength, courage, liberty, and democracy in its gilded wings. As one of the largest repositories for American figureheads, it is fitting that the Mariners' Museum

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[26] Construction and Repair, 1687-147, National Archives. December 2, 1920 – April 7, 1925. In Smith, *John Haley Bellamy, Carver of Eagles*, 33.
[27] Smith, *John Haley Bellamy, Carver of Eagles*, 33-35.
[28] *Ibid,* 34-35.

prominently displays this carving, which embodies the innovativeness and skill of nineteenth-century American figurehead carvers, as well as the American spirit.

Bear

Figure 67. The figurehead from the *Bear,* OF37. Built in Scotland, 1874 (TMM).

Another fine beast of the sea in the Mariners' Museum figurehead collection is the figurehead of the barkentine *Bear* (figure 67). Although not an American-built ship, the *Bear* is deeply woven in the tapestry of American maritime history. No other figurehead in the museum can boast such an impressive resume filled with daring rescues and dangerous expeditions. The 89-year career of the *Bear* is documented thoroughly in many first and second hand accounts. The value of the *Bear* figurehead lies in its proximity to notable historic events. The *Bear's* resume includes polar exploration, arctic whaling, Alaskan settlement, and Admiral Byrd's Antarctic adventures. Volumes of documentation and albums of historic photos enhance the adventures of this figurehead's

past, establishing the *Bear* figurehead as the historical centerpiece of the Mariners' Museum figurehead collection.

Although the *Bear* had three figureheads over its lifetime, the Mariners' Museum has the original carving that stood on the bow of the barkentine from its launch in 1873 until its donation to the museum by Admiral Richard Byrd in 1935 (figure 68). Aside from its subsequent replacements, this is the only known bear figurehead carved for any vessel.[29]

Figure 68. Close up of the *Bear's* bow, pre-1940. Note the Mariners' Museum's figurehead topping the decorated cutwater (PO384, TMM Archives).

The rearing full-length polar bear is painted "to life," a slightly cream colored white that mimics the real coloring of an arctic polar bear. Not meant to depict a docile beast, sharp teeth and claws characterize the carving, which measures just under five feet in length, including the base. Typical of many nineteenth-century full-figure carvings, the figure inclines forward on a gilt acanthus leaf design scroll base. It was fastened to the bow of the ship via a series of four iron bolts protruding from the lacing piece along

[29] Carol Olsen, *Summary of OF37 File*, TMM, 1984.

the back of the figure. [30] An interesting feature of this figurehead is the suggestion of fur made by tool marks covering the carving. The textured effect contributes to the successful figurehead design evincing the carver's skill and experience creating quality ship decorations.

The *Bear's* figurehead was carved in 1874, but records do not identify the carver of this first, and arguably finest, figurehead of the barkentine. Experienced builders specializing in vessels built to withstand harsh environments, Alexander Stephen & Sons, Dundee, Scotland turned out more than 800 vessels spanning more than two hundred years.[31] Stephen's shipyards would have most likely chosen the carver, either an independent shipcarver contracted for this specific vessel, or a carpenter with particular carving skills on Stephen's payroll. The choice of a polar bear as the namesake and figurehead of the vessel was most likely determined by the man who commissioned the building of the vessel, Walter Grieve & of Greenock, Scotland. The *Bear* joined Grieve's pack of carnivore-themed vessels: *Wolf, Lion, Leopard,* and *Tiger* in his company's fleet of Newfoundland sealing and whaling ships.

As for the vessel itself, Alexander Stephen & Sons designed the *Bear* as a purpose-built sealing vessel measuring 198 feet long, 28 ½ feet of beam, 18 feet of draft, displacing approximately 700 tons.[32] Stephen architects used only wooden structural elements for the *Bear's* hull. Although they often used composite iron and wood construction, the experienced Scottish shipbuilders knew that wood provided the strength

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[30] The Mariners' Museum Catalogue Worksheet – OF37 file, TMM, 1988.
[31] William Bixby, *Track of the* Bear (New York, 1965), 6. The Stephen family began building ships in 1750. The vessels ranged from the 43-foot sloop *Sarah* (1828) to the 690-foot aircraft carrier H.M.S. *Ocean* (1945).

and flexibility needed to ply ice-filled arctic waters. Heavier than usual for a vessel of this size, the oak frames were placed closer together than that of a vessel destined to sail warmer climates. Moreover, the six-inch thick oak planks sheathed in Australian ironwood would prove invaluable against the icebound waters of the polar seas.[33] She was rigged as a barkentine but also employed a steam engine that drove a large propeller. This sail-assist configuration proved ideal. The ship could maneuver in ice as well as navigate long passages, making her well suited for the sealing and whaling industries as well as Arctic exploration.[34]

The *Bear* took up her duties in St. John's, Newfoundland, serving in the bloody seal hunting trade from 1874 to 1883. Overall, she proved a fairly successful vessel although her annual catches varied wildly. Her sailors, or "swilers" as they were called, clubbed between 841 and a record 30,298 seals a season.[35]

The *Bear's* first heroic efforts surround the rescue of the Lady Franklin Bay Expedition of 1881. The ill-prepared, US government-backed Arctic expedition led by Army Signal Corps Lieutenant Adolphus W. Greely endured terrible suffering. Their re-supply ship, the *Proteus*, was crushed and sunk by the arctic ice floes en route to Greely

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[32] *Registrar Sheet OF37.* TMM.
[33] Bixby, *Track of the Bear*, 7-10. Iron was comparatively brittle compared to wood and could shatter while plowing through shifting ice floes. Iron plates could also buckle under the pressure of the pack ice, which could trap a vessel for days. Moreover, wood could be repaired at sea, while iron could not.
[34] *Ibid.*, 12-19. Many polar explorers used Stephen and Sons ships. Sir George Nares' two ships, *Alert* and *Discovery,* as well as Robert Scott's *Terra Nova* were Stephen ships. Ernest Shackelton's *Nimrod* and *Aurora* both slid down the ways from Stephen yards as well.
[35] *Ibid.*, 12-26. Other sources indicate the *Bear* was a whaler, not a sealing vessel. (Coast Guard Bulletin, Vol. 3, Number 32, 1948: p. 460). This appears to be untrue.

and his men at Lady Franklin Bay on the west coast of Greenland.[36] With twenty-seven months of provisions laid in at the outset, Greely and his twenty-five men had rations to cover just over two of the three years planned for this expedition of scientific and geographical exploration. The failure of the *Proteus* to re-provision the expedition in the summer of 1883 meant the company would starve if help did not arrive. [37]

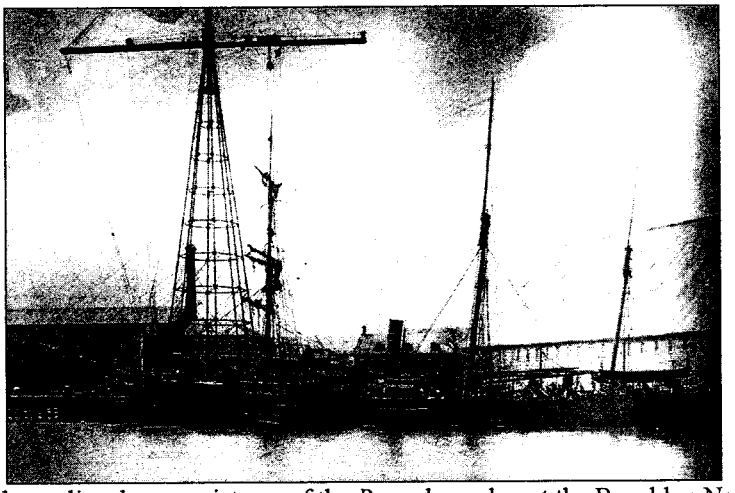

Figure 69. One of the earliest known pictures of the *Bear* shows her at the Brooklyn Navy Yard in 1884 preparing to sail on the Greely Relief Expedition. (A.M. Barnes Collection, PN2308, TMM Archives).

Political apathy and budgetary concerns kept the proposed relief expedition in congressional limbo until 1884 when Senator Eugene Hale of Maine finally convinced legislators to approve a US Navy-led relief expedition for the soldiers stranded at Lady Franklin Bay, declaring, "Unless Lieutenant Greely and his party are found this summer, they will doubtless pass away and we shall never hear more of them."[38] The Navy

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[36] Commander W.S. Schely, USN, *Rescue of Greely* (New York, 1886), 47-96. The *Proteus,* coincidentally, was a sister ship of the *Bear* turned out by the same Scottish shipyard. Her voyage was plagued by inept leadership and ignorance of Arctic sailing conditions. All the sailors from the *Proteus* were rescued, although only 500 rations, or twenty days' provisions, were landed at "wreck-camp cache" at Cape Sabine, where Greely was to seek stores if none arrived at Lady Franklin Bay.
[37] Deltus M. Edwards, *The Toll of the Arctic Seas* (London, 1910), 303-304.
[38] A.L. Todd, *Abandoned, The Story of the Greely Arctic Expedition 1881-1884* (New York, 1961), 159.

purchased the *Bear* and brought her to New York from Newfoundland, where she had proven herself as an ice-hearty vessel. The Navy further reinforced elements of the *Bear's* hull in preparation for the dangerous journey (figure 69).[39] Two other vessels, the *Thetis* and the *Alert* joined *Bear* on the rescuer mission to bring Greely and his men home, dead or alive. The Navy vessels were joined by errant members of the whale/seal fleet, as the government had put up a $25,000 reward for the vessel that rescued or recovered the stranded expedition.

The whalers soon gave up and returned to their profession. The *Bear's* superior sailing qualities in the Arctic ice floes off Greenland soon put her out front, leading the charge to Lady Franklin Bay. Stopping at supply caches along the Greenland coast, members of the expedition found a note left by Greely indicating that he would be waiting at Cape Sabine for relief. According to Schely, "cheers were heard above the roaring of the wind," but the jubilation felt by the rescuers quickly turned to dread as they realized that the supplies recovered from the cache would only last twenty days for the twenty-five men of the fated expedition, and they were reading the note nearly nine months after it was written.[40]

The ships steamed to Cape Sabine with great haste, acknowledging there was little chance of survivors. On the evening of June 22, 1884 a lookout on *Bear* sighted the figure of a man on the shore. The *Bear's* launch, *Cub*, headed for the lone figure feebly

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[39] Schely, *The Rescue of Greely*, 126. A letter from Schely to W.E Chandler, Secretary of the Navy attests to *Bear's* strength, and would establish her as the lead ice-breaking vessel of the expedition : "...I would respectfully suggest that the *Bear*, being the vessel most advanced in the strengthening needed for this service should be dispatched from New York on the 25th of April to St. John's, Newfoundland..." Schely to Chandler, March 17, 1884.

[40] *Ibid.*, 213.

waving to the ships. The emaciated individual that greeted the rescuers led them to an even more tragic scene. Over the hill, a half collapsed tent held six starved men, too weak to even sit up (figure 70a and b). Lieutenant Greely identified himself, yet he and his men were barely coherent and were described as initially not caring that they had been rescued; they had already consigned themselves to death.[41] These seven men were the only survivors. Behind the tent, rescuers found eighteen graves that accounted for the remaining expedition members. The universal thought was that if the relief expedition had come forty hours later, no one would have been left alive.[42]

a. b.

Figure 70. The Lady Franklin Bay Expedition survivor's camp: a, "The Rescue," engraving from Greely's autobiography (Greely, *Three Years of Arctic Service*, 330); b, "The rescue, as Lieutenant Harlow photographed it about 10 p.m., June 22, 1884" (Todd, *Abandoned*, frontispiece). Note the half-collapsed tent, the only shelter left for the survivors.

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[41] Lieutenant Adolphus W. Greely, *Three Years of Arctic Service* (New York, 1886). Greely describes the rescue succinctly in his autobiography: "We had resigned ourselves to despair, when suddenly strange voices were heard calling me; and, in a frenzy of feeling as vehement as our enfeebled condition would permit, we realized that our country had not failed us, that the long agony was over, and the remnant of the Lady Franklin Bay Expedition saved," 331.

[42] David L. Brainard. *The Outpost of the Lost, An Arctic Adventure* (Indianapolis, 1929), 314. Lieutenant Brainard was one of the six survivors of the Lady Franklin Expedition. His memoirs are recorded in a number of publications.

Medical officers from *Bear* and *Thetis* came ashore and slowly began introducing nourishment to the starved victims. One of the survivors had lost both feet and both hands to frostbite, and had a spoon tied to the stump of one of his arms. Almost immediately upon transfer to the ship, he succumbed to his injuries, as the freezing temperature in the tent was the only thing preserving his wounds. The other six did survive, and upon reaching St. John's, Newfoundland, Commander Schely telegraphed Washington and reported their rescue and the successful recovery of the remains of all the soldiers (figure 71).[43] The relief mission's success was, of course, tempered by the deaths of eighteen members of the expedition. Nonetheless, newspapers across the nation readily took up the story, lavishing accolades on the *Bear* and her companion ships. Upon her return to Portsmouth Navy Yard, the fierce polar bear figurehead greeted the hundreds of people that gathered to celebrate the successful mission.[44]

Figure 71. The six survivors of the Lady Franklin Bay Expedition. Sitting: Private Henry Biederbick, Lieutenant Adolphus W. Greely, Sergeant David L. Brainard. Standing: Private Julius Fredericks, Private Maurice Connell, Private Francis Long (Brainard, *Six Came Back*, frontispiece).

[43] Todd, *Abandoned*, 250-277.
[44] *Ibid.*

Biographer William Bixby notes, "the history of the Newfoundland sealing fleet is dotted with instances where a ship left active sealing and then returned, following some exploratory or rescue voyage, to take up the business of killing seals once more. This should have been the fate of the *Bear*, but once again, circumstances altered her fate."[45] Having proven herself more than able in the arctic, the government was loath to give up the *Bear,* so in March 1885, Congress transferred her from the Navy to the Revenue Marine, the forerunner of the Coast Guard. She traveled to San Francisco and joined the Bering Sea Patrol. Experienced Arctic Captain M.A. "Hell-Raising Mike" Healy took command of the *Bear* as she prepared for the annual summer cruise to Point Barrow, Alaska.[46]

The *Bear's* varied duties in her years with the Bering Sea Patrol included, "search, rescue, seeking fugitives, transporting government officials, protecting seals against poachers, towing whalers to port, administering justice, feeding Eskimos – even taking whale skeletons back to 'the States' for the Smithsonian Institution."[47] From 1886 until the beginning of WWI, the *Bear*'s history was a long succession of cruises in the Bering Sea and Artic waters via the West Coast of the US, sailing north nearly every summer for forty-one years.

The most heroic deed in this chapter of *Bear's* life is the rescue of eight stranded American whaling vessels with nearly 300 men aboard trapped in Arctic ice near Point Barrow, Alaska in the winter of 1897.[48] The Arctic was already blocked with ice, and the

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[45] Bixby, *Track of the Bear*, 83.
[46] Frank Wead, *Gales, Ice and Man – A Biography of the Steam Barkentine* Bear (London, 1938), 55-73.
[47] Bixby, *Track of the Bear*, 85.
[48] Stella F. Rappaport, *The* Bear *Ship of Many Lives* (New York, 1962), 82-85.

Bear could not hope to reach Point Barrow again before August, so she traveled as far north as possible and landed an expedition that could travel overland bringing supplies to the ice bound whaling station. The only way to acquire and transport the necessary eight months of provisions was to collect and drive domesticated reindeer herds overland 1,500 miles to Point Barrow for the trapped men to eat.[49]

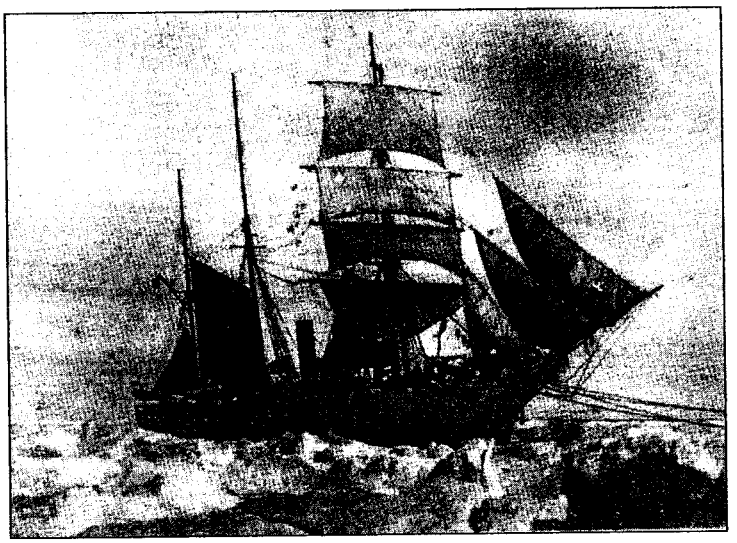

Figure 72. The *Bear* jammed in the ice off Point Barrow, 1898 (San Francisco Maritime Museum, in Burroughs, *The Great Ice Ship* Bear, 83).

The *Bear's* "Overland Relief Expedition", as it became known, was composed of a party of four men led by Lieutenant D.H. Jarvis, a few dogs, sleds, a tent, and sleeping bags. In the dead of the Arctic winter, under duress of extreme weather and almost impossible sledding conditions, the expedition traveled 1,500 miles to Point Barrow, reaching their destination on March 26, 1898. They successfully gathered enough reindeer to supplement the meager supplies of the whalemen holed up in Point Barrow,

[49] Robert H. Rankin and H.R. Kaplan, *Immortal* Bear, *The Stoutest Polar Ship* (New York, 1970), 69.

their ships frozen in or crushed by the ice.[50] On July 28, 1898, the *Bear* pushed through to Point Barrow station and reunited with Lieutenant Jarvis (figure 72). She took aboard the sailors who had lost their ships in ice or were too sickly to return south on their own vessels. She then turned south after provisioning the remnants of the battered whaling fleet, who also headed southward.[51]

The *Bear's* duties of rescuing whalers, patrolling seal rookery islands for poachers gradually changed by the turn of the century as those industries waned. In the late 1890s, *Bear* kept busy patrolling boomtowns like St. Michael and Nome on the shores of Norton Sound as waves of people chased the rumor of gold into the Yukon. Many hapless and unprepared prospectors were rescued or returned south by *Bear* rather than face the harsh winter in the Yukon. The *Bear* also served the Eskimo population of Alaska for many years, transporting natives, treating their sick, enforcing laws and hearing complaints, along with delivering mail and supplies along the inhospitable Alaskan coast.[52] After forty-one years of Alaskan cruising, the *Bear* was decommissioned on May 1, 1927 and moored at the Oakland Coast Guard base. Fifty-two years is a long life for any vessel, but it is absolutely remarkable for a vessel sailing such unforgiving ice-bound waters.

The Coast Guard eventually donated the *Bear* to the citizens of Oakland, California who opened the famous ship as a maritime museum in 1930. That May a reported 15,000 people visited her in a three-week period.[53] The same year, Fox Film Company used her in the movie *The Sea Wolf*, based on Jack London's book. She played

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[50] *Ibid.*, 67-96.
[51] Rappaport. *The* Bear *Ship of Many Lives*, 82-102.
[52] Burroughs, *The Great Ice Ship* Bear, 68-83.

the part of Death Larson's ship the *Macedonia*, and then returned to the Oakland waterfront.[54]

When the Depression of the 1930s hit and the city of Oakland could longer afford to maintain the museum ship, Rear Admiral Richard E. Byrd was looking for an ice ship suitable for his second trip to Antarctica. Oakland sold him the *Bear* at auction for $1,500. After her overhaul in Boston Navy Yard, the *Bear* participated in the 1933 Byrd Naval expedition to Little America, Antarctica.[55] A hurricane off Cape Hatteras delayed her start. She was forced into Newport News where she was put in dry dock and repaired. After nearly a month of maintenance, the *Bear* was once more ready to meet the ice.[56]

After a provisioning stop in Dunedin, New Zealand, the *Bear* left for Antarctica on January 19, 1934. The polar continent was a relative unknown for US explorers except Byrd who made one excursion there in 1928. Byrd and his party planned to winter over in the Antarctic Continent at Little America Island. His objectives for this expedition included plotting land and sea masses, taking soundings and gaining further knowledge of how a man might survive in the Antarctic where, unlike the Arctic, there are no mammals, no native inhabitants, in fact very little life at all excluding a few birds and fish (figure 73).[57]

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[53] Bixby, *Track of the* Bear, 248.
[54] Burroughs, *The Great Ice Ship* Bear, 86.
[55] *Ibid.*, 88-89.
[56] Rankin & Kaplan, *Immortal* Bear, 123.
[57] Burroughs, *The Great Ice Ship* Bear, 91.

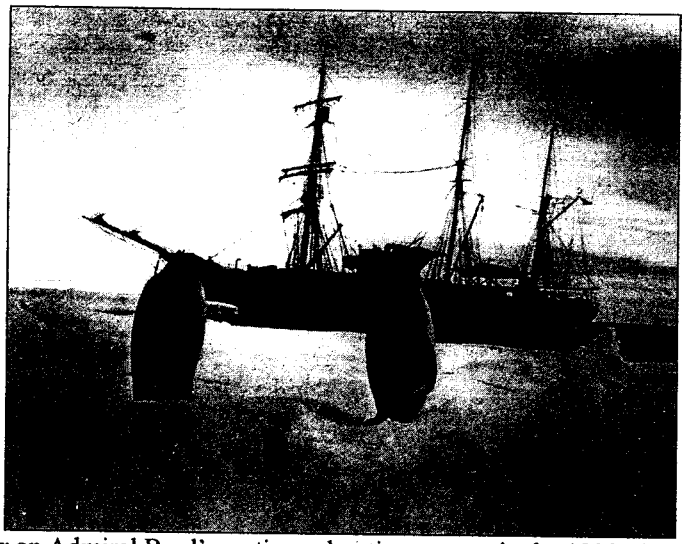

Figure 73. The *Bear* on Admiral Byrd's arctic exploration voyage in the 1930s (145561, TMM Archives).

Commenting on the *Bear's* fitness for working in the ice, especially ramming, Admiral Byrd recounted in his book *Discovery*:

> ...there was a fine and indestructible courage of [the *Bear's*] oak timbering with its sheathing of iron bark, which age and rot could not corrupt. Her crew knew it. With quiet smiles they passed around copies of a scurrilous article in a New Zealand publication which prophesied the *Bear* would never reach the ice: she was too old, too rotten – the seas would break her open and ink her. Well, there she was in the sanctuary of the Bay of Whales; and as I glanced over her and sensed the staunchness in her chunky frame, I took her measure for a trip on which I should soon dispatch her – a trip which would giver her a chance to round out her career in gallant style: not as a supply ship, an exalted grocery wagon, but in her true capacity as a vessel of exploration. I had no doubt as to her ability to live in ice.[58]

The *Bear* plowed determinedly through the ice, 60 feet thick in places, and arrived at Byrd's destination on Little America Island on February 15, 1934. Byrd's subsequent comments on the struggle south tell of the *Bear's* strength and vitality, "I don't imagine that in her sixty years of service, the white polar bear that is the ship's figurehead ever bit

into more ice than it got on the morning of February 14, 1934. She responded beautifully to every call made on her."[59] The *Bear* soon left Byrd and his companions to brave the long dark summer on Little America Island. *Bear* then battled north, fighting hurricane force winds and icebergs before she reached her berth in New Zealand where the crew repaired damage and prepared for the return voyage to rendezvous with the expedition nearly a year later to bring it home.

When the *Bear* recovered the wintering party on February 7, 1935 after their year in the Antarctic, the expedition was proclaimed a resounding success. On their return, President Roosevelt paid homage to the *Bear* and the expedition's accomplishments. But even Admiral Byrd predicted for *Bear* this was 'her last polar voyage', and presented her famous white polar bear figurehead to the Mariners' Museum at Newport News, Virginia (figure 74).[60]

Admiral Byrd wrote a letter to the Mariners' Museum saying, "I am sending you the figurehead of the *Bear*. I hope it arrives in good shape. You will recall I promised you this figurehead before leaving the States."[61] The confirmation that the Mariners' Museum holds the original figurehead came from one of *Bear's* biographers, Frank Wead in 1937. The author of *Gales, Ice, and Men,* Wead said, "judging from old photographs, sketches, etc., I am sure that you have the original figurehead of the *Bear.*"[62] Indeed, historic photographs in the Mariners' Museum archives and figurehead files show this to be true.

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[58] Richard E. Byrd, *Discovery* (New York, 1935), 96.
[59] *Ibid.*, 112
[60] *Registrar sheet OF37*, TMM. Burroughs, *The Great Ice Ship* Bear, 95.
[61] Letter from Admiral Richard Byrd to the Mariners' Museum, September 9, 1935. In OF37 file, TMM.

Figure 74. *Bear of Oakland.* OF37. Repairing damage on the barkentine *Bear* - date unknown. The rope around the neck of the carving may indicate that it was being removed from the vessel (Carol Olsen, *OF37 file Summary,*TMM, 13). (Photograph - PO406, TMM Archives).

During its tenure at The Mariners' Museum, the *Bear's* figurehead underwent numerous conservation measures. In 1948, two new forepaws were carved to replace the paws missing at the time of donation (figure 75).[63] Further restorations took place in 1974 as sections of the bear's belly and back were re-carved, and the figure was painted its current cream color. The addition of a new base carved in the 1970s rounds out the repairs that contribute to the *Bear* figurehead's appearance today. [64] Currently not on display, the *Bear* has been used in museum classroom education programs for students.

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[62] Letter from Frank Wead to A.C. Brown, November 13, 1937, per registrar sheet. In OF37 file.
[63] *Registrar sheet OF37*, TMM. "This figurehead was sent to Mr. Bader's home, via our truck, May 26, 1948, for him to make two new forepaws and set in place. Repaired and returned to the Museum and rehung July 6/48." – note TMM photos PO405 through PO407 show this carving without paws. PO520 shows them in place. (TMM Archives)
[64] *Ibid.*

Figure 75. The figurehead of the *Bear* on the bow of the barkentine at sea in 1934. Note the missing forepaw (PO520, TMM Archives).

The barkentine *Bear* did unexpectedly continue her career with the government after Byrd donated the figurehead to the museum in 1935. She was called into service in the later 1930s as part of the first United States Antarctic Service in reaction to Nazi Germany's exploration of the South Polar Region. Among the preparations made for her journey south, Bill Robertson, a three-year crew member on Byrd's second Antarctic voyage, carved a new figurehead to replace the one donated to the Mariners' Museum (figure 76).[65]

[65] Olsen, *OF37 Summary File*, TMM, 44.

Figure 76.This photo shows the replacement figurehead being installed on the *Bear*, dated March 1940. Carver W.A. Robertson poses with his lifelike second figurehead for the barkentine. (Charlotte Everingham Figurehead Materials Collection, donated to The Mariners' Museum in May 1982. It appears that Everingham obtained this photo from Robertson himself).

Even after her second tour to the Antarctic, the Navy continued to utilize the *Bear* in the newly formed Northeast Greenland Patrol, where she served until her decommission from the US Navy on June 7, 1944. In her last two decades, the *Bear* passed through a number of private hands, spending many years idle at Canadian dockyards before undertaking her last voyage on Sunday, March 17, 1963. While under tow bound for her new duty as a floating restaurant in Philadelphia, heavy seas caused the towline to snap leaving the *Bear* helpless and adrift in the high seas. *Bear* biographer Polly Burroughs, waxing poetic, infers that, "rather than move on to the plebian tasks that lay ahead, [the *Bear*] preferred to let the sea claim her." [66]

March 18, 1963 at 9:10 pm, one of America's greatest ships was swallowed up by the North Atlantic. The Coast Guard took MIT Professor Harold Edgerton and his

sidescan sonar equipment to the region where *Bear* sank in 1981 hoping to finding her. The expedition did not locate the historic vessel, and she rests in an unknown location to this day.[67]

With its varied and notable history, the *Bear's* figurehead offers an unparalleled opportunity to present the museum visitor with an artifact that was present at significant events in the American exploration of the polar seas. Not only does the museum posses the *Bear's* unique figurehead, museum archives have compiled over seventy-five historic photographs that richly illustrate the story of this long-lived vessel that had performed heroically for nearly ninety years. More than any other figurehead in the museum's collection, the figurehead of the *Bear* illustrates that by attaching the figurehead's history to the static carving, its intrinsic value can increase exponentially.

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[66] Burroughs, *The Great Ice Ship* Bear, 102.

[67] Carol Olsen, Personal communication April 2, 1983 with Coast Guard cadet who was onboard for the search. Records show the *Bear* sinking at 42°25′N Latitude, 65°35′W Longitude. Bixby, *Track of the Bear,* 286.

Uncovering Historic and Artistic Treasures: Nineteenth-Century Figureheads in the Mariners' Museum

The figurehead's history can be, and often is, lost at some point subsequent to its separation from its vessel. Removed or replaced when a vessel was refit or scrapped, or lost at sea and washed up on some foreign shore, many instances cloud a figurehead's attribution to a specific vessel. A figurehead's post-vessel history can be multifaceted, with many cracks for historical details to fall. Adding to the mystery of a figurehead's history, most of the Mariners' Museum figureheads were acquired during the 1930s and 40s in the early days of collection development. Museum records from these years are frequently vague or conflicting regarding a carving's acquisition. Often "word-of-mouth" histories relayed by antiques dealers to Mariners' agents are the only background information available for a figurehead.

There are exceptions to this trend. The seven figureheads described in this chapter all have known and uncontested histories, offering an expository glimpse into the "lives" of nineteenth-century figureheads. Moreover, the carvers are known for three of these figureheads, and in some cases photographs of the figureheads attached to their vessels exist in museum files. Gracing vessels launched between the years 1841 to 1889, these figureheads offer an excellent overview of middle and later nineteenth-century figurehead carvings, illustrating the scope and variation in the art. Allegorical female figures and naval heroes, and ship owners populate this corner of the Mariners' Museum figurehead collection, among the finest they possess.

Belle of Oregon

The figurehead from the Maine-built bark *Belle of Oregon* exemplifies the graceful female allegorical figures that decorated many nineteenth-century vessels. Launched from Goss and Sawyer shipyard in 1876, the *Belle of Oregon* was one of three "Belles" built by the Bath firm in the 1870s, all with similar full-length female figureheads carved by C.A.L. Sampson, also of Bath. Eight figureheads have been attributed to Sampson, three of which remain extant in collections around the country.[1] The most prominent aspect of Sampson's carvings, pervasive through all of his surviving figureheads, is the detailed and skillful execution he applied to his figures and their costumes.

The *Belle of Oregon's* figurehead is a full-length female figure carved clear-and-through, with a deep lacing board in the shape of the figure's swirling drapery (figure 77). This imposing figure stands over seven feet high, with a depth of nearly two feet, which was proportional to a wooden bark over 185 feet long, and rated 1169 registered tons.[2] Characteristic of Sampson's carvings, the "Belle" stands inclined on a fiddle scroll base rather than grandly striding forward. The *Belle of Oregon,* like all of Sampson's "Belle" figureheads, has a detachable extended right arm, which was removed when the vessel went to sea, preventing damage or loss of the extending appendage.[3] Three square

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[1] Carol Olsen, *Summary of* Belle of Oregon *File, OF78,* TMM, 1983, 5.

[2] Frederick C. Matthews, *American Merchant Ships 1850-1900* (Salem, Massachusetts, I, 1930), 44. The *Belle of Oregon* figurehead measures 86 ½" height x 22 5/8" deep, 74" top of head to right foot, and 9 ½" lacing board. Olsen, *Summary of* Belle of Oregon *File,OF78* ,1.

[3] "The extended arms of these twin figureheads were detachable....if the figures went to sea without braces [Sampson's] handiwork would soon ape Venus de Milo; rather than disfigure his carvings with iron rod bracing he arranged that the ladies be one-armed at sea, two-armed in port. The scheme worked so well that both ladies [*Belle of Oregon and Western Belle*] and their arms are still with us." William Avery Baker, *A Maritime History of Bath, Maine* (Bath, Maine: Marine Research Society of Bath, 1973), 661.

bunghole covers align vertically down the center front of the figure indicating the placement of the iron through bolts that affixed the figurehead to the vessel.[4]

Figure 77. *Belle of Oregon,* OF78. The figure's costume and sheath of wheat in her outstretched hand indicate the trade for which this vessel was built (Copy of painting in the Wright Collection, OF78 file, TMM).

But, who is this expertly carved figure at the bow? In her 1983 summary of this carving, Carol Olsen indicates that the *Belle of* Oregon figurehead is most likely a portrait carving, as primary sources recount Colonel Sampson often carving figureheads visually rendered from models or photographs, and that he was quite skilled in their depiction.[5] The *Belle of Oregon's* figurehead also served as a symbol of the cargo the vessel was built to haul. She grasps a sheath of wheat in the hand of her extended right arm, an emblem of the grain carrying ship she decorated (figure 78). The *Belle's* fairly ornate

[4] *The Mariners' Museum Catalouge Worksheet – OF78*, TMM, 1988.
[5] Carol Olsen, *Summary of* Belle of Oregon *File,OF78*. "An elderly resident of New Bedford tells with pride that, when she was a twelve-year-old girl in Bath, she served as a model for Colonel Sampson when he was carving the figurehead for the *Maybel*." Pauline Pinckney, *American Figureheads and Their Carvers* (New York, 1940), 139-140.

costume corresponds with contemporary fashions, but Sampson also incorporated a scalloped wheat design into the off shoulder neckline bodice, further enforcing the symbolic qualities of the figurehead. The draped overskirt with wheat tassels repeats the grain motif to the *Belle's* fashionable dress.[6]

Figure 78. *Belle of Oregon,* OF78. Note the wheat bodice details and tassels. The current all white paint scheme appears not to be the figurehead's original coloring (OF78 file, TMM).

To round out the description of her appearance, brief mention must be made of her paint scheme. She is currently painted completely white, in imitation of the clipper-style figurehead. She arrived to the Mariners' Museum painted white when the Webb Academy and Home for Shipbuilders donated her in 1941. A number of sources, including a *Belle of Oregon* crewman's recounting, indicate that she traditionally had

[6] *The Mariners' Museum Catalouge Worksheet – OF78.*

polychrome elements when she was affixed to her ship, which matches the prevailing practice on merchant ships in the late nineteenth century (figure 79a and b).[7]

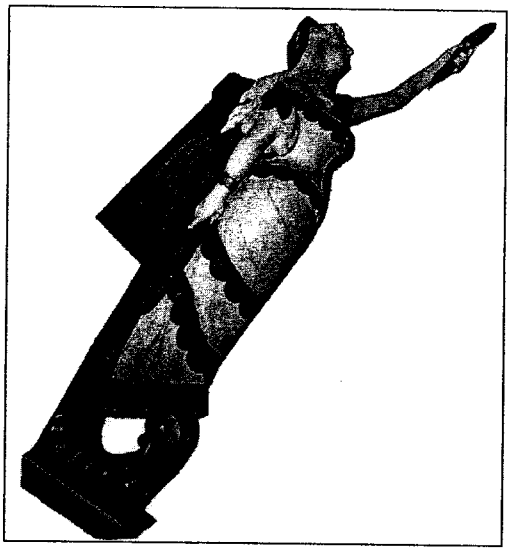
a. b. 

Figure 79. *Belle of Oregon,* OF78: a, at the Webb Institute 1908-1941 (Pauline Pinckney, *American Figureheads and Their Carvers*, plate XXIV); b, figurehead of the *Western Belle,* sister ship – and sister figurehead – to the *Belle of Oregon*, both built 1876. Note the gilt trim accenting this carving. (Brewington, *Shipcarvers of North America* (New York, 1962), 80).

The *Belle of Oregon* is exemplary not only for its beautiful figurehead, but also because the ship represents the Down East shipbuilding industry in the late nineteenth century. Southern New England shipbuilding centers that thrived in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries had virtually closed up shop, in part because of timber

[7] Olsen, *Summary of* Belle of Oregon *File, OF78*, 5. Olsen cites an article in the Bath newspaper, *American Sentinel,* praising the *Western Belle* figurehead, the twin sister of the *Belle of Oregon*, carved only a month apart for nearly identical ships. "The paper says that Sampson did the carving in excellent style and that the painting and gilding were done by Mr. Joseph Eibell, and reflects great credit upon the painter. Surely they do not mean he covered it with a coat of flat white paint, especially since that color deadens the rich details under the sleeve, in the hem, etc.... Additionally, "Charles M. Wright's letter to The Mariners' Museum dated 1-23-41 says that a man who had been a sailor aboard *Belle of Oregon* in 1886, William Sturtevant, described to him (Wright) how the *Belle of Oregon* figurehead had been painted when she was on the ship. They were apparently contrasting it to how she looked ("about 5 years ago" – in the 1930s) at the Webb Institute." Finally, other figureheads by Sampson indicate his use of color on his female figures: *Florence, Leading Wind, Alice M. Minott, Western Belle,* and *Belle of Bath.*

depletion. This allowed northern ports with greater access to timber supplies to dominate the industry. Bath, Maine proved to be chief of all the Down East shipbuilding centers where shipyards such as the Sewalls, William Rogers, Pattens, and Goss & Sawyer annually turned out at least two or three large vessels every year, supplying ample work for shipcarvers.[8]

Figure 80. Painting of the Maine-built bark *Belle of Oregon.* Built by Goss and Sawyer, 1876 (The Wright Collection, Copy in OF78 file, TMM, no date).

One may wonder why a Bath, Maine-built vessel should carry the surname "Oregon". This elegant emissary of the grain trade acquired that West Coast attribution from vessel's manager, Captain William H. Besse of New Bedford, who was engaged in the Western grain trade to the Pacific Northwest (figure 80). Captain Besse commissioned two sister barks *The Belle of Oregon* and the *Western Belle* in 1876. Bath

[8] M.V. Brewington, *Shipcarvers of North America* (New York, 1962), 79. Olsen's summary has Goss & Sawyer turning out an average of 9-10 vessels per year between 1866-1884 – no citation. Olsen, *Summary of* Belle of Bath, *OF78 file.*

historian William Avery Baker points out that, "being so nearly alike it was proper that [the two vessels] carry twin-sister figureheads carved by Colonel Sampson."[9]

Colonel Charles A. L. Sampson, of Bath, Maine (1825-1881) was one of the most prominent shipcarvers of his day. Sampson was trained by carver G.B. McLain, and upon completion of his apprenticeship, advertised his skills in the Bath *Weekly Mirror* on 31 July 1852:

> Carving – We call attention of persons interested in Ship-Carving, and ornamental wood work, to the card of C. A. L. Sampson. He is an excellent workman, and a young gentleman worthy of confidence or patronage."[10]

Having circulated his "card" in the advertising columns, Sampson gained a reputation as a highly skilled craftsman commissioned by a number of Bath shipyards. He served in the Civil War as a lieutenant colonel, his wife joining him as a Union nurse.[11] After the War, both Bath shipbuilding and Sampson's carvings reached new heights.[12] The bulk of Sampson's known carvings are from this period, a number of which are extant today, including both the *Western Belle*, the *Belle of Oregon*. Pinckney stresses the strikingly similarity in the figures' execution, including their costumes, down to the French bonnet.[13]

A column in the Bath newspaper, the *American Sentinel* on 27 April 1876 sung praises for the *Western Belle's* figurehead upon the occasion of her launching. One

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[9] William Avery Baker, *A Maritime History of Bath, Maine* (Bath, Maine, 1973), II, 664-665.
[10] *Ibid.*, 661.
[11] Sampson "went to war as captain of Company D, 3rd Marine Volunteer Infantry, and was Lieutenant Colonel of the regiment when he was honorably discharged for a disability incurred in the swamps of Chickahominy. Following his discharge Colonel Sampson was employed in Washington for a time but apparently he and his wife returned to Bath in 1864." Baker, *A Maritime History of Bath*, 662.

assumes the same sentiments were felt about the *Belle of Oregon's* nearly identical figurehead:

> Like Venus who is fabled to have risen from the foam of the sea, and Minerva, who sprung forth from the immortal head of Jupiter, so the *Western Belle* sprung forth from the forests of Maine, and while Michael Angelo could see an imprisoned angel in the block of marble by the wayside in the City of Florence, so Sampson saw the beautiful creature, constituting hi beau-ideal, in the shapeless log lying before him...While, of course, the figure adds nothing to the strength and durability of the vessels, we may compliment the person who conceived of such a figure for a vessel calculated for the grain trade. The "Belle" is represented with one arm extended, holding in her hand a fine bunch of yellow grain. The painting and gilding were done by Mr. Joseph Eibell, and reflect great credit upon the painter. To say that Col. Sampson is a finished workman is to express in very mild terms our gratification in viewing so fine a work of art (figure 81)."[14]

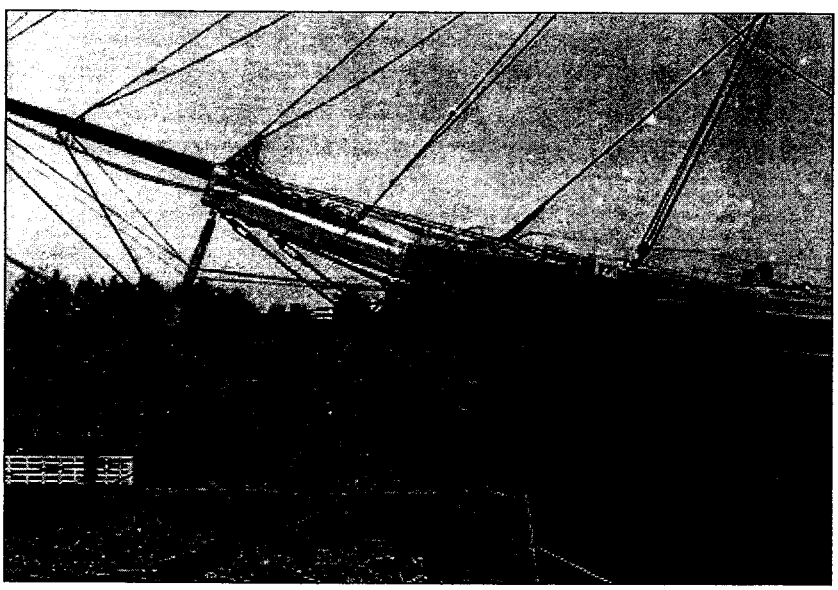

Figure 81. The bark *Western Belle,* sister ship to *Belle of Oregon,* in Goss and Sawyer Shipyard. The placement of the figurehead would have been identical on both vessels (PK76, TMM Archives).

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[12] Brewington, *Shipcarvers of North America*, 79. The *Western Belle's* figurehead was removed from the vessel in 1894 and is now in the Peabody Essex Museum in Salem, Massachusetts.
[13] Pinckney, *American Figureheads and Their Carvers*, 139-140.
[14] Baker, *A Maritime History of Bath,* 664-665.

Colonel Sampson is credited with carving at least twenty-one figureheads, yet his greater legacy lies in his passing down the waning shipcarving profession to another generation of enthusiastic apprentices. Carver Edbury Hatch as well as Abner and Woodbury Potter trained under Sampson, and an example of Hatch's work, "Warrior," resides in the Mariners' Museum.[15] Charles Sampson died in 1881, but prolific shipcarver William Southworth bought Sampson's carving business. He carved figureheads for Bath vessels until the turn of the century. [16]

The *Belle of Oregon* outlived Colonel Sampson, she continued to transport wheat from the Pacific Northwest to Europe and diversified her cargoes by 1882, carrying everything from case oil and coolie laborers, to western grain and general cargo.[17] She hailed at ports throughout Asia and the United States. Her globe trotting days almost ended during a hurricane in 1892 that inflicted extensive damage to the bark, causing the *Belle* six weeks of repairs in San Francisco.[18] She continued her international trading until 1894, when the *Belle of Oregon* returned to Bath to be cut down to a barge. At that time, Charles E. Hyde, then head of the engineering department of Bath Iron Works, purchased her figurehead from Captain Besse.[19] According to the *Bath Independent*, 28 April 1894, Hyde repainted and regilded the figure and placed her on his summer house

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[15] "Warrior" is OF43 in TMM files.

[16] Pickney. *American Figureheads and their Carvers,* 139-140. Southworth's career spanned 69 years and he estimated that he had carved figures for approximately 500 ships. Baker, *A Maritime History of Bath,* 666-669.

[17] Frederick C. Matthews, *American Merchant Ships 1850-1900* (Salem, Massachusetts, 1930), I, 44.

[18] *Ibid.*, 44-47.

[19] Baker, *A Maritime History of Bath,* 665. "Hon. Charles E. Hyde Dead" *The Bath Independent*, May 26, 1917. Hyde was a lifelong resident of Bath, was an engineer for Bath Iron Works, and reportedly designed and oversaw the building of the first American triple expansion marine engine. He became the Director of the Marine National Bank and a popular two-term Mayor of Bath. Clipping in OF78 File, TMM.

overlooking the Kennebec River.[20] The ship *Belle of Oregon* met her fate in a 1902 gale, springing a leak and quickly sinking, taking down her master and three men.[21]

The figurehead of the *Belle of Oregon* left Charles E. Hyde's private collection in October of 1908 when he donated it to the Webb Academy and Home for Shipbuilders (later renamed the Webb Institute of Naval Architecture).[22] According to The Mariners' Museum records, the *Belle of Oregon* figurehead was presented to the museum by the Webb Institute on September 26, 1940. A *New York Times* article from June 29, 1941 confirms that the figurehead was on display in the Mariners' Museum by that year.[23] The *Belle of Oregon* figurehead is currently housed in museum storage.

Edmonton

The figurehead "Lady Edmonton" from the Canadian-built bark *Edmonton* (1882) is a full-length striding figure of an ornately dressed woman. Yet another symbolic figure, this richly dressed and bejeweled lady symbolizes her vessel's namesake, the city of Edmonton, Canada (figure 82).[24] Skillfully carved, the rich folds of her dress show how the illusion of wind-swept drapery can be effectively rendered on a vessel's figurehead. Standing nearly seven feet tall, this statuesque figure bears imposing features and a solemn expression, reflecting the strength and dependability of the ship and her

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[20] *Bath Independent*, 28 April 1894.
[21] Matthews, *American Merchant Ships,* 45.
[22] "Copied from brass plate." *Registrar Sheet – OF78*, TMM.
[23] "Figurehead of a Bark – Old Carving that Survived Many Storms in Mariners' Museum – Midsouth," *New York Times*, June 29, 1941.
[24] Carol Olsen, *Summary of* Edmonton *File,OF29*, TMM, 1983, 1. Olsen's research turned up no references to an actual "Lady Edmonton" and infers that the figure refers to the name of the vessel she graced. Additionally, two other vessels built in the same area are named after Canadian cities, Brandon and Winnipeg, further strengthening the probability of the ship being named for the city.

Canadian crew. This brightly painted and gilded lady would have been attached to the bow via the lacing board at her back.[25]

Figure 82. Figurehead of Canadian bark *Edmonton,* OF29, built 1882 (TMM).

The bark *Edmonton,* built in 1882 by William Charland, the younger, was a 200-foot, 1298-ton wooden bark constructed in St. Joseph de Levis, Quebec on the south shore of the Saint Lawrence, opposite Quebec.[26] Sources record Quebec produced fewer than twenty vessels over 500 tons from 1880-1887, William Charland building seven of them.[27] According to registration records from the Public Archives, Ottawa, Ontario,

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[25] *The Mariners' Museum Catalogue Worksheet – OF29*, TMM, 1988.
[26] Olsen, *Summary of* Edmonton *File, OF29*, 1. *Edmonton* financing contract in OF29 file; also from Registration records in Public Archives, Canada, per 5/3/82 letter to TMM – in OF29 file; also Wallace, *Wooden Ships and Iron Men*, p.311. Lloyds Registry, however, shows the builder as W. Sharron.
[27] Frederic W. Wallace, *Wooden Ships and Iron Men* (New York, n.d.), 311. Wallace also built the vessels *Edinburgh* and *Braidwood* which appear to have figureheads carved by the same hand as *Edmonton.*

Edmonton had a carvel-built wooden hull, and was decorated with a female figurehead.[28] Mr. Charland sold *Edmonton* in the summer of 1882 to John Herron and James Ross, both of Liverpool, England. Between 1883 and 1897 they remained the primary owners of the vessel.[29] *Edmonton* sailed internationally approximately fifteen years before limping into St. Thomas, Virgin Islands in such a dilapidated state, that she was condemned and sold there at public auction, July 16, 1896.[30] In reference to the vessel's demise, the Mariners' Museum registrar sheet notes, "while bound from Cochin, India to New York with *general cargo* the Edmonton put into St. Thomas, Virgin Islands in a leaking condition March 7, 1896. Condemned and broken up."[31]

The *Edmonton's* figurehead next resurfaced in 1925 in an article in *The International Studio*, featuring the Nadelman Ship Figureheads. While the article does not offer any insights into the figurehead's past, it does contain the only known pre-restoration photo of the *Edmonton* carving, as well as placing the carving in the Nadelman Museum in 1925 (figure 83).[32] Unfortunately, no information remains on the figurehead's whereabouts from 1925 until her purchase by the Mariners' Museum in

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[28] Olsen, *Summary of* Edmonton *File, OF29*, 55-56. Public Archives, Canada, letter of 5/3/82 in OF29 file.
[29] The vessel had a number of owners, but Herron & Ross retained majority ownership by holding 22 shares each of 64. Olsen, *Summary of Edmonton File, OF29*, 54. Public Archives, Canada, letter of 5/3/82 in OF29 file.
[30] *Ibid.*
[31] Registrar records also indicate a letter from Captain Alf Anderson to J.L. Lochhead dated December 14, 1965 would offer more information about the situation. This letter is not currently in the file, and thus cannot be confirmed. *Registrar sheet OF29*, TMM.
[32] Mr. and Mrs. G. Glen Gould, "The Nadelman Ship Figureheads," *International Studio*, September, 1925. 51 & 53.

1934. Museum files do not contain details of where or from whom the figurehead was acquired.[33]

Figure 83. *Edmonton*, OF29. The only known pre-restoration photo of the carving ("The Nadelman Ship Figurehead," *International Studio*, September 1925).

Soon after her acquisition, the Mariners' Museum restored the *Edmonton* figurehead at the cost of seventy-five dollars.[34] She was repaired and painted again in 1974, including the replacement of her right arm.[35] Subsequently, the *Edmonton* has developed a number of minor cracks and chipping related to fluctuating humidity in the

[33] *Ibid.* The Mariners' records do not indicate from where or whom the figure was purchased. The registrar sheet does note the Nadelman article, so it is possible the figurehead was bought from them or their estate. Although, one would think more information would have been retained if the figurehead came from such a notable collection.

[34] *Ibid.*. The registrar sheet indicates that the figurehead was restored in December 1934. There is no information on what this restoration entailed.

[35] Olsen, *Summary of* Edmonton *File, OF29,* 5. Photos in the OF29 file show Percy Matthews doing the restoration work on site. Olsen notes that the right arm replacement is most likely incorrect when one compares this figurehead to others by the same carver.

museum in the 1980s. Today the "Lady" *Edmonton* remains in good condition in climate controlled museum storage.

Although the vessel for this carving is established, the specific carver is a matter of some contest. This leads one to an interesting discussion of possible carvers and comparable carvings. The "Lady" *Edmonton* has been attributed to three different carvers through the years, but, noted Canadian artist John Rogerson appears the most likely candidate.[36] Olsen lays out the suspects, none of which presents an obvious choice. Carvers Louis Jobin, Jean Baptiste Cote, and John Rogerson worked in the area where the ship was built, as did Quebec carver Edward Charters.[37] Troublesome and unfounded attributions riddle the evidence, forcing the researcher to look to similar figureheads that may hold stylistic elements establishing the origin of *Edmonton's* carving.

Olsen identified four figureheads carved by the same hand that crafted *Edmonton* by studying images of figureheads from around the world (figure 84a-d).[38] Three of the figureheads, *Edmonton, Edinburgh, and Grudrun (ex-Braidwood)*, have known histories. All three were bark-rigged, built between 1880 and 1883 and either built or owned by William Charland of Quebec.[39] However, it is the figurehead of the *Tikoma* that points towards a specific carver, John Rogerson. Olsen notes similar facial features poses and

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[36] John Rogerson was born in Scotland in 1837 and trained as a carver in Boston and St. John, New Brunswick. At the height of his career the *London Shipping Journal* called him the "best workman on the other side of the Atlantic". He retired from shipcarving in 1887 and died in St. John in 1925. Brewington, *Shipcarvers of North America*, 95-98.

[37] Olsen, *Summary of Edmonton File – OF29,* 20.

[38] Olsen, *Summary of Edmonton File – OF29,* 10. *Edmonton* (The Mariners' Museum), *Edinburgh,* (Andover, MA) *Braidwood* (Western Australia), "White Lady" (New Bedford, MA), and "Unidentified Woman" (Haugesund, Norway) all appear to be carved by the same person.

[39] *Ibid.,* 11.

costume elements, such as the tiara and pointed waist of the dress, that mark these figureheads as being likely from the same hand.[40] *Tikoma* was identified by John Rogerson's daughter as one of her father's carvings. This suggests *Edmonton,* as well as perhaps the four comparable carvings, were carved by Rogerson.[41]

Figure 84. Comparable figureheads: a, "White Lady" at New Bedford Whaling Museum; b, Unidentified Woman at Haugesund Museum, Norway; c, *Gudrun* (ex-Braidwood) at Western Australia Museum (a-c from Olsen, *Summary of* Edmonton *File,* OF29, 12-14);d, *Edinburgh* at Addison Gallery, Andover, MA (Brewington, *Shipcarvers of North America*, 94); e, *Edmonton* at the Mariners' Museum (TMM).

[40] *Ibid.,* 15-21.
[41] *Ibid. Tikoma* identification per New Brunswick Museum.

George R. Skolfield

The figurehead from the Maine-built ship *George R. Skolfield* represents another popular figurehead type for merchant vessels in the middle to late nineteenth century, the portrait head. This full-length male figurehead is a portrait of George R. Skolfield, one of the vessel's builders and masters (figure 85). A plethora of information exists on the Skolfield shipyard, the 1731 ton ship *George R. Skolfield,* and the figurehead's carver, Emery Jones. This figurehead is one of the most completely recorded figureheads in the museum's collection, and forms a fine example of the interesting stories these artifacts can tell if their histories are known.

Figure 85. *George R. Skolfield.* OF54 figurehead from Brunswick, Maine-built ship of 1885 (TMM).

The full-length striding George R. Skolfield is carved "clear and through," his left foot striding forward atop a black and gilt scroll base with an acanthus leaf design. The

lacing board along the back of the figure is also painted black in contrast to the white and gilt finish of the figure. The Brunswick, Maine shipbuilder holds rolled documents, possibly ship plans, to his chest clasped in his right hand, while his left hand remains at his side holding his hat. Mr. Skolfield is wearing, "long trousers over square toed shoes with heels, a double vested long frock coat with gilt border and buttons, vest, gilt buttoned shirt with turned down collar and neckcloth tied in a bow", which is appropriate to a gentleman's dress contemporary to the 1885 launch date of the ship. [42]

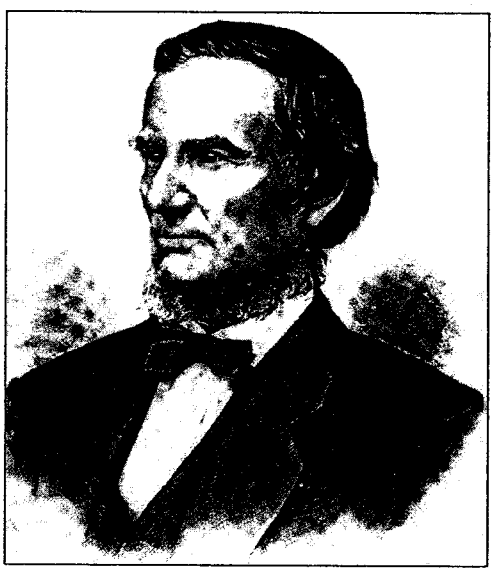
a.  b.

Figure 86. George R. Skolfield: a, engraving of the Brunswick, Maine shipbuilder (Date unknown, *History of Cumberland Co., Maine* (1880), in Ermine Reynolds & Kenneth Martin, *A Singleness of Purpose – The Skolfields and Their Ships* (Bath, Maine, 1987), 43); b, later in life, date unknown (From the Penobscot Historical Society, Brunswick, Maine. In Reynolds & Martin, *A Singleness of Purpose*, 138).

The figurehead stands just over seven feet high, which assured the carving would be seen on the 232-foot vessel it decorated. The shipbuilder's cropped locks and stern

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[42] *The Mariners' Museum Catalog Worksheet - OF54,*TMM, 1988. Scrolls, such as the one portrayed here, often emphasize the importance of a figure. For example the Andrew Jackson figureheads from the *USS Constitution* (1834 and 1846) are holding a scroll, thought to be the constitution. Carol Olsen, *Summary of* George R. Skolfield *File, OF54,* TMM, 1983, 1.

facial expression contributed to M.V. Brewington's characterization of the Victorian conventionalism guiding the chisel of late nineteenth-century Maine craftsmen[43] Stylistic critiques notwithstanding, the figurehead of the *George R. Skolfield* does resemble the actual George R., as seen in the above portrait and photograph of the shipbuilder (figure 86a and b).

This figurehead decorated the bow of its ship for only five years, from 1885 to 1900. It was removed when the ship *George R. Skolfield* underwent conversion to a barge at Newport News Shipbuilding and Dry Dock Company in Newport News, Virginia at the turn of the century. Correspondence in museum files indicates that the *Skolfield's* figurehead was next displayed between the C&O Passenger pier and the Casino Grounds in Newport News.[44] The Mariners' Museum purchased the figurehead in 1934.[45]

The museum commissioned William Geggie to repair and renovate the *George R. Skolfield* figurehead in 1959. Geggie repaired or recarved damaged portions of the figure and Allan Jones Jr. restored the color scheme to reflect the figurehead's solid white appearance in a historic photo in shipcarver Emery Jones' shop in Freeport, Maine, taken just prior to its attachment to the ship (figure 87a and b).[46] Subsequent minor repairs and maintenance have kept this figurehead in excellent condition. It is currently housed in museum storage.

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[43] Brewington noted the similarities of the figures that Jones and his New England contemporaries, Sampson, Southworth, and Hatch, Brewington carved, "the males all have the air of attending the obsequies of their best friends; the females, one of a hurried trip to the nearest obstetrician." Brewington, *Shipcarvers of North America*, 88.

[44] Letter from E.L. Blaisdell to TMM, November 24, 1935.

[45] *Registrar Sheet OF54*, TMM.

Figure 87. *George R. Skolfield* figurehead: a, before the 1959 restoration (Pinckney, *Shipcarvers of North America*, plate XXIV); b, in shipcarver Emery Jones' shop in Freeport, Maine, circa 1885 (OF54 file, TMM).

The excellent appearance of this carving owes much to the care and skill applied by its carver, Emery Jones, who noted that the *George R. Skolfield's* figurehead was, "one piece of work of which he was especially proud."[47] Multiple sources note Mr. Jones of Freeport, Maine (1827-1907) as the figurehead's carver, and descendants of Mr. Jones supplied figurehead researchers M.V. Brewington and Carol Olsen with ample details of this industrious carver's life (figure 88). Jones carved for shipbuilders in Freeport, Yarmouth, Brunswick, Bath, Newcastle, and Damariscotta, Maine, managed his farm and livery stable, and delivered the mail twice a day from South Freeport to

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[46] *Ibid.*

[47] "Fifty & One Years Married – Mr. and Mrs. Jones", unidentified newspaper clipping in Mrs. Elinor Detlefsen's family scrapbook. Cited in a report by Carol Olsen recounting her interview with Mrs. Detlefsen in 1983. Olsen, *Summary of* George R. Skolfield *File*, OF54, 5-10.

Freeport.[48] Letters from Jones' grandson W.L. Gooding recount the reminiscences of an acquaintance of Jones who lived near his shop:

> "He was an excellent carver, doing work for shipbuilders in many places, Yarmouth, Bath, Brunswick, Damariscotta, etc. I used to hear him tell how he drove to Damariscotta, took measurements of a ship and returned home to start the work, all the same day. I have seen him look at a picture or a pattern, then make a few quick strokes on the wood with a pencil, seize his chisel and mallet and soon the desired thing would take form. Mr. Jones was a fast worker and very deft in handling his tools. His work required huge amounts of glue and paint. He had a little paint mill and always a pot of glue on the stove. Hundreds of dollars worth of gold beaten thin and placed between the leaves of a little book was used for gilding. Many times I have watched him slide the gold leaves with a brush onto the wood and smoothly brush them out. No sticking; no wrinkles. In those days there was no subterfuge about the work or materials, it had to be real. When one saw a gilded surface he knew it was coated with pure gold."[49]

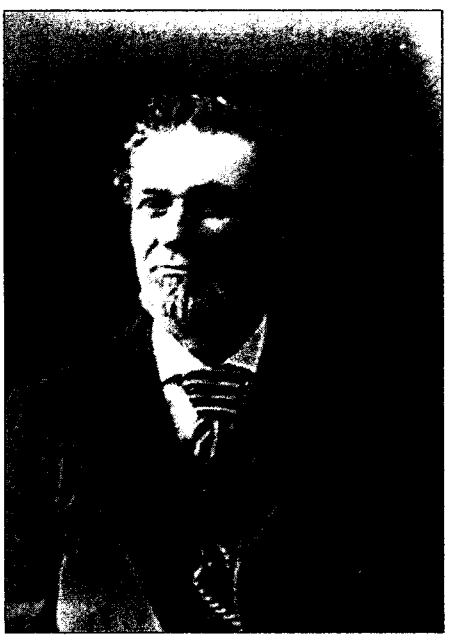

Figure 88. Emery Jones (1827-1907), the *George R. Skolfield* figurehead's carver (OF54 file, TMM).

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[48] Brewington, *Shipcarvers of North America,* 82.

[49] Letters from W.L. Gooding; New England *Directories,* in Brewington, *Shipcarvers of North America,* 82-83.

Jones partnered with another prominent Maine carver, William Southworth (1826-1909), to carve many of the figureheads for the Brunswick, Maine Skolfield fleet.[50] Interestingly, Southworth bought C.A.L. Sampson's Bath, Maine carving shop in 1881. Sampson, of course, carved the Mariners' figurehead *Belle of Oregon*, and also carved the figurehead for the 1870 ship *George Skolfield*, named after George R. Skolfield's father.[51] The below photograph of the *George Skolfield's* figurehead depicts a very similar carving to that of *George R.*, reminding one of the small group of artisans supplying the region with carvings and their mutual influence (figure 89).

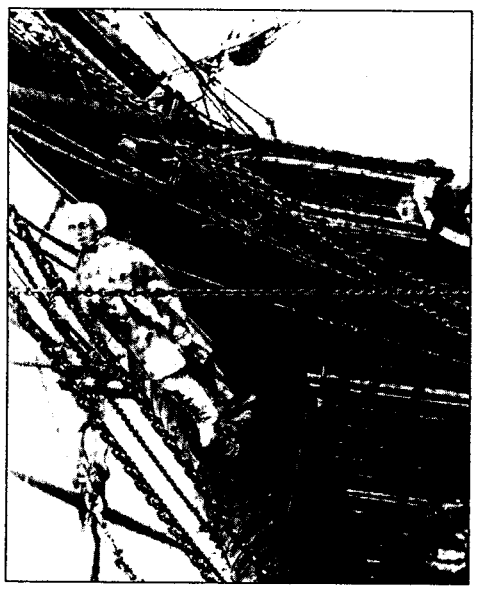

Figure 89. Figurehead of the ship *George Skolfield*, carved by C.A.L. Sampson. Note the similar pose and style to the *George R. Skolfield Figurehead* in the Mariners' Museum (Reynolds and Martin, *A Singleness of Purpose, The Skolfields and Their Ships*, 149).

The ship *George R. Skolfield*, was the culmination of an eighty-three year tradition of shipbuilding in the Skolfield family of Brunswick, Maine (figure 90). The

[50] *Ibid.*, 79.
[51] Baker, *A Maritime History of Bath, Maine*, 663.

George R. was the last and largest full-rigged ship built in Brunswick.[52] The family patriarch, George R's father George Skolfield (1776-1866), had built up his Brunswick shipbuilding business from scratch, leaving his sons with one of the finest shipyards in the region. Despite the decline of sailing ships at the turn of the twentieth century, George R. carried on with the family business, constructing four ships and two barks between 1870 and 1885.[53]

Figure 90. Painting of the ship *George R. Skolfield*, built 1885, unknown artist and date (Wright Collection 2.79, TMM Archives).

According to Skolfield biographers Ermine Reynolds and Kenneth Martin, George R. considered his namesake, the *George R. Skolfield,* the finest of all the Skolfield ships. At almost 1,650 tons and measuring 232 feet in length, she certainly was

[52] Anna W. Hammond, "Skolfield – Shipbuilders & Seafarers," *Down East* (Camden, Maine, April 1975): 53-56, 71.

[53] *Ibid.,* 55. The other five ships George R. Skolfield built during those years were the *George Skolfield, Fannie Skolfield, Samuel Skolfield, Samuel Skolfield II,* and the *I.L. Skolfield.*

the largest of the fleet.[54] A local newspaper reporter highlighted some of the construction details of the *George R.*, following a tour of the ship while still on the ways:

> we took a look at the outside frames, the extra fastenings at the stern built up with the best oak roots or knees, also at the immense timbers put in the bow....It was stated by a Bath mechanic that this ship has as many deck timbers as a ship built a year or two ago at Bath and rated at 2250 tons. The frames...almost abut on each other, so thickly are they set.... Wherever you look, no matter what the department, the work is done in the most thorough manner; and Master George says it is his intention to turn out the very best ship ever built at the yard (figure 91).[55]

Figure 91. The ship *George R. Skolfield* undergoing repairs, unknown date. Note the white figurehead on the bow (Reynolds and Martin, *A Singleness of Purpose*, 151).

The Skolfield's not only built strong ships, the large and close-knit family also owned and commanded their vessels. The Skolfields dealt mainly in the Far East and Australian trade, which is where the *George R.* spent most of her fourteen years under

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[54] Reynolds and Martin, *A Singleness of Purpose – The Skolfields and Their Ships,* 135.
[55] *Brunswick Telegraph,* 13 March 1885, in Reynolds & Martin, *A Singleness of Purpose*, 135-136.

sail, often carrying case oil.[56] Declining economic conditions and competition from iron ocean-going ships in the 1890s put considerable strain on the Skolfield fleet. They held on to the *George R.* as long as possible, finally selling her to the Seaboard Transportation Company of New York in 1899, who converted her to a tow barge.[57] The *George R's* fate was indicative of the final phase of wooden shipbuilding in Maine. Large Down East schooners became the lifeblood of Maine's merchant marine by the turn of the century. Even though the Skolfield Brothers possessed the technical capability to build these high-capacity, cheaper to operate coasting schooners, they did not shift their operations to produce these vessels.[58]

Sailing without her figurehead or ship-rig, the *George R. Skolfield* operated as a barge until February 1920 when a high wind and stormy seas parted the tow line and she was driven ashore on the New Jersey Coast. Unsalvageable, the *George R.* disappeared into the Jersey beach until a forty-foot section of her hull became uncovered in the early 1970s. Admirable detective work by Susan Langston, who helped recover the hull remains, identified the wooden hull section as the *George R. Skolfield.* The fairly intact section was taken to Bath, Maine where it is on permanent display at the Maine Marine Museum as part of a larger exhibit on the Skolfield's and their ships.[59]

The Maine Maritime Museum's exhibit, along with their well-researched publication, *A Singleness of Purpose – the Skolfields and Their Ships*, signifies the great wealth of information readily available for a collaborative study of the *George R.*

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[56] Reynolds and Martin, *A Singleness of Purpose*, 144.
[57] *Ibid.*, 144-149.
[58] *Ibid.*, 150-152.
[59] *Ibid.*, 157-158.

Skolfield figurehead in the Mariners' Museum.[60] Both museums can add to the inherent historic value of all the artifacts associated with the Skolfield family and their vessels by sharing of files, photos, and research.

Benmore

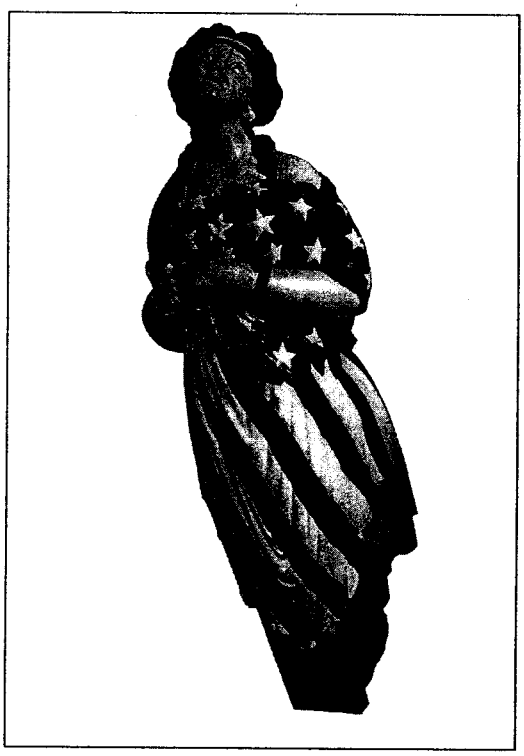

Figure 92. *Benmore.* OF55. 1870 Scottish-built American iron ship. This figurehead depicts Columbia, a female symbolic representation of the United States (TMM).

The second most recognizable figurehead in the Mariners' Museum is another American icon, the figurehead of the iron ship/bark *Benmore* (figure 92). The dramatic stars and stripes paint scheme coupled with the skillful carving of the neo-classical female figure make this one of the most arresting figureheads in any museum. The

[60] The nameboard for the *Lydia Skolfield* (1860) also resides in the Mariners' Museum collection.

subject of this patriotic three-quarter figurehead is Columbia, a popular nineteenth-century iconographic representation of the United States. The figurehead from the Scottish-built iron ship *Benmore,* like the figureheads from the Scottish-built USCGC *Bear* and the yacht *Narada*, warrants inclusion in this North American study, for its subsequent association with the United States.

Benmore's Columbia is a three-quarter length polychromed female figure draped in an off-shoulder classical costume, painted to mimic a richly-hued American flag. The volute base is painted gray and black, decorated on the sides with a green leaf design. A gray band and crown encircle Columbia's black wavy hair, which is pulled into a loose bun with tendrils spilling over her shoulders. Her hands come together at her waist and she wears a green snake bracelet on her left arm.[61]

All evidence indicates that this is the original figurehead for the *Benmore*. The figure was most likely carved in Glasgow, Scotland around 1869 or 1870, corresponding with the ship's launch location and date. The figurehead's three-quarter arrangement on the vessel, as if sprouting from the cutwater, is more characteristic of figureheads carved in the British Isles, as opposed to the predominance of striding figures atop the terminal end of a concave cutwater seen in North America. This is confirmed by the lowered arm placement along with the slight left tilt to her head, which departs from the outstretched arm and forward seeking gaze of many nineteenth-century North American figureheads.[62]

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[61] *The Mariners' Museum Catalogue Worksheet – OF55,* TMM, 1988.

[62] Peter Norton, *Ships' Figureheads* (New York, 1976), 112-114. The figurehead of the British clipper *Cutty Sark* (built 1869) reflects a similar style and placement to the *Benmore's* three-quarter figure. Norton acknowledges that there are many exceptions to this generalization.

The name Benmore denotes a promontory in Northern Ireland, also known as Fair Head; however, no known connection with Northern Ireland emerges in the history of the ship. In considering the original identity of the *Benmore* figurehead, one is drawn to the classical hairstyle and drapery that suggest she was originally carved as a classical figure. The snake bracelet, often seen on classical Greek female figures, likewise supports the theory of classical subject.[63] A distant photograph of the ship taken between 1900-1912 when *Benmore* was Norwegian-owned, shows the figurehead with a more monochromatic paint job, possibly even with a completely white paint scheme, confirming the stars-and-stripes attire as a later manifestation (figure 93).

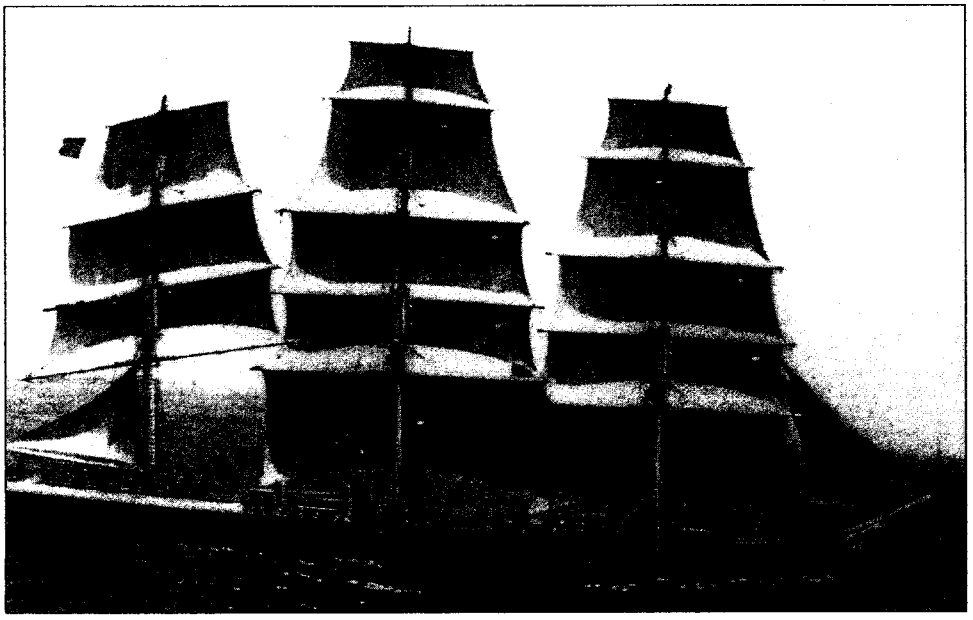

Figure 93. Iron ship *Benmore*, built 1870 in Scotland. This photo was taken when she was under Norwegian ownership, 1900-1912. Careful inspection of the photo reveals a more monochromatic, possibly even all white paint scheme for the figurehead (APK52 vol.2, TMM Archives).

[63] Carol Olsen, *Summary of* Benmore, *OF55 File,* TMM, 1983,1-2. Olsen suggests several classical identities: St. Bride, Thetis, Cleopatra, or Hygieia. However, no conclusive evidence has been uncovered. Interestingly, subsequent articles featuring the *Benmore's* figurehead mention Cleopatra as the figurehead's original identity.

The current identity of the *Benmore* figurehead is undoubtedly Columbia, the female figure symbolizing the United States.[64] Columbia is the product of the neoclassical metamorphosis of the Native-American woman that symbolized the North American continent in the eyes of Europeans after American independence. The new iconographic symbol of America became "Columbia", "Liberty", "Miss Liberty", or "the Goddess of Liberty." This symbol remained popular into the twentieth century, when it is depicted on the covers of *Leslie's Illustrated* from 1918, in a startlingly similar form to the *Benmore's* figurehead (figure 94).[65]

Figure 94. Covers of *Leslie's Illustrated* from 1918. Columbia is dressed in the American flag, a style seen during and post World War I (Olsen, *Summary of* Benmore, *OF55 File*, 3-4).

This paint scheme was probably originally done by her first American owner, US Mercantile Marine Corporation (1920-21). Supported by the nearly identical appearance

[64] "Columbia: The United States." *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary* Springfield, Massachusetts, 1989), 262.
[65] Peter Welsh, *American Folk Art, The Art and Spirit of a People* (Washington, DC, 1965), 10.

of Columbia on *Leslie's Illustrated* covers from 1918, and especially since "United States" was part of the company name, this is the most likely time *Benmore's* figurehead made the patriotic transition into an American icon, reflecting the patriotic mood of the post World War I United States.[66]

The *Benmore* figurehead came to Mariners' Museum in 1935. It was removed from the ship between 1924, when records indicate that the *Benmore* was ready for scrapping, and 1927, when the ship was last listed in Lloyds register.[67] The history of the figurehead becomes obscured between its removal from the ship and its appearance in a Jersey City warehouse. A Mariners' agent and his wife spotted the figurehead in a second story window in 1935. They bought the carving, which was unidentified at the time, and had been in the warehouse as long as the man working there could remember. [68]

The same museum agents discovered the figurehead's identity while looking at an old mariner's scrapbook in the Great Lakes area. They came across a newspaper clipping with the *Benmore's* figurehead on the bow of her ship (figure 95). Unfortunately, the name of the ship could not be seen in the photo, and the name of the newspaper also was unknown, although after careful scrutiny, it appeared the illustration had most likely come from a New York paper. The photo and associated article from *The Herald Tribune*, July 29, 1924, which identified the ship as the *Benmore,* was eventually located by the museum personnel that began the search.[69]

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[66] Olsen also mentions that *Benmore* did have a second American owner, Pendleton Bros. Inc. (1922-24), "but it seems more likely that the figurehead was painted by her first American owner." Olsen, *Summary of* Benmore, *OF55 File*, 3.
[67] Olsen, *Summary of* Benmore, *OF55 File*, 5.
[68] OF55 file, TMM.
[69] *Ibid.*.

Figure 95. The figurehead of the *Benmore*.OF55 on the bow of her vessel (PO143, TMM Archives).

A number of restorative measures have been undertaken for the *Benmore* figurehead since its accession in 1935. The base recess, where the figurehead attached to the top of the cutwater, was filled in during the 1930s, and a complete "restoration" of the figurehead was carried out by carver William Geggie in 1960 for the price of $325.[70] *Benmore's* Columbia retains her unique star-spangled drapery and is currently in museum storage.

The history of the vessel provides a narration of the late nineteenth century Australian wool races. The 242-foot long, 1,460 ton, iron ship *Benmore* was characterized as "a big iron Clyde creation, built with no pretensions to clipper class, but which developed such a reputation for speed that she could always fix a wool charter,

[70] OF55 file, conservation notes.

even in the palmy days of wool racing."[71] Launched in Port Glasgow, Scotland by J. Reid & Co., she was English owned when she raced ships such as the *Cutty Sark, Pericles*, and *Thermopylae* from exotic south sea ports to England between 1870 and 1899.[72] In 1885, *Benmore* made passage from Sydney to London, dock to dock, in 75 days, an incredible passage.[73] She was still running strong in 1890, making a 106 day passage from San Francisco to Liverpool.[74]

Some entertaining first hand accounts of *Benmore* crew members are written up in *Sea Breezes* articles from the 1920s and 1930s. Colorful characters populate these accounts, including Scottish skipper Captain Scot, who is characterized by one of *Benmore's* former sailors as, "like the clipper ship captain mentioned by Conrad, 'Give him the wind two points abaft the beam, and he became constitutionally incapable of giving an order to shorten sail....He would carry sail to the point of madness,' but this does not mean reckless dare devilry. Few sailing ship masters made less mistakes in handling or driving their charges."[75]

From 1900 to 1912, she was Norwegian owned according to Lloyds Register. She returned to English ownership for a year, then to Canadian hands until 1920 when she was purchased by an American firm. It appears at this point that *Benmore* operated as a coal hulk in St. Thomas in the West Indies.[76] According to information on the Mariners' Museum registrar sheet, the *Benmore* was "pulled out" of St. Thomas and

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[71] *Sea Breezes,* (October 1934), 281.
[72] *Ibid.,* 281-2.
[73] *Sea Breezes,* (August 1932) 87.
[74] Cicely Fox Smith, *The Ocean Racers*, 208.
[75] *Sea Breezes,* (October 1934), 281-2.

brought to Norfolk, Virginia where she was loaded with coal bound for Genoa, Italy in 1924.[77] The *Benmore* left Norfolk July 9 but leaked so severely that she put into New York for repairs July 13.[78] The worn-out vessel was either condemned, foundered, or scrapped sometime between 1924 and 1927 when it was removed from the Lloyds register of US merchant vessels.[79] The figurehead must have been unshipped around this time, eventually making her way to Jersey City, where she was found by Mariners' Museum agents in 1935.

Galatea

This beautiful figurehead from the clipper ship *Galatea* demonstrates the value of careful historic research. The vessel from which the *Galatea* figurehead originated, and the carver who crafted her can be distilled, however, inconsistent evidence in museum files, coupled with conflicting attributions in publications complicates the story of the *Galatea* figurehead. This describes the situation for a number of figureheads in the Mariners' Museum. Yet, scrutiny of the facts and the figure itself establish the identity for this graceful white lady.

Aesthetically, the well-modeled lines of the *Galatea* figurehead are akin to a Greek statue (figure 96a and b). One would think that convincingly transforming wood into simulated stone heightened the art of figurehead carving, a number of folk art authors believe this practice contributed to the shipcarvers' downfall. While praising the

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[76] *Lloyds Registers,* in Olsen, *Summary of* Benmore *File,* 41-42. Letter on OF55 Registrar Sheet from Fred Hill, OF55 File.
[77] Letter from Fred Hill, TMM to Mr. Ferguson, no date, quoted on *Registrar Sheet – OF55,* TMM.
[78] *Sea Breezes* (November, 1926), 148.

Galatea's carver for imagination and inspiration, figurehead author Pauline Pinckney criticizes the carving for being, "smooth and hard in its modeling – a quality which results from a lack of appreciation of the wood as a medium of expression," expounding that, "many of the clipper-ship carvers failed to take advantage of the grain of the wood in their modeling."[80]

Figure 96. The *Galatea* .figurehead, OF76: a, right side view; b, head on view (TMM).

The all-white *Galatea* embodies the marble-like inclined and striding classical figureheads prevalent in mid-century clipper ships. This over six-foot tall full-length female figure strides, left foot forward atop a scroll base with a mortised notch attaching her to her ship. A sinuous fabric swath encircles *Galatea's* left shoulder exposing the

[79]Olsen, *Summary of* Benmore *File,* 41-42.

right side of her body. This drapery extends down the figure's back disguising the lacing board. Her flowing hair also wraps around her shoulders and cascades down her back.[81] indicate The carver's talent and attention to detail is indicated by the skillful depiction of the female figure, along with details such as the floriated wreath decorating *Galatea's,* head.

The character Galatea originates in Greek mythology. Described most often as a sea nymph, she enthralled many heroes and monsters alike, including the Cyclops. Pinckney infers,

> "the carver's idea of Galatea was probably gained from the Greek classic scene of the Cyclops, as Theocritus gives it in *Idyl VI*, describing Polyphemus combing his coarse locks and examining his one eye in the reflection of the sea, singing to Galatea, 'Oh, milk-white Galatea, why cast off him who loves you?...more what than the pressed milk to look upon...more delicate than the lamb thou art...Here will I learn to swim if perchance some stranger cam hither sailing with his ship, that I may see why it is so dear to have thy dwelling in the deep.' Or perhaps the artist recalled the classic scene which depicts Galatea as she comes to life under the hand of the sculptor, Pygmalion. Some of the sailors who were familiar with the latter story called the ship the *Pygmalion*. Be that as it may, this well-conceived figurehead reveals a knowledge of the classics."[82]

This figure has a somewhat contested history. She is definitely from an American clipper ship named *Galatea*, however, sources disagree on which *Galatea*. The original Mariners' Museum attribution, cited in numerous figurehead publications, contends that this is the figurehead of the medium clipper ship *Galatea,* built in 1854 by Joseph

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[80] Pinckney, *American Figureheads and their Carvers*, 129-130.
[81] *The Mariners' Museum Catalogue Worksheet*, TMM, 1988.
[82] Pinckney, *American Figureheads and their Carvers,*130.

Magoun of Charlestown, Massachusetts.[83] Pauline Pickney's *American Figureheads and their Carvers*, dramatically recounts of the Mariners' *Galatea* figurehead's career on the 1854 clipper *Galatea,* including the figure being transported into the African interior to be worshiped as a deity by local tribes.[84] Elements of Pinckney's story can be corroborated, but many cannot, including the deification of the lady *Galatea.*[85]

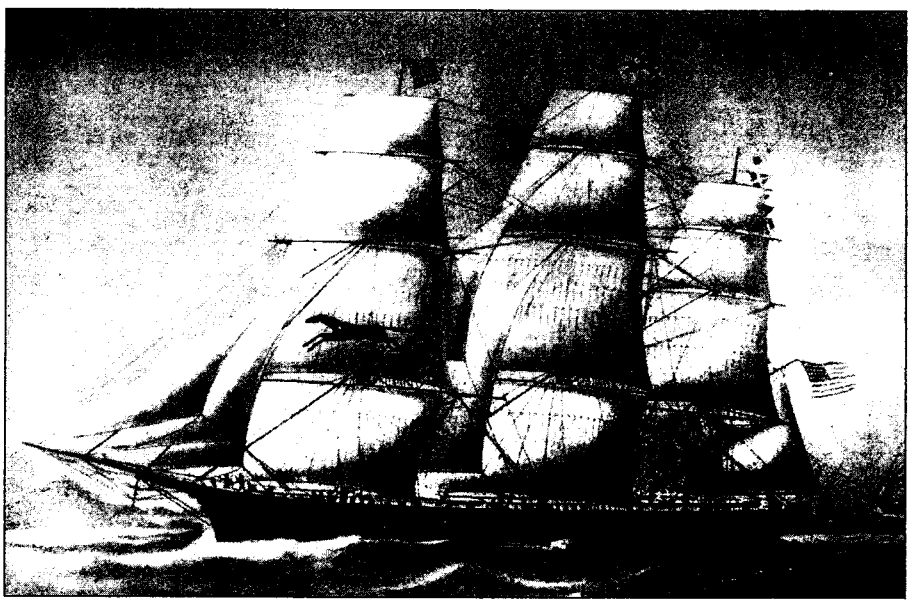

Figure 97. *Galatea*, American clipper ship from 1865 (PK4830, TMM Archives).

Research by Carol Olsen contends that the *Galatea* figurehead comes from another American clipper, *Galatea*, built in East Boston in 1865 (figure 97).[86] Olsen bases her findings on an article in a 1939 *Cape Town Argus* newspaper describing the sale of the figurehead to the Mariners' Museum. The article gives an account of the

[83] Built for W.F. Weld and Co. of Boston. Harry Barber, Captain. Her dimensions were 182 x 36.6 x 23. 939 tons. Howe and Matthews, *American Clipper Ships,* Vol. 1, 213.
[84] Pinckney, *American Figureheads and their Carvers*, 130.
[85] The misattribution in a general subject reference such as Pinckney's especially confuses the historic record as it perpetuates a false identity for decades.
[86] Carol Olsen, *Summary of* Galatea, *OF76 File*, TMM, 1983. The 1865 *Galatea's* dimensions were 192'loa x 38' beam x 24' depth of hold, and 1268 registered tons. Lloyds Register of Shipping.

figurehead's history as told by Captain Yngve Eiserman, a Swedish collector, who "during his forty year residence in Cape Town had retrieved many shipping relics of historical interest and presented them to overseas museums."[87] Captain Eiserman received his information from a local man who was part of the *Galatea's* last crew and is described in the *Cape Town Argus* article in July of 1939,

> The ship to which she gave her name was, I believe, one of the early American clippers whose memory is still honoured in the States. After making her name under the American flag she passed into German hands. Then one day in 1882, she was badly battered in a gale off Port Elizabeth...so the crippled *Galatea* crawled into Table Bay and was dry docked...the first ship to use the newly completed dock. But a sad blow fell upon the captain and his crew. Their ship was condemned as being no longer fit for sea. When the old *Galatea* was condemned she became a hulk in Table Bay. When she outlived her period of usefulness in even that lowly capacity she was run ashore among the breakers on Blaauwberg beach and broken up. Her figurehead, I believe, was saved by a Mr. Stevens at Blaauwberg. Eventually it passed into the ownership of Mr. Charles Bleach who set it up in his hotel at Simon's Town. There it was always an object of interest....Now the American Museum has raised the money for its purchase and from letters I have said they are very glad over there to be getting it back. The figurehead, carefully packed, left in the American steamer *West Isleta* for New York on Thursday.[88]

Olsen dissects Eiserman's interview as well as correspondence in museum files. She stresses that Eiserman said *Galatea* was *one* of the early American clippers. In correspondence with the museum, he also comments the figurehead was from a Boston built vessel.[89] The 1865 *Galatea* was built in East Boston, additionally, the 1865 ship's home port was Bremerhaven, Germany from 1877 until 1883.[90] The *Cape Argus* article mentions the ship passing into German hands. Eiserman also says that the *Galatea* was

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[87] "Goddess Leaves City for America," *The Cape Town Argus*. Cape Town, South Africa, July 15, 1939.
[88] *Ibid.*
[89] Letter from Y. Eiserman to Mr. D. Carver, TMM, July 26, 1938.
[90] *European Lloyds Register of Shipping*, in Olsen, *Summary of* Galatea, *OF76 File.*

badly battered in a storm and went to the Table Bay dry dock in 1882 (elsewhere he says 1883) where she was condemned (figure 98).[91] This date fits with *Galatea's* last listing in *European Lloyds Register of Shipping* in 1883.[92]

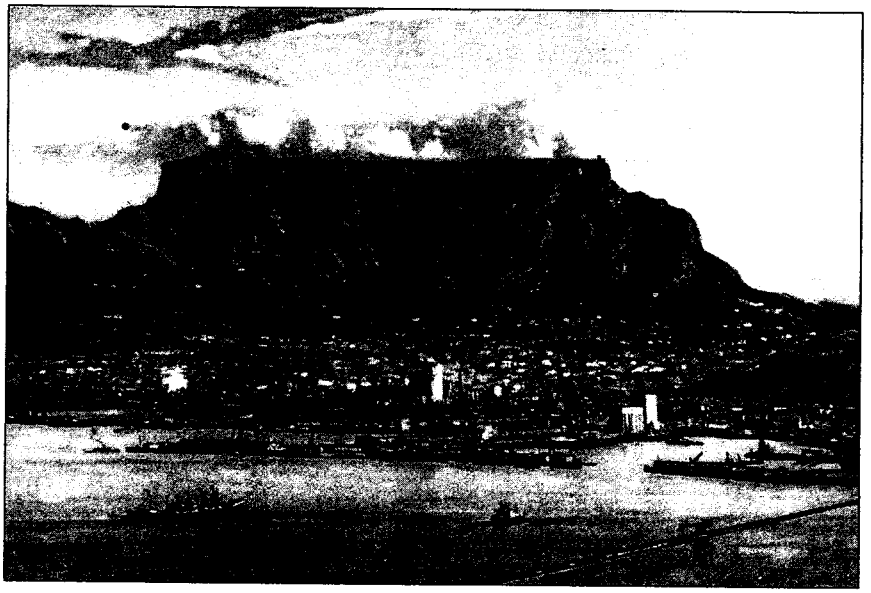

Figure 98. Table Bay, South Africa, the reported final destination of the 1865 clipper *Galatea* (PH2433, TMM Archives).

Olsen largely discounts the 1854 *Galeata* attribution as a mistake because the circumstantial evidence of the vessel's clipper designation and the Charlestown shipyard's close proximity to Boston. The 1854 ship, moreover, did not have German owners. A painting now the Peabody Essex Museum depicts the 1854 clipper ship *Galatea.* The figurehead appears to be holding her hand to her head, while the Mariners' *Galatea's* hands do not rise higher than her waist, proving illustrative evidence discounting the 1854 attribution.[93]

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[91] "Goddess Leaves City for America," *The Cape Town Argus.* Cape Town, South Africa, July 15, 1939.; Letter from Y. Eiserman to Mr. D. Carver, TMM, July 26, 1938.
[92] *European Lloyds Register of Shipping,* in Olsen, *Summary of* Galatea. *OF76 File.*
[93] Olsen, *Summary of* Galatea. *OF76 File.*

a. b.

Figure 99. Similarities are seen between: a, *Galatea* figurehead ("from the Museum at Cape Town, Africa" pre-1939 photo, *OF76 File*, TMM); and b, *Glory of the Seas* figurehead "as she decorates the stairs at India House Inn, New York City" , pre-1940. Now in the Peabody Essex Museum (Pinckney, *American Figureheads and Their Carvers,* plate XXII).

Olsen also proposes a likely carver for the *Galatea* figurehead, Boston carvers Herbert Gleason and E. Warren Hastings. Her convincing argument compares the *Galatea* to the Peabody Essex Museum's figurehead from the Donald McKay clipper *Glory of the Seas*, carved by Herbert Gleason. These carvings were both created in Boston around the same time, 1865 and 1869 respectively. Olsen contents the two carvings' astonishing similar style and appearance establish them most likely carved by the same hand, or at least fabricated in the same shop (figures 23a and 23b).[94] American decorative arts scholar, Jane L. Port found the argument convincing enough to note Ms.

Olsen's researched attribution in her article on Boston's nineteenth-century ship carvers in her *Antiques* article in November 2000.[95] Currently in museum storage, the Mariners' Museum's *Galatea* figurehead can be firmly attributed to the 1865 clipper *Galatea* through both historic and stylistic testimony.

Narada

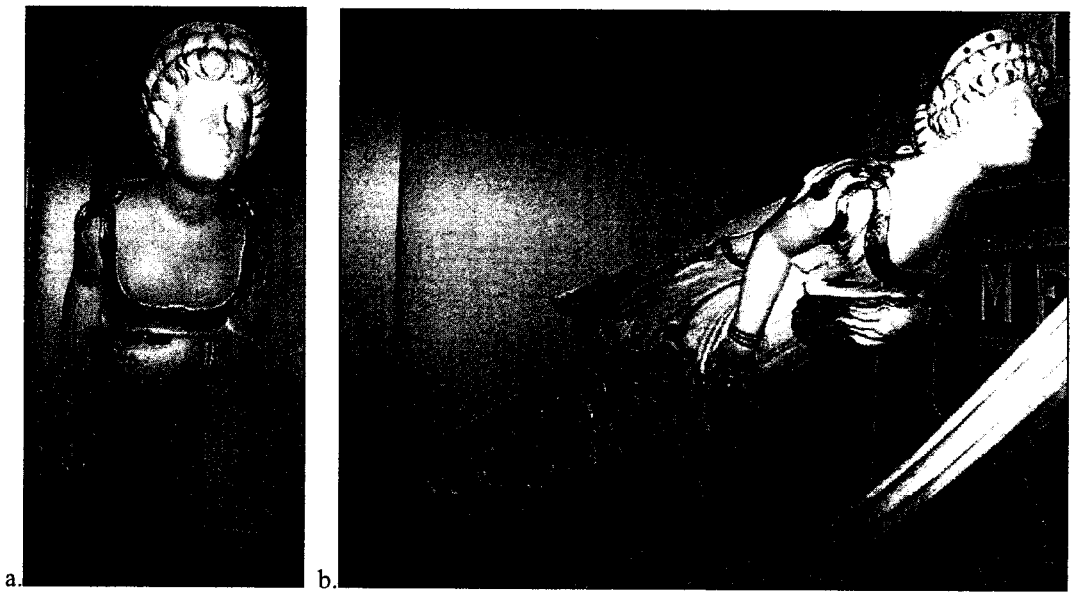

Figure 100. Figurehead from 1889 steam yacht *Narada*, OF1: a, front view; b. right side view (Photos by Catherine Green, 2000).

This white and gold three-quarter-length female figurehead is an example of the style of bow decoration on turn of the century yachts (figures 20a and 20b). Growing directly out of the trailboards and cutwater, this gilt lady is dressed in an ancient tunic with riband, holding a fan in her left hand. The trailboards pick up below the waist and

[94] Michael Jay Mjelde, *Glory of the Seas* (Middleton, Connecticut, 1970), 13. Norton, *Ships' Figureheads,* 122. Olsen, *Summary of* Galatea, *OF76 File.*
[95] Jane I. Port, "Boston's Nineteenth-Century Ship Carvers," *Antiques*, Vol. 158, Issue 5. (November 2000), 754-761.

are richly carved in a ribbon and acanthus leaf design, centered around a vase. The main point of attachment to the vessel for this figurehead is the lacing board at her back. This positioned her beneath the bowsprit continuing the extreme curve of the bow. She is uniquely adorned with an assortment of jewelry. An unusual feature of this figurehead is the faux-gem-studded, actually glass-studded, metal tiara that marks this figure as a queen.

Figure 101. *Semiramis Building Babylon* (unfinished) painting by Edgar Degas, 1860-62. Oil on canvas, now in the Musèe d'Orsay, Paris (www.ocaiw.com).

The identity of this crowned lady is Semiramis, which corresponds to the yacht's original name. Semiramis was Queen of Assyria from 810-805 BC, and became a mythological and legendary character in many stories centered in the city of Babylon.[96] The choice of using this quasi-legendary Assyrian Queen for a figurehead may come from her appearance in numerous nineteenth-century literary and artistic works. Many ships from the last century of sail used figureheads with theatrical, musical, or literary

associations. Although obscure today, the story of Semiramis was wildly popular as a subject for literature, the visual arts and the operatic stage up to the end of the nineteenth century (figures 101 and 102).[97]

Figure 102. Nineteenth-century marble statue of *Semiramis* by William Wetmore Story, 1872–1873 (Dallas Museum of Art, 1999, http://www.dm-art.org/collections.htm).

An insurgence of literary-themed figureheads emerges in the nineteenth-century when looking at various figurehead collections around the world. Books certainly were more widely available in the 1800s, which may have fostered the use of figureheads from literature.[98] Practical elements also led ship owners to literary themes: "for example, while a contemporary portrait figurehead of a lady in an 1876 dress may be elegant, it is also immediately out of date. On the other hand, there is a timeless quality to a literary

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[96] George E. Foryan, *Semiramis – Legendary Mysterious Great Queen of Assyria* (www.nineveh.com/semiramis), 1-9. The name Semiramis is a later, Hellenized form of the Sumerian name "Sammur-amat", or "gift of the sea." Bruce Self, *Semiramis, Queen of Babylon* (www.idolphin.org/semir).

[97] Semiramis is the protagonist in Pedro Calderon de la Barca's seventeenth-century drama *The Daughter of the Air.* Voltaire also wrote a tragedy titled *Semiramis* in 1784, and in 1823, Rossini composed an opera titled *Semiramide*, which became very popular in Europe.

[98] Carol Olsen, "Ship Figureheads from Literature," presentation at the Sixth Maritime Heritage Conference, Wilmington, North Carolina, October, 2001.

figure such as King Arthur carrying his sword."[99] Olsen also infers that established literary figures can convey more by embodying a known set of traits, such as the values of strength, honor, loyalty, and triumph in adversity. Fittingly, these virtues, seen in many literary heroes, are the same attributes sought after by ship owners for their vessels.[100]

So what attributes does the character of Semiramis put forth that would be desirable to the nineteenth-century ship owner? Semiramis' most notable traits were her beauty, wisdom, and alluring power, certainly traits sought after by yacht owners.[101] Like *Benmore's* Columbia figurehead, Semiramis represents a strong female figure. Various accounts, both biblical to mythical, describe Semiramis' strength and command, and many are fraught with violence and evil deeds.

The yacht *Narada,* also like the *Benmore,* was built in Scotland. The Mariners' Museum's *Narada* figurehead, however, is probably a replacement figurehead, carved in the United States after the yacht was under American ownership. A January 9, 1934 memorandum in the OF1 file states that Mr. T. Griffith, who served as the boatswain on the yacht *Narada* visited the museum in 1934 and informed the staff that this was not the original figurehead for the vessel, as that was lost in a collision. The carver of our figurehead is unknown but it was likely carved in the United States from the original carver's plan.[102] Original blueprints from the original carvers K. Reid and Co, of

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[99] *Ibid.*
[100] *Ibid.*, 5-6.
[101] Foryan, *Semiramis – Legendary Mysterious Great Queen of Assyria* (www.nineveh.com/semiramis).
[102] There is conflicting evidence on *where* the replacement was done. "Our figurehead is a replacement made by Ramage and Ferguson of Lieth, Scotland, and was shipped to New York by them for installation on the yacht." TMM memo of January 9, 1934 regarding boswain Mr. T. Griffith's testimony. However,

Glasgow, provided by Ramage & Ferguson of Lieth, Scotland confirm that this carving closely mimics the original figurehead's design (figure 103).[103] The date of the replacement carving is unknown, although it probably was created after 1894 when the vessel was American-owned.

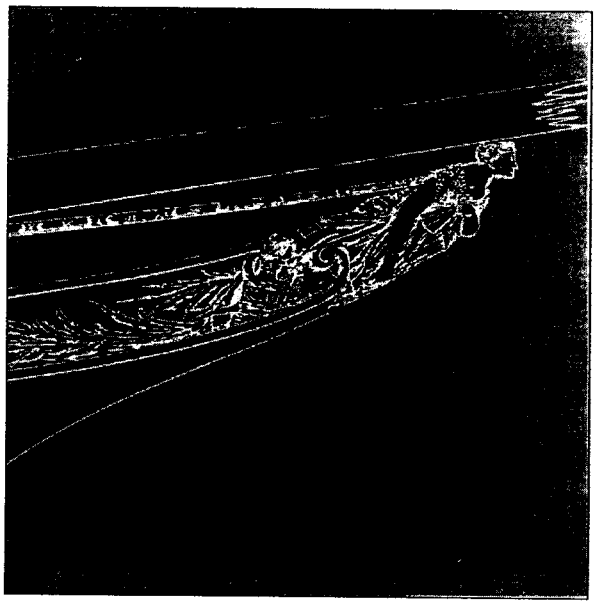

Figure 103. Copy of blueprint of the *Narada* ex-*Semiramis* figurehead 1889 (K. Reid & Co., Glasgow, Scotland. Provided by Ramage & Ferguson, Lieth, Scotland. Copy in OF1 file, The Mariners' Museum).

Acquired from a Connecticut antiques dealer for the museum in 1933, very little of the figure's historic details came with the carving, but the similarity of the *Narada's* blueprints to the present figure, coupled with existing photographs of the yacht taken in

there also is a note in the file that says a blueprint of the figurehead was sent to the US, making it likely that the carving was actually done here. The Registrar sheet also notes a letter from a Mr. William G. Roelker who was a passenger on *Narada* and believed that Sadie Jones, who would became the wife of the owner of the vessel, was the model for the face of the figure (4-18-1950), furthering the US-carved theory. Olsen, *Summary of* Narada, *OF1 File*, TMM, 9.

[103] *Registrar Sheet,OF1*, TMM.

the early twentieth-century that show the figurehead in place, there is no doubt that this is the figurehead from the *Narada* (figure 104).[104]

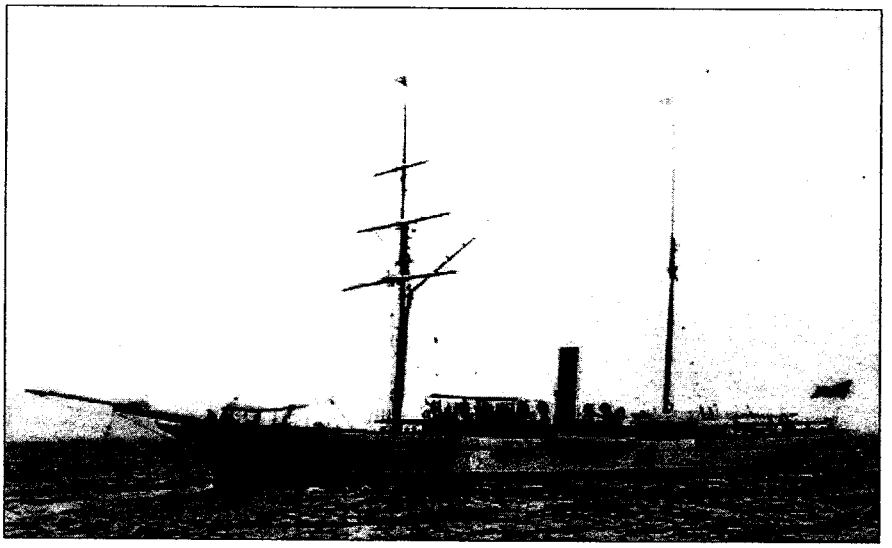

Figure 104. Yacht *Narada, ex-Semiramis, ex-Margarita,* OF1, no date (OF1 file, TMM).

The *Narada* figurehead has undergone conservation before and after its accession to the Mariners' Museum. The figure's right and left arms were replaced sometime before 1933.[105] The carving also was painting and gilding in 1947, and again in 1962. Although suffering from minor cracking due to low humidity levels in the museum in the early 1980s, the *Narada* figurehead remains in good condition today and is currently in storage.

The history of the yacht *Narada* includes two name changes. Shipbuilders Ramage & Furguson constructed this personal yacht, hull number 93, in their Lieth, Scotland yard, in 1889. Measuring 225-feet long and 491 gross tons, the *Narada* was large and dependable, serving as a luxury yacht for a number of European owners up

[104] *Ibid.*

until 1894, when A.J. Drexel of Philadelphia bought her and changed her name to *Margarita.*[106] In 1899 she traded hands, and names, again when Henry Walters of Baltimore purchased her and changed her name to *Narada*. Mr. Walters was an avid art collector and made many trips to Europe with his yacht, using it to transport his art treasures back across the Atlantic.[107] The US Navy acquired the *Narada* during Word War I in June of 1917. She served for a year at New London, Connecticut on experimental submarine signal duty (figure 105).[108] She was decommissioned in January of 1919 and returned to her owner. The Mariners' Museum Registrar Sheet notes that she was "dismantled and scrapped" in 1933, which is confirmed by the 1934 letter of H.L. Ferguson who wrote to Ramage and Ferguson on June 26 of that year, "I saw the hull of this vessel last week at New London, Connecticut where she is being broken up."[109]

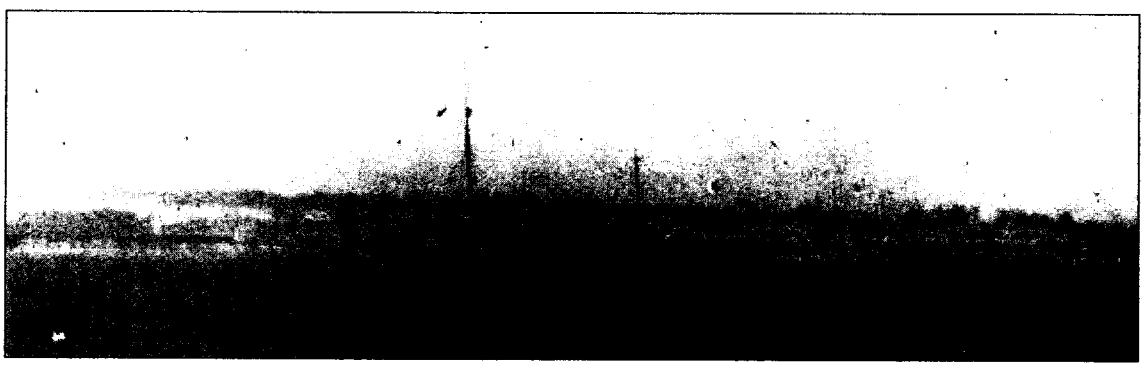

Figure 105. *USS Narada* at anchor, circa 1917-19, probably off New London, Connecticut. Photographed from *USS Thetis* (Naval Historical Center, photo # NH 45639).

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[105] *Registrar Sheet – OF1,* and Fred Hill material in OF1 file, TMM.
[106] Erik Hofman, *The Steam Yachts: An Era of Elegance* (Tuckahoe, New York, 1970), 64-65.
[107] *Ibid.*
[108] *USS Narada,* Naval Historical Center, Online Library Listing (www.history.navy.mil/photos).
[109] *Registrar File - OF1,* Letter from H.L. Ferguson to Ramage & Ferguson 6/25/1934 in OF1 file.

According to information in the *Narada* figurehead's file, the Mariners' Museum also has a bronze and silver bell from the vessel, as well as bronze binnacle posts, copper ventilators, and running lights from the yacht.[110] The incorporation of these pieces, along with additional research on the Semiramis legend and this yacht's role in World War I submarine training would compose an excellent multi-faceted exhibit.

Commodore Morris

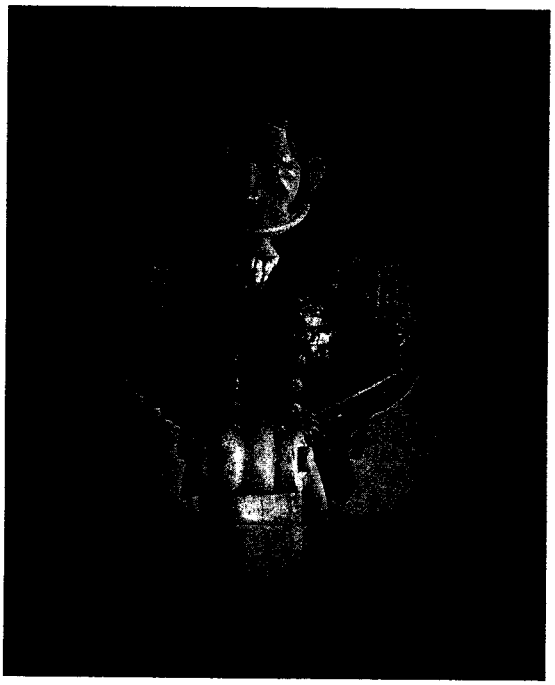

Figure 106. *Commodore Morris,* OF18. Massachusetts-built whaling ship 1841 (TMM).

The *Commodore Morris* figurehead, technically a bust head, represents a class of vessels and an entire industry that comprised an important chapter of American maritime history (figure 106). This figurehead sat upon the bluff bow of a New Bedford whaling

[110] Letter from Earl B. Smith to TMM, August 29, 1933 letter in OF1 file. Museum accession numbers for

ship built in 1841. The whaling industry, among others, helped to shape the character of the nation and played a central role in the seafaring heritage of New England. Stoutly built vessels designed to withstand voyages of several years in the challenging conditions of the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, American whaling ships were witness to some of the most intriguing stories of perseverance and endurance. Fortunately, these voyages to the far side of the world can be interpreted through the most recognizable artifact from these ships, the figurehead.

The *Commodore Morris* figurehead is a bust of United States Navy Commodore Charles Morris (1784-1856) in his uniform atop a star-studded volute. Bust heads were popular on hard-driven whaling ships, which often used low profile and low maintenance bow decorations in response to the rough conditions presented by the nature of whaling. The rounded bows of American whalers invited stately, yet compact figures rather than the grand striding figures lunging from the extreme curves of the nation's clippers.

Certainly not an imposing figure, the *Commodore Morris* figurehead measures just 37 inches high, an appropriate size for a bust decorating a 338-ton whaling ship. The Commodore is attired in his dress uniform, which is painted "to life" in a brilliant array of blues, reds, and yellows. His facial features and uniform closely echo Ary Scheffer's 1825 portrait of Morris as vigorous and stalwart figure in the relatively new US Navy (figure 107).[111]

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the associated *Narada* artifacts are (NG12-12), (NC32), (NJ28), (NJ28) respectively.

[111] Morris was 41 when Scheffer painted his portrait in 1825. Already an American naval hero, he participated in an extraordinary number of notable naval engagements since his role as midshipman at Stephen Decatur's side in Tripoli in 1804. At the time of this portrait sitting in France, Morris was at the height of his career in the position of Naval Commissioner. Charles Morris, *The Autobiography of Commodore Charles Morris, U.S. Navy* (Annapolis, Maryland, 1880, reprinted 2002).

Figure 107. Commodore Morris. A painting by Ary Scheffer 1825 (Special Collections, Nimitz Library, US Naval Academy, in Charles Morris, *The Autobiography of Commodore Charles Morris, U.S. Navy* (Annapolis, Maryland, 1880, reprinted 2002), frontispiece).

Figure 108. *Commodore Morris,* OF18 Massachusetts-built whaling ship 1841 (Wright Photograph Collection, Vol.3, 31, TMM).

The wooden volute on which the Commodore sits is a modern addition, replaced around1940, after coming to the Mariners' Museum.[112] From historic photos, one can see the volute is an accurate feature, the crowing point of a network of supporting rails, these supports, aided by a small lacing board along the back of the figure held the bust in its place of prominence (figures 108 and 109).

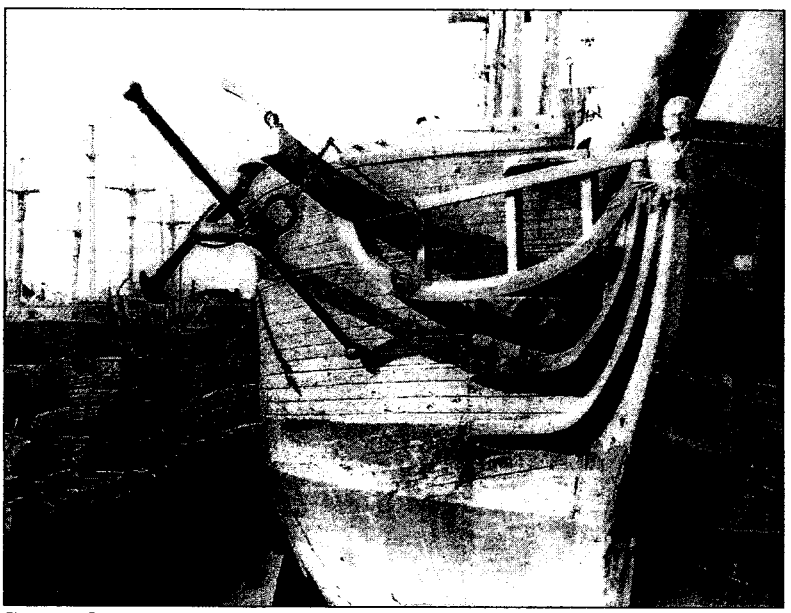

Figure 109. *Commodore Morris.* OF18 Massachusetts-built whaling ship 1841 (Wright Photograph Collection, Vol.6, 100, TMM Archives).

The figurehead came into the museum's collection in 1933 with the *Commodore Morris* attribution. This is confirmed by historic photos of the figure on the ship. The museum purchased the bust from Hutchinson Bookstore, New Bedford, Massachusetts, the *Commodore Morris'* old home port.[113] The manager of the bookstore did not know when the figurehead came to the store, but indicated that it was a long-time family

[112] Pinckney mentions the restored figurehead in her 1941work on American figureheads. The Mariners' Museum Catalog Worksheet also notes that the base of the bust is a modern addition, but no details of when or where the work was done.

possession, "but that it had little more meaning than a good dust collector."[114] The registrar reported that the figurehead was in good condition when it was accessioned to the Mariners' Museum. The bust was restored sometime between 1933 and 1941, including the carving of a new volute mentioned above. These efforts must have been an improvement, as Pauline Pinckney notes in her 1941 book, *American Figureheads and Their Carvers,* "Many who had seen the original portrait head on the ship now look askance at the old Commodore and deny that he was ever so prim and good looking on the whaler as he is since the restoration."[115]

Captain Elijah Swift (1774-1852) built the whaling ship *Commodore Morris* at Falmouth, Massachusetts in 1841.[116] Captain Swift, who was not only builder but part owner, most likely named his vessel after Commodore Charles Morris (1784-1856) of the United States Navy, because of Morris' assistance in settling a Congressional investigation into the practice of using 'scrap' wood from navy contracts to build whalers and local craft.[117] The 350-ton whale ship *Commodore Morris* was owned by Aiken & Swift and measured 107 feet long. She is recorded as sailing the Pacific whaling grounds from November 30, 1841 to May 3, 1845, cashing in 1,450 barrels of sperm oil and forty more of whale oil over the course of the nearly four-year voyage.[118] She continued to sail out of Falmouth until 1864, when she was sold to interests in New Bedford who confined

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[113] OF18 File, TMM.
[114] *Ibid.*
[115] Pinckney, *American Figureheads and Their Carvers,* 146.
[116] Alexander Starbuck, *American Whale Fishery from Its Earliest Inception to the Year 1876* (Waltham, Massachusetts, 1878), 384-385.
[117] *The Mariners' Museum Catalogue Worksheet – OF18*, TMM, 1988.
[118] Starbuck, *American Whale Fishery*, 384-385.

her voyages to Atlantic waters.[119] Alexander Starbuck records *Commodore Morris* sailing from New Bedford on Atlantic voyages until 1876, the year of *American Whale Fishery's* publication.[120] Registrar records note that the vessel was last entered in the List of US Merchant Vessels in 1900.[121]

Another interesting aspect to the history of this figurehead is the Commodore himself. The *Commodore Morris* bust not only sheds light on the New England whaling fleet in the nineteenth century, it also features the history of an often overlooked hero of the early US Navy. Charles Morris's meteoric rise through he ranks began with his service in the Quasi-War with France, and continued through the Barbary Wars, and the War of 1812. He served under and alongside many of the US Navy's most famous commanders, playing a key role in notable engagements. Whether it was jumping into the captured frigate *Philadelphia* alongside Stephen Decatur in 1804, or as first lieutenant aboard the *Constitution* under Captain Isaac Hull in the War of 1812, Morris evinced tactical genius and inherent bravery. He was appointed Navy Commissioner from 1823 to 1827 and as Chief of the Bureau of Construction, Equipment, & Repairs from 1844 to 1847.[122]

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[119] *Ibid.*, 602-603. Starbuck's 1865 entry reads: Bought from Falmouth 1864. Out of New Bedford on an Atlantic voyage May 10, 1865 to December 10, 1867.

[120] *Ibid.*, 602, 624, 636, 646. Journal of Captain Gilbert B. Borden on the *Commodore Morris* from April 27, 1870 to May 23, 1873, in the Nicholson Whaling Collection in the Providence, Rhode Island Public Library. Stuart G. Sherman, *The Voice of the Whaleman, with an Account of the Nicholson Whaling Collection* (Providence, Rhode Island,1965), 98.

[121] *Registrar Sheet, OF18*, TMM.

[122] Morris's autobiography covers the bulk of his career, up to the early 1840s. Intended as an account for his family and friends, the manuscript was given to the Naval Institute by Morris's descendants in 1880. It was the Institute's first published book. Morris, *The Autobiography of Commodore Charles Morris US Navy.*

The *Commodore Morris* figurehead is one of only four North American nineteenth-century figureheads currently on display in The Mariners' Museum.[123] While it is a wonderful addition to the US Navy exhibit in the museum, it is incorrectly mounted to the "bow" of a ship (figure 34). Angled to look down upon museum visitors, the bust head is inclined much as a clipper ship figurehead, rather than sitting upright as it sat on the bluff bow of the whaling ship it originally decorated. A figurehead's positioning should not be an overriding consideration in a figure's incorporation into an exhibit, however, the incorrect placement of this figurehead is distracting and misleading, and in the end, historically erroneous.

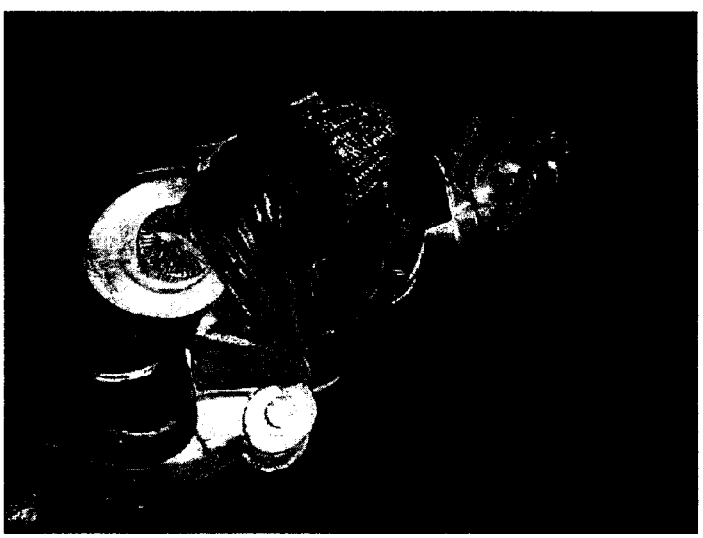

Figure 110. *Commodore Morris.* OF18. As it is currently displayed at the Mariners' Museum naval exhibit -incorrectly positioned on the "bow" of a ship (Photo by Catherine Green, 2000).

[123] As of June 2003, per personal communication with Jean Willoz-Egnor, Director of Collections Management, TMM.

Undetermined Past:Nineteenth-Century North American Figureheads in the Mariners' Museum

Largely detached from their histories as well as from their vessels, the figureheads discussed in this chapter were chosen as examples of nineteenth-century North American figureheads through stylistic observations and comparisons, as well as from an analysis of the information in each figurehead's artifact file. These thirteen figureheads in the Mariners' Museum illustrate the variety of subjects and carving styles seen on North American figureheads in the nineteenth century. Many of these figureheads have obtained an identity, although often a dubious one, on their journey into the museum's collection.

The museum acquired the majority of these figureheads during their early years of collecting, the 1930s and 1940s. Obtained through antiques dealers or auction houses, the carvings often were "attributed" to a certain vessel, without evidence or explanation to corroborate the attribution. This situation is not unique to the Mariners' Museum. One of the finest and largest figurehead collections in the country at Mystic Seaport Museum in Mystic, Connecticut houses a total of seventy figureheads. Of those seventy, only twelve can be connected with their vessel, seven of which are of American origin.[1] While figureheads are often saved or salvaged, their histories are not.

Ideally, museums interpret a figurehead in the context of its vessel and its place in the historic record, however, all is not lost when that information becomes obscured.

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[1] Karl-Eric Svärdskog, *Jenny Lind and the Clipper* Nightingale *Figurehead* (Portsmouth, New Hampshire, 2001), 150.

Some figureheads seem one step away from recovering their true past, while others offer up only mere passages of their rich stories. Even without full divulgence, these carvings have much to tell us about the variance, craftsmanship, and evolution of nineteenth-century North American figureheads. Moreover, their vague and sometimes confused stories often separate into fact and fiction under scrutiny, revealing clues to these figureheads' true identities.

"Baron de Castine"

Figure 111. OF40. Full-length figurehead known as "Baron de Castine," a prominent figure in the history of the Penobscot Bay region of Maine (TMM).

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[1] Karl-Eric Svärdskog, *Jenny Lind and the Clipper* Nightingale *Figurehead* (Portsmouth, New Hampshire, 2001), 150.

This full-length figurehead, known as "Baron de Castine" depicts a valiant seventeenth-century French warrior striding into battle (figure 111). Cut "clear and through," his left foot leading, his legs are completely separated. Whatever type of platform the "Baron" originally occupied, he currently is without any kind of base. This contributes to the figurehead's seemingly compact stature, as the base would have added to the overall height of the bow decoration. The moustached Baron sternly gazes to sea while raising his drawn sword defiantly across his chest.[2] This configuration is somewhat unusual because it ignores the streamlined and water-shedding qualities expressed by many figureheads. The "Baron's" left hand holds his shield to his side while his cape sweeps back over his shoulders and down his back, disguising the now absent lacing piece. The polychrome "to life" paint scheme of this figure includes shiny silver full-body armor, including an extravagant plumed helmet befitting a seventeenth-century French nobleman.

The "Baron de Castine" figurehead was acquired in the 1940s by museum agents from the intriguingly named "Cappy Stewart's Never-Never Land" in Portsmouth, New Hampshire.[3] In the proprietor's possession for years, Cappy was certain the figurehead depicted Baron de Castine, a French nobleman who established the settlement of Castine, Maine in 1667. Unfortunately, he could not recall the name of the vessel the "Baron"

[2] The figurehead's sword is detachable.
[3] *Registrar Sheet "Baron de Castine," OF40*, TMM.

once sailed upon, although he indicated that it had sailed during his lifetime in and around Portsmouth. [4]

Figure 112. Portrait of Baron Castine, no date (George Augustus Wheeler, *Castine Past and Present*, 12).

The Baron of Castine (1636-circa 1701) would certainly have been a good decorative ambassador for a Maine merchant ship. A prominent historical figure in the Penobscot Bay region, the Baron de Castine helped to establish French dominance on the strategically located peninsula to which he would lend his name (figure 112).[5] After serving with a French regiment in Canada, the French-born Jean Vincent, Baron de Saint Castin took up residence on the Castine peninsula in the late 1660s. He lived among the

[4] OF40 File, TMM.

[5] William Nathaniel Banks, "Castine, Maine, and St. Andrews, New Brunswick, Canada," *Antiques*, CXVIII, No.1 (July 1980): 103-105. Dominated at various times by the Dutch, French, Englishmen, and Indian nations, the history of Castine, Maine saw the town of Castine change hands frequently between the English and the French during the middle decades of the seventeenth century because of its key position at the confluence of the Bagaduce and Penobscot rivers on the border between Acadia and the well-entrenched English settlements to the south.

natives of the area, he adopted many of their ways, and married the daughter of a powerful chief.[6] Contemporary dispatches from Acadia and Quebec described Castin as "very daring and enterprising," "zealous...intelligent," and "absolute master of the savages."[7] In his poem *The Baron of St. Castine,* Longfellow described him as, "Swift as the wind is, and as wild," while fellow nineteenth-century poet John Greenleaf Whittier focused on the Baron's romantic aspects, writing, "In harsh outlines of his face/ Passion and sin have left their trace."[8]

Correspondence in the Mariners' Museum files suggests the "Baron de Castine" figurehead belongs to the 1852 Castine, Maine-built brig *Baron de Castine*, a large merchant vessel captured by the Confederate commander Ralphael Semmes during the Civil War.[9] Mr. William N. Banks of New Hampshire wrote to the Mariners' Museum in 1979 relaying he had, "learned that a ship called the *Baron de Castine*, from Castine, was captured by Ralphael Semmes in 1862 and was described as 'old and of little value.' It seems to me this ship might well be the source of the [Mariners'] figurehead."[10]

It is quite reasonable to assume that the "Baron de Castine" figurehead likely came off a vessel of the same name. Further research in ship registries for vessels named *Baron de Castine* would help substantiate this theory. The Mariners' "Baron de Castine" figurehead would perhaps prove too small for the 267-foot brig, but with the addition of a

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[6] John E. Godfrey, "Jean Vincent, Barn de Saint Castin," *Maine Historical Society Collections*, Ser.1, Vol.7 (Bath, 1876), 41-72.
[7] Banks, "Castine, Maine, and St. Andrews, New Brunswick, Canada", 103-105.
[8] George Augustus Wheeler, *Castine Past and Present* (Boston, 1896), 13.
[9] Banks. "Castine, Maine, and St. Andrews, New Brunswick, Canada", 103-105. *Baron de Castine*, built 1852; 267 x 105 x 26 x 11. Owners John Frederic & Charles Jarvis, William Witherle, et al, Castine;

substantial scroll base, this figurehead could have been proportional for a vessel of that size. Nothing about this figure stylistically discounts a 1852 carving date, although it is in remarkably good condition to have come off a vessel from that early date reported as being "old and of little value."[11]

The "Baron de Castine" figurehead's true identity remains unconfirmed, yet, there is no reason to believe that Cappy's, albeit incomplete, credentials for this carving are untrue. A tentative attribution to the 1852 brig *Baron de Castine* seems reasonable, but without further research, it cannot be stated with certainty. Whatever his true identity, the Mariners' Museum's "Baron de Castine" provides an excellent example of nineteenth-century craftsmanship. The attention-grabbing details carved into the Baron's costume, as well as his out of the ordinary pose and fine state of conservation make this figurehead, presently in storage, a valuable piece.

"Black Prince"

Stepping out of the annals of English history, this figurehead, believed to depict Edward the Black Prince, demonstrates the use of heraldic figures at the bows of nineteenth century vessels (figure 113a and b). Based either in history or, drawn from popular nineteenth-century literature such as Sir Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe* (characters such as Friar Tuck, Robin Hood, and Ivanhoe), chivalric figureheads decorated numerous

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Thomas Atwood, Master. George S. Wasson & Lincoln Colcord, *Sailing Days on the Penobscot* (Salem, Massachusetts, 1932), 317.
[10] Mr. William N. Banks to TMM, October 16, 1979. Photocopy in OF40 File.
[11] *Ibid.*

nineteenth-century ships.[12] A universally recognized medieval hero, whether real or fictional, evinces many of the desirable properties of a successful merchant ship, such as bravery, moral rectitude, and strength and victory over competitors.

a.

b.

Figure 113. "Black Prince", OF13, TMM: a, The figurehead today (photo by Catherine Green, 2000); b, Black and white photographic reproduction of "Black Prince" figurehead painting (unknown artist, in OF13 File, TMM).

Edward Prince of Wales, known as the Black Prince (b.1330- d.1376), was the son of Edward III King of England (ruled 1327-1377). The Hundred Year's War raged between England and France in the fourteenth century, and Prince Edward demonstrated his prodigious military talent at the Battles of Crécy and Poitiers, acquiring the dark nickname "Black Prince" from the color of his armor (figure 114).[13] Curiously, the

[12] Carol Olsen, *Summary of "Black Prince," OF13 File*, TMM, 1983, 6. Sir Galahad and Sir Lancelot are also depicted as figureheads on nineteenth-century ships.
[13] Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia; www.wikipedia.org.

Mariners' Museum's "Black Prince" figurehead's armor is painted a metalic silver color instead of the characteristic black one would expect for this historic figure.[14]

Figure 114. A scene after the Battle of Crécy, fought in France on August 26, 1346--a major turning point in the Hundred Years War between England and France. Edward the Black Prince stands in his tell-tale black armor in the center of the painting. Julian Story (1857 - 1919) *The Black Prince at Crécy*, 1888, Oil on Canvas (Telfair Museum of Art, Savannah, Georgia; www.telfair.org).

Black armor notwithstanding, the "Black Prince" figurehead is a brightly "to-life" painted, silver-gilt figure. The extant three-foot-tall portion of the figurehead has been cut off at the waist, leaving one to conclude it was originally approximately five and a half feet tall, most likely a full-length striding figure.[15] A remarkably similar full-length figurehead of "Sir Galahad" at the Seamens Church Institute, New York supports this inference (figure 115a and b). The appearance of the two pieces is so strikingly similar

[14] *"Black Prince," OF13 File*, TMM. Like most of the figureheads in the Mariners' Museum collection, the "Black Prince" figurehead underwent restoration efforts soon after it came into the collection in the early 1930s, with additional minor repairs including repainting taking place in 1974. This could explain the silver, rather than black armor.

[15] *Ibid.*, 2. *Catalogue Worksheet, OF13,* TMM, 1988. The configuration of the base, and thus lower method of attachment is undeterminable, however and lacing board along the rear of the figure specifies support given from behind.

that, according to M.V. Brewington, "unquestionably both were cut by the same hand."[16] Indeed, both carvings wear silver-gilt armor, black plumed helmet, and a cape held on by a finely carved chain.[17] The right-tilted attitude of the head, black hair and long moustache, as well as the troubled expression and furrowed brow characterize both figureheads.

a.

b.

Figure 115. Two knight figureheads likely carved by the same artist: a, *Sir Galahad* figurehead, Seaman's Church Institute, New York; b, The Mariners' Museum's "Black Prince" figurehead. Note the mortises cut the shoulders to receive the tenon joints for the figure's removable arms (Both illustrations in Brewington, *Shipcarvers of North America,* 70).

[16] Brewington, *Shipcarvers of North America,* 69.

[17] The full plumes decorating the "Black Prince's" helmet could be a nod to the feather emblem of the Prince of Wales's, which, along with its accompanying motto, "Ich dien" (I serve), are said to have been inherited by the Black Prince from King John of Bohemia, with whom he served at Crecy. The emblem and moto are still used by the Price of Wales today (Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia; www.wikipedia.org).

The "Sir Galahad" figurehead may also indicate the original arm placement of the Mariners' "Black Prince" figurehead. The arms have been missing since the figure's acquisition to the museum in 1934. The shoulder mortises are clearly visible, indicating that this figurehead, like many of its contemporaries, had removable arms that were unshipped regularly at sea for safekeeping.

Registrar records and correspondence regarding the "Black Prince's" purchase indicate the Boston antiques dealer from which this figurehead was secured in 1934 attributed the carving to the ship *Black Prince* built by George W. Jackman in 1856.[18] The 1862 American Lloyds Register of Shipping records a 1050-ton ship *Black Prince* built in 1856 at Newburyport, Massachusetts, ostensibly providing a probable candidate.[19] Unfortunately, this vessel was lost in the North Atlantic in 1865 and never recovered, making it very unlikely the Mariners' figure came from that ship. Yet, figurehead researcher M.V. Brewington uses the *Black Prince* as a possible example of the Wilson brother's nineteenth-century ship carving shop in Newburyport, Massachusetts, believing the Mariners' Museum has the figurehead of the Newburport vessel.[20]

Over a dozen ships built in North America or England between 1838 and 1943 carried the name *Black Prince.* A number of these vessels may be disregarded as possibilities if one considers that the Mariners' "Black Prince" and the Seamen's Church Institute's "Sir Galahad" figurehead were carved in the same region, probably by the

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[18] Copy of Fred Hill information in OF13 File, TMM.
[19] Olsen, *Summary of "Black Prince," OF13 File*, 21-25.
[20] Brewington, *Shipcarvers of North America,* 69. Brewington does not indicate where the *Black Prince* attribution for this figurehead was acquired.

same carver. Both of these carvings were most likely carved in the United States or Canada because of Sir Galahad's full-striding style, rather than a scroll-skirt style figure which was more common in Europe. Additionally, the "Black Prince" figurehead probably came from a vessel under 1000 tons because of its relatively small size. [21]

Having established the above requirements, the most likely candidate emerges as the 803-ton wooden ship *Black Prince*, built in 1863 by Vail & Moran at St. Martins, New Brunswick, Canada. Owned by St. Martins shipbuilder James H. Moran, this *Black Prince* wrecked in Dieppe, France, on a voyage from New Orleans to Amsterdam. [22] The subsequent salvage of the vessel would have allowed for the removal of the figurehead.

Even with its questionable attribution and its reduction to a torso and head rather than a full-figure, the Mariners' Museum's "Black Prince" is one of the most expressive figureheads in the museum's collection. The intense gaze of the valiant herald of a nineteenth-century ship currently haunts the museum storage area, waiting for his next battle.

"Brooks Walker"

The "Brooks Walker" portrait figurehead illustrates the practice, prominent with nineteenth-century shipbuilders and owners, of choosing a family member or even themselves as the namesake and corresponding subject of the figurehead of their vessels. (figure 116a and b) Other examples of this practice are the *Donald McKay* figurehead in

[21] Olsen, *Summary of "Black Prince," OF13 File,* 21-23.
[22] Esther Clark Wright, *The Ships of St. Martins* (Saint John, N.B., 1974), 16.

Mystic Seaport Museum as well as the Mariners' Museum's *George R. Skolfield* figurehead, which both depict the builders of their respective vessels.

a. b.

Figure 116. "Brooks Walker," OF2: a, as seen today in museum storage (photo by Catherine Green, 2000); b, historic photo of "Brooks Walker" OF2 on display at the Mariners' Museum (OF2 File, TMM).

Unlike the full-length portrait figureheads mentioned above, which are from very large merchant ships, the "Brooks Walker" figurehead decorated a much smaller vessel. Measuring 33 inches tall, this relatively small half-figure emerges from an inward-turned or "fiddle head" scroll. Depicting a middle-aged man with skillfully carved features and convincingly rendered brown moustache and beard, "Brooks Walker" wears dark business attire contemporary to the later nineteenth century. His arms and jacket

smoothly transform to folds of subtle shadowy drapery wrapping around the lower sides and back of the figure. This blending of contemporary and classical elements imbues the figurehead with a graceful profile that would have been an effective transition to his ship.

Currently, the original figurehead sits atop a base carved in 1942.[23] One can clearly delineate where the original figurehead and modern base come together and are held with a metal plate and screws. Not particularly flattering to the figurehead, the base turns this finely crafted example of the shipcarvers' art into an awkward bust upon a pedestal. The upright posture currently evinced by "Brooks Walker" is ineffective in expressing the original purpose of this bow decoration. Currently in storage, if this figurehead were displayed again, historical accuracy would dictate its exhibit without the 1942 base.

Particulars of the vessel *Brooks Walker* remain unknown. The figurehead's attribution in museum files records that the Mariners' Museum purchased this figurehead from Robert Sanford Walker, the grandson of Brooks Walker, in July of 1934. An accompanying letter from Mr. R.S. Walker states,

> "This is to certify that the figurehead was the property and came from my grandfather, the late Brooks Walker. It came from his ship named the *Brooks Walker*, which was engaged in the South American guano trade to England. This figurehead came to me from my father, the late Herbert Brooks Walker, and was in the possession of my family ever since the ship was dismantled."[24]

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[23] *Registrar Sheet "Brooks Walker"* OF2, TMM.

[24] Letter from Robert Sanford Walker, July 1934. Unknown recipient, likely the Mariners' Museum or Earl B. Smith, the museum's representative who acquired the carving. Copy of text on OF2 Registrar Sheet.

Unfortunately, no vessel by the name *Brooks Walker* has been located to date in either American or European Lloyds Register of Ships.[25] To add to the mystery, research uncovered no information on anyone named Brooks Walker involved in nineteenth-century North American maritime commerce.[26] However, the familial link to this figurehead's past likely conveys fairly accurate information, so further research may yet uncover "Brooks Walker's" past. Port registries from Long Island may prove fruitful, as R.S. Brooks indicated he resided on the island.[27] Furthermore, a note on the original paperwork for the figurehead states that it was, "from a ship built in Boston," so perhaps Boston ports may also yield information on the elusive *Brooks Walker*.[28]

"Commodore Perry"

This half-figure, known as "Commodore Perry," is a finely carved nineteen-century example of a portrait figurehead depicting an American naval hero (figures 117a and b). "Commodore Perry" would have been mounted fairly upright on his vessel's bow. Measuring nearly three feet tall, this figurehead would have appeared approximately life-size. The figure's nineteenth-century costume (notably not a naval uniform) has truncated arms that end just blow the shoulders. Paint that colored the light blue double breasted jacket, white frilled shirt and gray collar is almost completely worn off, as is the flesh-colored paint of the face and black paint of the curly hair and long full sideburns. A

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[25] Carol Olsen, *Summary of "Brooks Walker," OF2 File,* TMM, 1983. Searches of various nineteenth-century listings in both American and European *Lloyds Register of Shipping* find no vessel named *Brooks Walker.*

[26] *Ibid.* 2003 online searches by the author for any reference to Brooks Walker also proved unsuccessful.

[27] The 1934 letter from R.S. Brooks lists his residence in Babylon, Long Island.

[28] *Registrar Sheet "Brooks Walker,"* OF2, TMM, circa 1934.

faded blue drapery base completed the lower extent of the figure, which has been sawn off at the base as well as at the back.

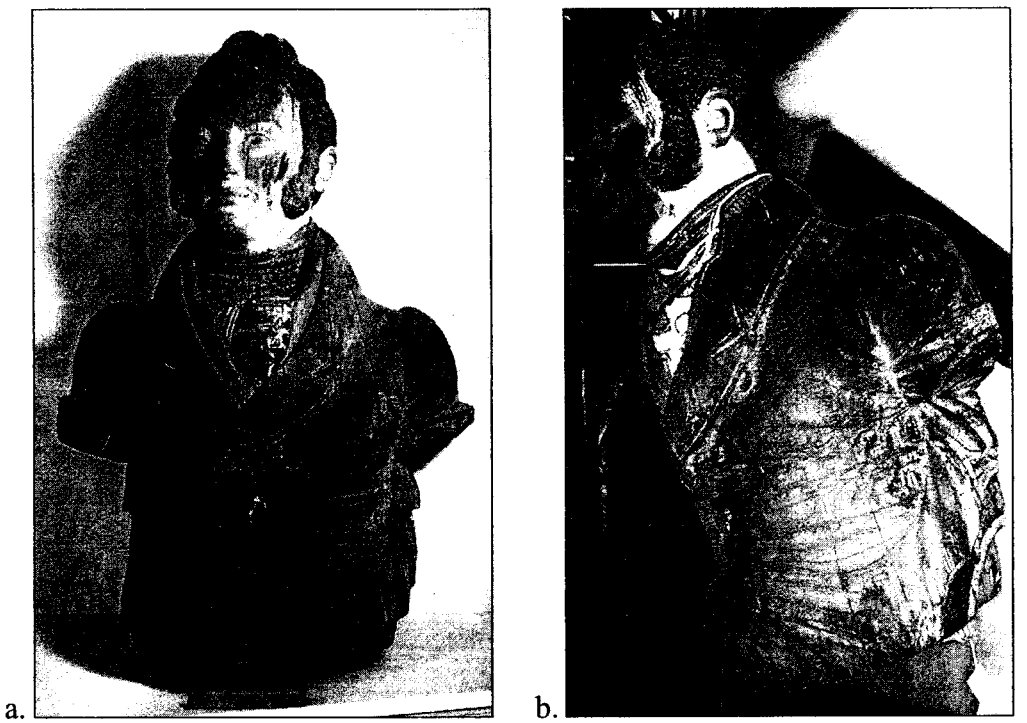

Figure 117. "Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry," OF72: a, Black and white photo from museum files (OF72 file, TMM); b, "Commodore Perry" figurehead today in museum storage (photo by Catherine Green, 2000).

Without the protective layer of paint, the figure has sustained noticeable vertical cracking. This exposes the figurehead's expressive carving details and the grain of wood, now clearly visible, an interesting contrast to the more finished pieces in the museum's collection. The "Commodore Perry" figurehead is in fair condition, although to minimize further deterioration, it should certainly remain in a climate controlled environment and

possibly undergo stabilization measures, such as an application of clear sealant, if repainting is not desired.[29]

Since its acquisition into the museum in the 1930s, this figurehead has been identified as United States Naval hero Oliver Hazard Perry. A strong resemblance does exist between the Mariners' "Commodore Perry" figurehead and contemporary portraits of Oliver Hazard Perry (figure 118). A highly regarded naval hero best known for leading the Lake Erie fleet to victory during the War of 1812, Perry came from a well-established Rhode Island family. Considered a favorite New England son, Perry would have been doubly qualified as a suitable figurehead subject on a nineteenth-century, New England-built merchant or Navy ship.[30]

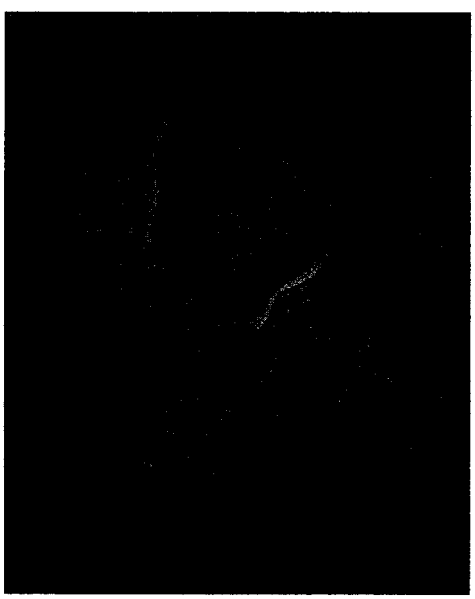

Figure 118. Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry (1785-1819), United States Naval hero, best known for leading the Lake Erie fleet to victory during the War of 1812 (http://www.brigniagara.org/perry.htm).

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[29] Color negatives in the OF72 file show remedial repairs made to the figure by Percy Matthews in 1974.
[30] Olsen's research found two other Oliver Perry vessels, the *O.H. Perry* a 352-ton vessel built in Perrysburg, Ohio in 1834, and the *USS Perry*, a 280-ton ship built in 1843, both of which re probably too small for the Mariners' figurehead. Carol Olsen, *Summary of "Commodore Perry," OF72 File,* TMM, 1983, 25.

Museum records cite a Mr. Burnham, who presumably owned this figurehead in the 1920s and 30s, who claimed the carving was quite valuable as it had come from the famous Donald McKay-built packet ship *Commodore Perry* of 1854.[31] Although Mr. Burnham would not accept the Mariners' Museum's offer to buy the figurehead, thinking the offer was too low, in 1938 the museum eventually purchased the figurehead from a Boston antique shop, that had acquired the piece from Mr. Burnham's estate.[32]

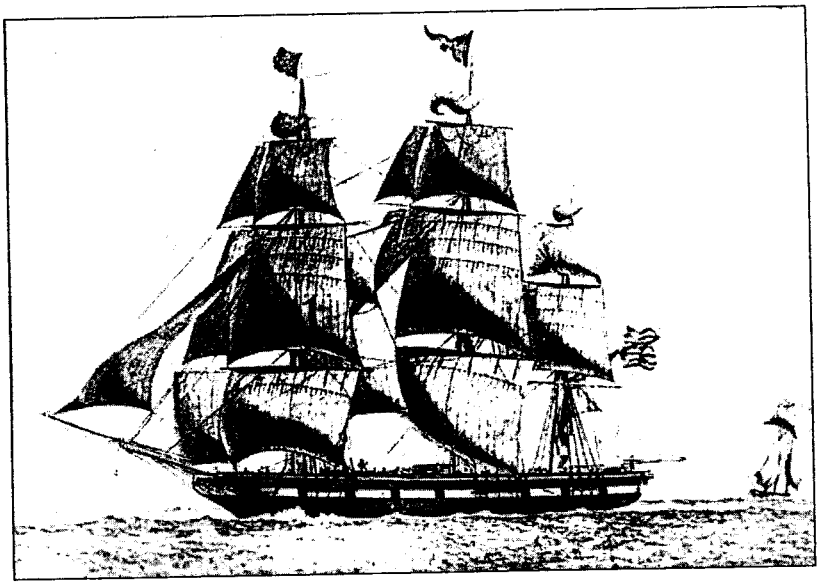

Figure 119. The American Packet Ship *Commodore Perry*, built by Donald McKay at Boston 1854, owned by James Baines' Blackball Fleet (TMM Library PK2039 c.232).

Several letters from 1939 in the museum files describe the figure as Perry, but remain skeptical as to when and by whom this attribution was given.[33] Pauline Pinckney attributes the Mariners' carving to the packet *Commodore Perry*, and, indeed, the most

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[31] *OF 72 File,* TMM.
[32] *Registrar Sheet "Commodore Perry," OF72*, TMM. Letter to Fred Hill from TMM, October 12, 1939.
[33] JT. Holzbach to Fred Hill, TMM, October 12, 1939. J.T. Holzbach to Nora Houston, TMM, October 3, 1939.

likely candidate appears to be the 1964-ton, 212-foot long packet ship *Commodore Perry,* built by Donald McKay in Boston in 1854 that operated in James Baines' Australian Black Ball Line (figure 119).[34]

Not only does this ship seem to have the correct bow shape and size for this figure, an 1854 newspaper article featuring the new packet describes her figurehead as, "a bust of her namesake."[35] This would seem to confirm the Mariners' Museum figure as the figurehead from this vessel, however, the article also describes the figure dressed, "in naval uniform," which it appears the Mariners' "Commodore" is not.[36] Another problem with this attribution is that the 1854 *Commodore Perry* burned to the waterline in Bombay, India in 1869. Therefore, if this figurehead is from the McKay-built packet, it was either removed before or during the fire, or it could have been salvaged and sold after the fire. While precedence does exist for figureheads surviving such scenarios, positive identification of this figurehead can hardly be made from the present unsubstantiated evidence.[37]

"Daniel Webster"

This exemplary nineteenth-century bust figurehead demonstrates the portrayal of famous personages of the day as figureheads (figure 120).[38] This carving also indicates

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[34] *Registrar Sheet, "Commodore Perry," OF72.* Pinckney, *American Figureheads and Their Carvers*, 117. Pinckney mistakenly lists *Commodore Perry* built in New York for the Charleston Line. No such New York-built vessel can be found.
[35] Donald McLean, "The New Packet Ship *Commodore Perry*," *Boston Daily Atlas,* September 30, 1854.
[36] *Ibid.*
[37] "Commodore Perry" is missing sections from the back and base, probably from being sawn off its ship, possibly during the fire. There is precedent for salvaging a figurehead after a fire that destroyed the vessel, as seen in the salvage of the figurehead on Donald McKay's *Great Republic* after an 1853 fire.
[38] Brewington, *Shipcarvers of North America,* 53.

the nationalistic tendencies many figureheads took in the 1800s. The subject of this figurehead is New Hampshire lawyer, orator, and politician Daniel Webster (1782-1852). A champion of American nationalism, Daniel Webster symbolized democracy and the United States to his contemporaries.

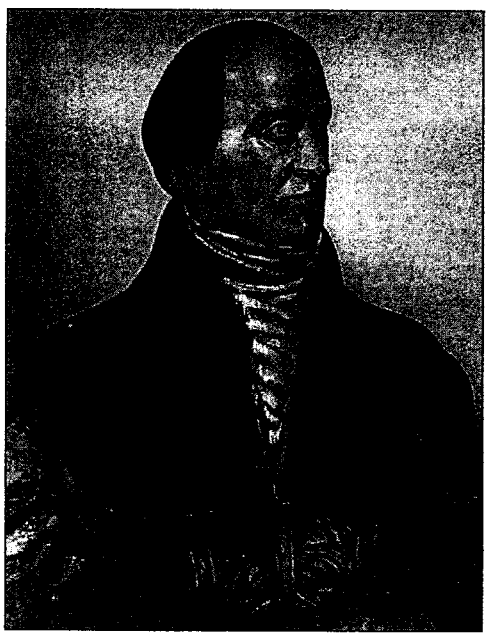


Figure 120. Bust figurehead of "Daniel Webster," OF9 (TMM).

Portraits of Daniel Webster confirm that this bust indeed depicts a likeness of one of the early nineteenth-century's most notable American political figures (figure 121a and b). This dignified figurehead of Webster is painted "to life" wearing a black jacket, white high collared shirt, with just a hint of his orange vest protruding from the jacket's lapels. Finely carved facial features and a high forehead framed with brushed back dark hair describe the head of the figure, which is turned slightly to the left. The bust sits atop an outward turned gilt scroll base inscribed with an acanthus leaf design. The abrupt transition from the minimal dark drapery at the bottom of the jacket to the gold foliated

scroll would have set off the figure against the stem of the vessel and enforce the look of a classical bust. Not seeking to portray a larger than life American statesman, this figure measures just under two feet tall, convincingly life size.[39]

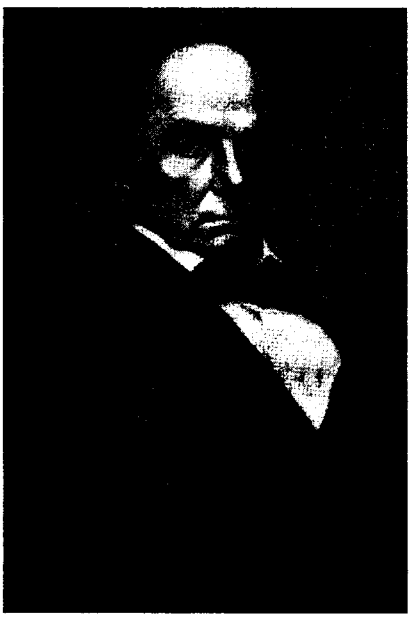
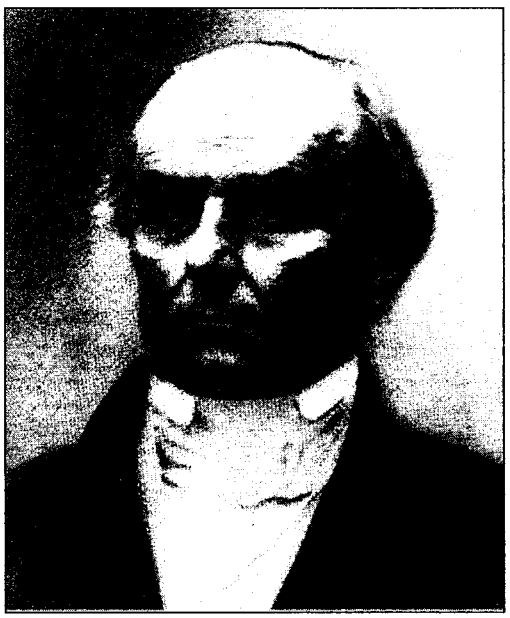
a.  b. 

Figure 121. American statesman Daniel Webster: a, Painting of Daniel Webster (1782-1852), unknown artist and date; b, Daniel Webster "from a daguerreotype (Both images in Elijah R. Kennedy, *The Real Daniel Webster* (New York: 1924), facing 102 and 242).

Mariners' Museum's agents purchased this figurehead in Maine in 1934.[40] The original condition of the figurehead is unlisted, but "Daniel Webster" was repainted in 1974, and remains in good condition in museum storage today with no superficial cracking apparent.

While the subject of this figurehead is established, the vessel from which it came is not. A number of *Daniel Websters* are recorded in mid-nineteenth-century New England port registries. Carol Olsen found no less than ten vessels named Daniel

[39] *The Mariners' Museum Catalogue Worksheet OF9,* TMM, 1989.
[40] *Registrar Sheet "Daniel Webster," OF9,* TMM.

Webster from 1834 to 1853, all American built and owned.[41] The figurehead's size reduces the number of probable candidates to two vessels, notably excluding the Donald McKay-built clipper ship *Daniel Webster* of 1850, which had a full striding figurehead carved by famous Boston shipcarver John W. Mason.[42] The 313-ton bark *Daniel Webster* built 1853 in Damariscotta, Maine and registered in New Haven, Connecticut is a likely possibility, as is the 236-ton *Daniel Webster* built 1853 in Charlestown, Massachusetts and registered in Boston. One step away from substantiated identification, the Mariners' Museum's "Daniel Webster" would be a perfect subject for further research. Finding out how and where the two above-mentioned vessels ended their days would likely provide a match for this carving.

"Emma"

A lovely half-figure of an unknown woman, the figurehead known as "Emma" stands nearly four-feet tall portraying larger than life proportions (figure 122). "Emma" is painted "to life" wearing a white-lace-trimmed light blue bodice. A centered red rose decorates her breast, while a gilt chain loops twice around her neck, one short strand and one that reaches to her waist. Her fairly pale complexion is highlighted with paint mimicking makeup, and her reddish brown hair is pulled back into a loose bun.

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[41] Carol Olsen, *Summary of "Daniel Webster," OF9 File*, TMM, 1983, 16.

[42] The full-length figurehead on the McKay clipper portrayed, "the statesman in debate, a mantle thrown lightly over the left shoulder, with folds gathered in front and held by the left hand, while the right hand held a scroll of the *Constitution*." Daniel Webster was the featured speaker at the launching of the ship. The elderly statesman spoke briefly to the assembled crowd saying, "I am much obliged to you, and glad to see you, fellow-citizens. I am here to see my namesake take her departure for her proper element. I am an older friend of the citizens of Boston than she is, and I don't think I shall leave them so suddenly. I give you joy of this fine morning, fellw –citizens. I hope you and your families are well and I rejoice to see so

"Emma's" black skirt and cape form transitional drapery that would have blended into the cutwater of the vessel.

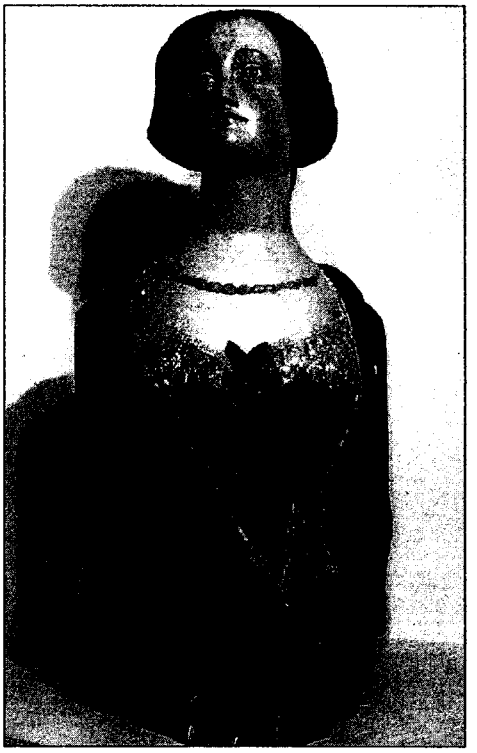

Figure 122. The portrait half-figure known as "Emma," OF26 (TMM).

The style of clothing depicted on this figurehead dates her to around 1899, although, at her 1933 purchase, she was attributed to *Emma*, a ship built in 1854.[43] Mariners' Museum agents acquired the figurehead in either Maine or Boston on a trip gathering artifacts for the newly formed museum.[44] The registrar sheet lists the figurehead as belonging to the ship *Emma,* although it is unknown who gave her this

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many evidences of general happiness and prosperity all around again." Pinckney, *American Figureheads and Their Carvers,* 124-125.

[43] *The Mariners' Museum Catalogue Worksheet*, TMM, 1988. Carol Olsen, *Summary of "Emma," OF26 File*, TMM, 1983, 8. Olsen compares Emma's costume to the very similar attire of actress Julia Marlowe in the 1899 play *Barbara Frietchie.*

[44] *Registrar Sheet "Emma," OF26*, TMM.

attribution. A 1934 letter from the Peabody Museum of Salem, Massachusetts supplies specifications for a 359-ton ship, *Emma*, built at Medford, Massachusetts in 1854 by J.T. Foster, and hailing from Charleston, South Carolina in 1858.[45] Conflicting research in museum files indicates *Emma* was listed in the 1857 *New York Marine Register* as 850 tons, and owned by Wellsman of Charlestown, Captain Heding, master.[46] None of this information confirms this figurehead's identity.

Charred wood at the back and base of the figurehead where it would have been attached to the vessel hint at the cause of the ship's demise. The base appears to have been sawn off, and a new wooden support structure lines the back where the original lacing piece would have been.[47] Nonetheless, this nineteenth-century lady remains in fairly good repair, bills in museum files reporting restorative work in 1933 and 1974.[48] "Emma" is currently in museum storage.

"Hope (of Salem)"

Known as "Hope of Salem," this over seven-foot tall full-length female figure skillfully depicts a muscular woman in wind swept garments. She is carved "clear and through" with her left foot leading forward (figures 123a and b). Her left arm extends upward to what would have been the horizon when she was inclined forward on the ship's bow. Her gaze likewise follows while her index finger points to her ship's

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[45] Letter from L.W. Jenkins, Assistant Director, of the Peabody Museum, Salem, MA. to Mr. H.L. Ferguson, TMM, July 14, 1934.
[46] *Registrar Sheet "Emma," OF26,* TMM.
[47] *Ibid.*

destination. She strides atop a black painted double scroll base attached to a modern brown painted wood mounting board. This allegorical figure of Hope wears a flowing toga-like drapery with a sash draped over her left shoulder arranged diagonally across her partially bared chest, while her entire midriff is exposed. Her feet are shod in thonged sandals, and she wears an upper arm bracelet on her extended left arm. Additional accessories include wrist bracelets, a drop earring in her right ear, and a brick-link crenellated crown sitting atop long flowing hair.[49]

a. b.

Figure 123. *Hope of Salem,*OF27: a, as she is painted today in the Mariners' Museum (TMM): b, *Hope of Salem.*OF27 (Pinckney, *American Figureheads and their Carvers,* Plate XVIII).

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[48] "Emma" OF26 File, TMM. Although the extent of the 1933 repairs is not documented, we can assume that she underwent some facial reconstruction from the comments of a museum employee who mentions an unskillful repair to "Emma's" nose upon acquisition. Unpublished manuscript, OF26 file, TMM)

[49] *Catalogue worksheet "Hope of Salem," OF27.* TMM, 1988.

Her all-white paint scheme illustrates the faux-marble style that typified many female figures, on countless nineteenth-century merchant ships. This statue-like style of carving became popular in the early nineteenth century and remained en vogue though the height of the clipper ship era in the middle of the century. The museum's restoration work consisted of repainting in 1974 and the museum kept the traditional all-white appearance.[50]

Purchased for the Mariners' Museum in 1933, she came into the collection attributed to the 1804 schooner *Hope*.[51] If this attribution held true, it would make this figurehead the oldest in the museum's collection. Built in Connecticut in 1804, the schooner *Hope* was registered in Boston, January 29, 1805, and in Salem, Massachusetts on February 11, 1805. Records list *Hope's* owners as successful Salem merchants John Derby, John Prince, Jr. of Boston, and Noah Emery, Master.[52] Listed as a two-masted, 67-foot coasting schooner, *Hope* would have been much too small to accommodate a seven-foot-tall figurehead.[53]

Moreover, the figure's nudity makes its carving date more likely the middle to late nineteenth century. Folk art researcher Ralph Sessions estimated a carving date in the 1870s or 1880s in his 1998 survey of the Mariners' figurehead collection.[54] Finally, when looking at the angle at which the figurehead was mounted on her ship, it evokes a sharper bow shape, not seen early in the nineteenth century. Refocusing historical

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[50] Carol Olsen. *Outline of Hope File – OF27.* TMM 1982.
[51] *Registrars Sheet – OF27.*
[52] *Ibid.*
[53] *Ibid..*

research to a *Hope* from the later half of the nineteenth century may prove fruitful in finding "Hope of Salem's" true identity.

"Jenny Lind"

Figure 124. The three-quarter figurehead known as "Jenny Lind," OF8 (TMM).

Noted for its delicate beauty and simple graceful style, the three-quarter figure known as "Jenny Lind" is one of the most widely recognized figureheads in the Mariners' Museum collection (figure 124). She has been reproduced many times in a variety of materials from wood to fiberglass.[55]

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[54] Ralph Sessions, *Figurehead Survey Results*, OF File, TMM, 1998, 3.
[55] Preston's in Greenport, Long Island, New York listed wooden reproductions of the "Jenny Lind" figurehead in their 1969 catalog. Moreover, numerous poorly executed fiberglass copies can be obtained from nautical gift Web sites on the internet (2003).

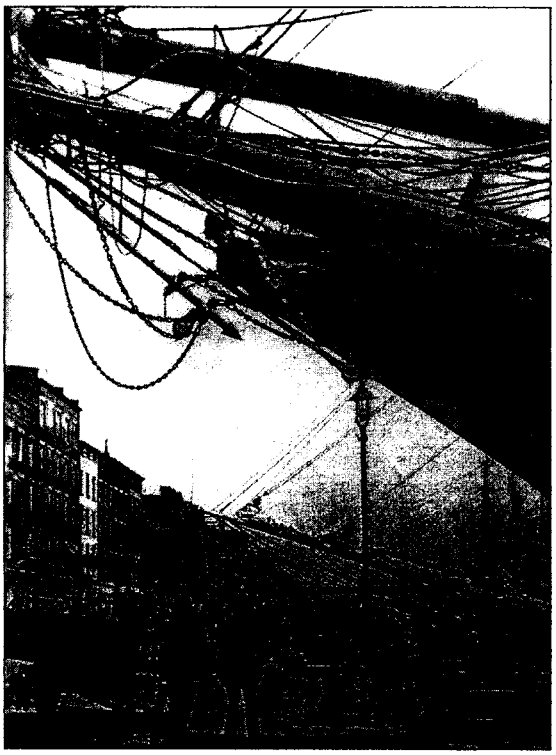

Figure 126. The "Jenny Lind" figurehead would have been configured on the bow of her vessel similarly to the figurehead seen here. Photo taken at South Street, New York, circa 1890 (In Karl-Eric Svärdskog, *Jenny Lind and the Clippter* Nightingale, 179).

Wearing a blue off the shoulder dress, whose style dates to the 1850s, the costume's tight bodice gives way to a v-shaped waist and gathered skirt.[56] The vertical windswept folds of the skirt terminate in an inward turned scroll that culminates beneath the figure and is viewable only from the side. The front of the figure's lower extremity is squared off to match the pinnacle of the ship's cutwater, the most forward part of the hull, contributing to the appearance of the figurehead growing out of the vessel's bow. A deep recess cut into the bottom of the base would facilitate attachment, as would the now damaged lacing board that supported the lower back of the figure (figure 125).[57]

[56] Carol Olsen, *Summary of "Jenny Lind", OF8 File,* TMM, 1983, 19.
[57] *Ibid.* 17. The lacing board of this figure went from the base to approximately four inches below the waist.

The "Jenny Lind" figurehead's neat shoulder length rich golden ringlets frame the sweet expression on her face. While she gazes straight ahead, her head inclines slightly to the left giving her the air of a dreamy young woman. She is missing both of her arms, which were designed to be detached in rough conditions. Like the figurehead "Black Prince," "Jenny Lind's" arms were attached by a mortise and tenon joints. The wedge-shaped mortises remain visible today.

Interestingly, the true identity of this diminutive figurehead known as "Jenny Lind" is one of the most contested in the collection. An actual historic figure, the Swedish diva Jenny Lind (1820-1887) was one of the most popular singers of the nineteenth-century. Jenny Lind's clear soprano voice took Europe, then America by storm in the 1840s and 1850s. Known as the Swedish nightingale, her well-received American tour managed by promoter extraordinaire P.T. Barnum firmly established her as a celebrity on this side of the Atlantic by 1851. Her universal popularity made Jenny Lind the perfect subject for a ship's figurehead, with numerous nineteenth-century vessels adopting her image at the bows.[58]

Once attributed to the 1851 Donald McKay-built clipper *Nightingale,* the Mariners' "Jenny Lind" was unseated from that position by an extensively researched Swedish-owned figurehead, which emerged a much better candidate for the *Nightingale's* bow decoration.[59] A recent publication by the Portsmouth Historical Society chronicles Swedish collector Karl-Eric Svärdskog's tireless search to confirm the true identity of his

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[58] C.G. Rosenberg, *Jenny Lind in America* (New York: 1851). And Karl-Eric Svärdskog, *Jenny Lind and the Clipper* Nightingale *Figurehead* (Portsmouth, New Hampshire: 2001).
[59] *Registrar Sheet "Jenny Lind," OF8*, TMM.

carving, which he strongly asserts is the true Jenny Lind carving from the *Nightingale* (figure 126a and b).[60]

a. b.

Figure 126. The *Nightingale's* figurehead of Jenny Lind: a, Figurehead of Jenny Lind from the clipper *Nightingale* with a painting of the clipper in the background; b, Detail of *Nightingale* figurehead with inset of Jenny Lind painting from the opera *Robert le Diable* at Her Majesty's Theatre in London May 4, 1847 (Both images In Karl-Eric Svärdskog, *Jenny Lind and the Clipper* Nightingale *Figurehead*, frontispiece and 24).

While Svärdskog's vehement assertion of his figurehead's attribution may or may not prove to be true, the Mariners' "Jenny Lind" figurehead is certainly much too small to have been the figurehead for the 1851, 1,066-ton extreme clipper *Nightingale.*[61] Turning to other nineteenth-century vessels named *Jenny Lind*, at least thirty-seven are listed in American and European Lloyds Registers of Shipping. [62] This includes the 533-ton McKay-built packet ship named *Jenny Lind*, built at East Boston in 1848, a more likely

[60] Karl-Eric Svärdskog, *Jenny Lind and the Clipper* Nightingale *Figurehead.*
[61] Octavius T. Howe and Frederick C. Matthews, *American Clipper Ships1833-1858,* Vol. II (Salem, Massachusetts, 1927), 427. and *Registrar Sheet "Jenny Lind,"OF8,*TMM..
[62] Olsen, *Summary of "Jenny Lind,"OF8 File,* TMM, 40-41.

candidate than *Nightingale*.[63] While the tonnage of many of these vessels make them possibilities for the Mariners' "Jenny Lind", Carol Olsen also raises the possibility that the figurehead may not depict Jenny Lind at all, citing the lack of supporting evidence and the disparity of the appearance of the Mariners' figurehead and the many images of Jenny Lind. Comparing the Mariners' figurehead to an 1852 image in Gleason's Pictorial, Olsen suggests that perhaps celebrated actress Madame Anna Thillon would visually agree more closely with Mariners' "Jenny Lind" (figure 127).[64]

Figure 127. Portrait of Madame Anna Thillon, inset of Mariners' Museum's "Jenny Lind" (*Gleason's Pictorial,* No.9, Vol.2, Boston, February 28, 1852. (In Olsen, *Summary of "Jenny Lind," OF8 File*).

While many portraits of Jenny Lind do more closely resemble Svärdskog's smooth-haired carving, a number of portraits of the young Jenny Lind do depict her with

[63] Richard C. McKay, *Some Famous Sailing Ships and Their Builder Donald McKay* (Riverside, Connecticut, 1928), 367.
[64] *Ibid.,* 1-2.

ringlet curls and dress cut similarly to the Mariners' figurehead (figure 128a and b). The great number of vessels named *Jenny Lind* suggest that a wide variety of interpretations of the widely popular singer must exist. The "Jenny Lind" attribution should not be discarded at this point, since that attribution is the only piece of information with which this carving entered the museum collection, and as Olsen herself points out in her study of Mystic Seaport Museum figureheads, the names by which carvings were early known, often prove significant, sometimes years later.[65] Exploring the history of nineteenth-century *Jenny Lind* vessels as well as the possibility of a Madame Thillon attribution may reveal the identity of this mysterious lady. Additionally, one should not discount the prospect that "Jenny Lind" may yet prove to be a portrait head of a captain or ship owner's daughter.

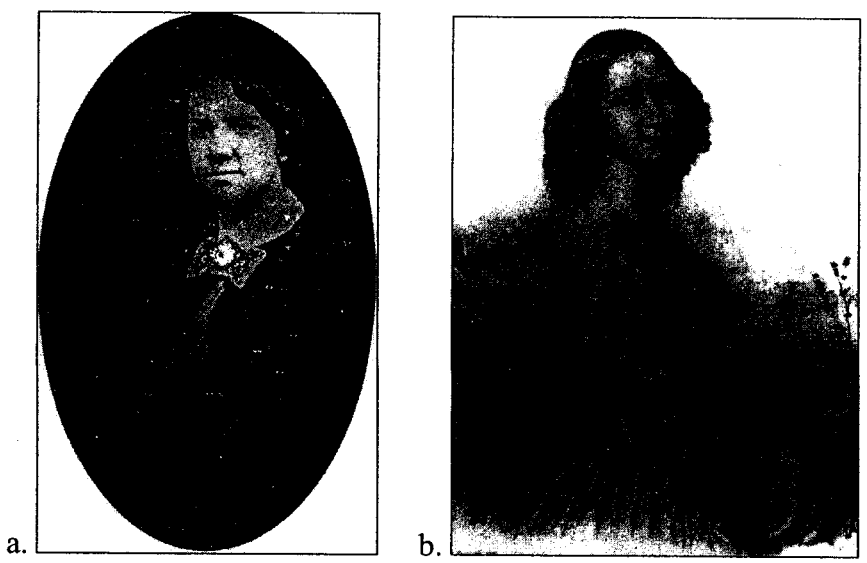

Figure 128. Images of Jenny Lind: a, photograph of Jenny Lind, circa 1850; b, Jenny Lind as a young girl, painted in Sweden by Södermark, no date (Both images in Karl-Eric Svärdskog, *Jenny Lind and the Clipper* Nightingale *Figurehead*, 30 and 35).

[65] Carol Olsen, "Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Figureheads from the Mystic Seaport Museum Collection," Master's Thesis, Texas A&M University (College Station, Texas, 1984), 22-23.

"Martha"

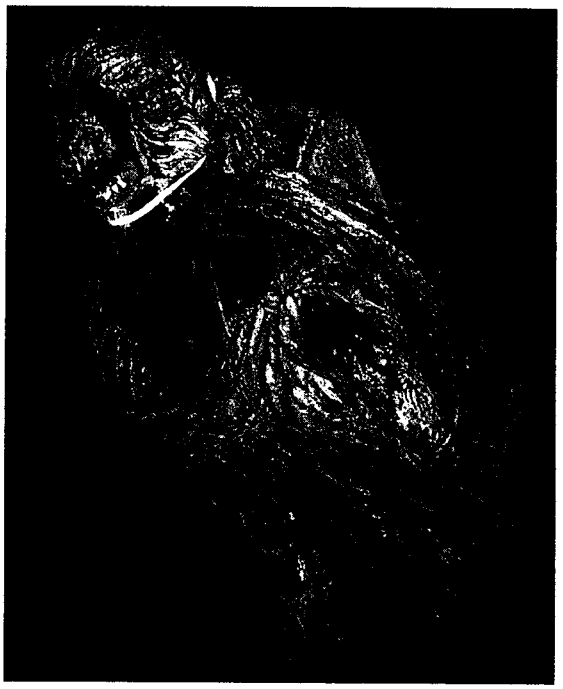

Figure 129. "Martha" figurehead, OF36, likely nineteenth-century New England (Photo by Catherine Green, 2000).

This handsomely carved full-length figurehead represents the archetypical popular perception of a figurehead – a bare-breasted female figure (figure 129). Known as "Martha," she would have originally stood nearly four and a half feet tall, not including a scroll base, upon which she most likely was positioned. Having been sawn off just above her knees, only thirty-five inches of this diminutive figurehead survive. The lower extent of the figure's swirling drapery reveals the remains of two legs, confirming the figure was cut "clear and through."[66] She is moderately clad in skillfully carved drapery that sweeps behind her, the contoured fabric suggesting the outline of her lower body beneath the skirt. Her right hand is placed gently on her partially exposed breasts. Her features

[66] Carol Olsen, *Summary of "Martha," OF36 File.* TMM, 1983. Martha's left leg leads forward.

are characterized by the searching, yet pleasant look on her face. Her loosely gathered hair, blown back in an unkempt fashion, contributes to the illusion of motion conveyed in this figurehead.

Tentatively attributed to the 273-ton bark *Martha* built in 1810 at Pembroke, Massachusetts, the Mariners' Museum purchased the figurehead in 1935 from Clifford Ashley, author of *The Ashley Book of Knots*.[67] In a letter to Mr. Ferguson, President of the Mariners' Museum, Mr. Ashley states,

> "I bought the figurehead *Martha* off Roland Macy. It came from Nantucket. The only *Martha* from Nantucket, according to Starbuck, was s ship of 273 tons built at Pembroke in 1810. Mr. Macy died within the last few years, close to ninety years of age. He was born in Nantucket, and I think his attribution may be taken."[68]

This attribution was initially adopted, and Pauline Pinckney in her 1940 authoritative volume, *American Figureheads and Their Carvers,* mentions the "Martha" figurehead as, "from the whaling ship *Martha* of New Bedford...one of the best examples of carving that has come down to us from these early years. From every stand point it is a satisfying piece. Its author undoubtedly was a skilled craftsman with an unusual sense for beauty of form and appropriateness of design."[69]

Figurehead researcher Carol Olsen asserts the North American attribution is probably correct, as the walking style of this figurehead, is more characteristic of

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[67] Clifford W. Ashley, *The Ashley Book of Knots* (Garden City, New York, 1944). *Registrar Sheet "Martha," OF36.* TMM.

[68] Letter from Clifford W. Ashley to Homer L. Ferguson, Mariners' Museum President, June 29, 1935. Copy of letter in OF36 File.

[69] Both Ashley and Pinckney muddle their attributions for this carving. Ashley labels her 'Martha of New Bedford' in the caption under her photograph in his book, *The Yankee Whaler.* Pinckney labels her as having decorated the ship "*Martha* of Nantucket" in the caption in her book, while noting the carving was from 'Martha of New Bedford' in the text. Clifford W. Ashley, *The Yankee Whaler* (Boston, 1926). Pinckney, *American Figureheads and Their Carvers,* 76.

American or Canadian figureheads versus European figurehead carvings. However, when comparing "Martha" with similar figureheads from vessel with known length, it appears that "Martha" should come from a vessel of about 500 tons, over twice the tonnage of the whaling bark noted by Mr. Ashley.[70] Olsen also draws parallels between the swirling back drapery of "Martha" and other later nineteenth-century carvings such as C.A.L. Sampson's 1870s-carvings including the Mariners' Museum's *Belle of Oregon*.[71]

Figure 130. "Martha," OF36 figurehead (Pinckney, *American Figureheads and Their Carvers,* plate XI).

Folk art researcher Ralph Sessions' assessment of the "Martha" figurehead notes that the figure's nudity makes an early nineteenth-century attribution questionable, but comments that the interesting drapery hints at an earlier to mid-nineteenth century

[70] Olsen, *Summary of "Martha," OF36 File,* 6.
[71] *Ibid., 5-6.* A figurehead of known origin, *Cassandra Adams*, built in 1876 and carved in San Francisco, also has similar blown back draperies and a short skirt, as well as mimicking "Martha's" pose with her right hand held to her breast.

carving date (figure 130).[72] It is unlikely that nineteenth-century ship owners would have commissioned the carving of a family member, such as their wife or daughter, to appear partially exposed. This calls into question the vessel name "Martha" and instead suggests an allegorical or mythological named vessel. Olsen expounds on this idea suggesting, "if the name Martha was correct for her vessel...Martha was probably not the original name, but a later name, and part of the means of finding her history should be to look for Martha ex- (something allegorical or something mythological)."[73]

The "Martha" figurehead is currently in museum storage. This figureheads state of preservation is quite poor. She is heavily cracked and unpainted. In 1961 the museum did commission "Martha's" repair at the cost of $145, although one is hard pressed to see where any repairs have been made, and no explanation of the repairs are detailed in the bill.[74] While it would be interesting to display this figure as is, illustrating the un-restored appearance of a nineteenth-century figurehead, "Martha" would certainly be better served by undergoing conservation to stabilize the wood and retard the extensive checking and cracking pervasive throughout the carving.

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[72] Ralph Sessions, *Figurehead Survey Results,* OF File, TMM, 1998.
[73] Olsen, *Summary of "Martha" File, OF36,* TMM, 8.
[74] Bill for repair of "Martha" figurehead from William W. Geggie to TMM, 1961. In OF36 File.

"Marcia Allen"

Figure 131. Bust figurehead known as "Marcia Allen," OF10. Possibly from a whaling ship (TMM).

This bust figure, known as the "Marcia Allen," is attributed to the whale ship *Marcia* built at Bath, Maine in 1828 and registered at Fairhaven, Massachusetts (figure 131).[75] The polychrome female bust sits atop an interestingly carved gold scroll base. Her costume, dated circa 1830, is an off the shoulder brown dress distinguished by the unique diamond patterned hatch marks carved into the wood.[76] Details such as gold and red painted jewelry including a necklace, broach and drop earrings mark this piece as a

[75] *Registrar Sheet for "Marcia Allen", OF10,* TMM. *The Mariners' Museum Catalogue Worksheet* for OF10. Carol Olsen, *Summary of "Marcia Allen," OF10 File,* TMM, 1983 mentions the Fairhaven registry, possibly from *Ship Registers of New Bedford,* Vol.1, 196, but it is unclear if this is where this information is derived. Alexander Starbuck lists a *Marcia* registered Fairhaven in 1832, but does not mention her build location or date. Alexander Starbuck, *History of the American Whale Fishery* (Waltham, Massachusetts, 1878).

[76] Olsen, *Summary of "Marcia Allen" OF10 File,*TMM, 4.

portrait figurehead. A blue draped shawl tied with a bow in the middle front of the figure forms a closely carved drapery around the scroll base, which is mortised on the bottom for mounting the figure on the bow of its vessel. The gold gilt feathers bedecking her tresses set off the dark curls of "Marcia Allen." Her facial features, somewhat compromised by a fairly unskillfully applied repainting, show a slightly anxious or concerned woman glancing slightly up and to the left.[77]

The tentative attribution as "Marcia Allen" is complicated by the figurehead's unknown history and the vague nature of where and by whom this figurehead acquired its attribution. Complicating the issue, research turned up no famous person named Marcia Allen or vessels named Marcia Allen.[78] Still, a number of comparisons may be made to other bust figureheads in American maritime museums that shed light onto the obscured origins of this carving.

"Marcia Allen's" unusual scroll base incised with a pineapple cross hatch design also appears on the bust figurehead of the 1845 Maine-built bark *Solomon Piper* now at the Peabody Essex Museum in Salem, Massachusetts (figure 132a and b). Although it is possible these two figureheads had the same carver, it is more likely that they illustrate a regional carving style for figurehead bases.[79] This supports the Bath-built *Marcia* attribution.

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[77] *Ibid.*, 21. The current painted eyebrows and lips of the figure do not follow the carved outlines for those features, making them appear heavy and crude.

[78] Olsen did not find the name Marcia Allen in her 1983 research. Subsequent research by the author in libraries and on the internet have also proved futile. However, local historical sources for Bath, Maine or Fairhaven, Massachusetts may reveal the identity of Marcia Allen.

[79] Carol Olsen, *Summary of "Marcia Allen," OF10 File,* TMM, 1983, 2.

Comparing the size of the "Marcia Allen" figurehead and the *Commodore Morris* figurehead in The Mariners' Museum also supports the *Marcia* attribution. Both the "Marcia Allen" and the *Commodore Morris* figureheads are both busts measuring approximately two and a half feet high. The two whaling vessels were also roughly the same size, the *Commodore Morris* measured 107-feet long and *Marcia* measured 104-feet long, proving the viability of "Marcia Allen" fitting on the bow of the proposed whaling ship.

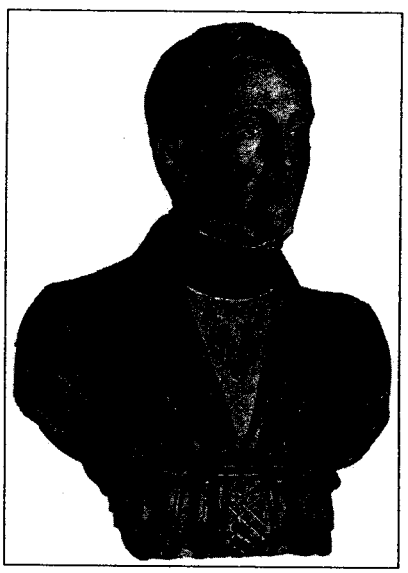
a.  b.

Figure 132. Nearly identical scroll bases: a, Figurehead of *Solomon Piper*, pre-1854 ship of Boston (Christensen, *The Index of American Design*, 61); b, "Marcia Allen," OF10 (Hornung, *Treasury of American Design*, 18).

"Marcia Allen's" circa 1830 costume, the prevalence of bust heads on whaling ships, and the figurehead having been "secured in Maine", all support the 1928 *Marcia* attribution.[80] One piece of evidence, however, greatly clouds this attribution. Pauline Pinckney in her seminal work, *American Figureheads and Their Carvers,* refers to a

figurehead in the Old Dartmouth Historical Society and Whaling Museum in New Bedford, Massachusetts, now the New Bedford Whaling Museum, as the figurehead of the whaling ship *Marcia* originally from Fairhaven, Massachusetts working as New Bedford whaler in 1844.[81] This figurehead is also a bust of a woman, but she wears a classical costume and is obviously a different figurehead than the Mariners' Museum's "Marcia Allen." It appears as if two figureheads claim the whale ship *Marcia.*

It remains to be seen which figurehead is from the *Marcia.* Until that determination is made, "Marcia Allen" remains an interesting example of a mid-nineteenth century authentic bust figurehead. She received restorative measures at some point resulting in the less than successful repainting, giving "Marcia Allen" her uneasy expression seen today.[82] Nonetheless, the carving appears stable with only minor modern cracking apparent in the wood. She is in good condition in Mariners' Museum storage. The likelihood that this figurehead is from an 1830s whale ship enables this carving to be displayed with a tentative attribution to the whale ship *Marcia.*

"Melmerby"

This half figurehead of a nineteenth-century gentleman is tentatively attributed to the New Brunswick ship/bark *Melmerby*, built in 1863 (figure 133). Nearly three-and-a-half feet tall, "Melmerby" poses with his arms folded across his chest, an unusual stance

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[80] Olsen, *Summary of "Marcia Allen" OF10 File,* TMM, 4. Pinckney, *American Figureheads and Their Carvers,* 143. Fred Hill information in OF10 File, TMM.
[81] Pinckney, *American Figureheads and Their Carvers,* 146, 170, and Plate XII.
[82] Museum files do not include details on restoration efforts for this carving. The relatively modern appearance and good condition of her current painted finish indicate she was repainted while under the museum's ownership, probably in the past 50 years.

but not unique. His upright posture and straight forward gaze indicate that this figurehead was mounted upright atop the vessel's cutwater, more closely resembling the bluff bow assembly of a whaling vessel rather than the sharp angular bow of a clipper.

Figure 133. Half-figure known as "Melmerby," OF77, TMM (Photo Catherine Green, 2000).

Depicted from the waist up, "Melmerby" wears a faded black suit, white shirt, and light blue neck cloth that would have been appropriate to an 1863 launch date.[83] Although form fitting, the jacket gives way to black drapery around the lacing board at the back and around the recess at the base, the figurehead's attachment points. Certainly not an allegorical figure, "Melmerby" appears to be a portrait head. An interesting

[83] Carol Olsen, *Summary of "Melmerby," OF77 File,* TMM, 1983, 5. Olsen cites issues of the *Illustrated London News* (July – December, 1863).

construction detail lies in the arms of this figurehead, for rather than fit with detachable appendages such as the "Black Prince" figurehead, "Melmerby's" outer shoulders and arms were laminated to the solid core of the carving, delineating the maximum breadth of the central wood block used for the figure. "Melmerby" has sustained moderate cracking, especially where the laminations come together. The figurehead is in fair condition in museum storage today.

The mutton-chopped "Melmerby" figurehead's identity remains elusive, though if a portrait carving, he is likely associated with the vessel's builders or owners. Like many of the figureheads in this chapter, the "Melmerby" figurehead's attribution remains fairly tenuous, although circumstantial evidence supports that it is from the 1863 wooden ship *Melmerby*, later re-rigged as a bark. This theory is based largely on a *New Glasgow Evening News* article of October 27, 1936 in which a Mr. Clements of Prince Edward Island sought information about the ship *Melmerby* which wrecked with a loss of sixteen lives near Roy's Island, Little Harbor, Prince Edward Island, in October 1890 (figure 134). In the article, Mr. Clements claims to have a figurehead reportedly taken from a ship, "wrecked somewhere in that vicinity a good many years ago, and I have been vainly endeavoring for a long time to find out the name of the vessel and who the figurehead may represent." [84] The "Melmerby" figurehead came to the museum in 1939 attributed to the 1863 ship *Melmerby*. Records mention that the figure was shipped from Halifax,

[84] *New Glasgow Evening News*. October, 27, 1936, New Glasgow, Nova Scotia.

Nova Scotia, suggesting the Mariners' figurehead is the figure referred to by Mr. Clements a year earlier.[85]

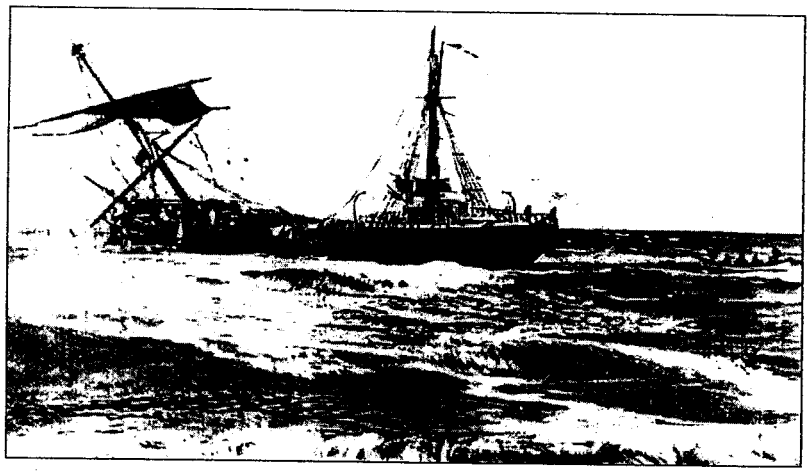

Figure 134. *Melmerby* aground off Roy's Island (The Maritime Museum of the Atlantic, Halifax, Nova Scotia. Photocopy in OF77 File, TMM).

The *Melmerby* was a 1510 ton, 207-foot long ship/bark built in 1863 by Nevins Shipyard at St. John, New Brunswick. She had two English owners and sailed twenty-seven years primarily in trade between Liverpool, London, Australia, and India.[86] "The English barque *Melmerby,* from Quebec for Greenock, with a cargo of timber, became water logged during a gale on the 5th [of October, 1890]...and lost everything on her deck. She drifted for a week, when she struck on an island near Pictou on the 12th ...Captain Olsen and 16 men attempted to land in a boat, but in the terrible surf all were drowned except the pilot and two men, who succeeded in swimming ashore.[87]

[85] Olsen, *Summary of "Melmerby," OF77 File,* 4.
[86] European Lloyds Shipping 1863-1890, in Olsen, *Summary of "Melmerby," OF77 File,* 14.
[87] *Shipping Gazette Weekly Summary,* Halifax, Nova Scotia, October 17, 1890.

"Merrie Monarch"

This monochrome, white full-length figure known as "Merrie Monarch" is thought to represent the pleasure-seeking King George IV of England (ruled 1820-1830). Standing approximately six and a half feet tall, he strides with his right foot forward on a black painted acanthus leaf base (figure 135a and b). The figure holds his right arm to his waist with his hand forming a fist, while his left shoulder is open and with his left arm somewhat extended back. The "Merrie Monarch's" costume consists of long pants over square-toed shoes. A long frock coat covers a starched shirt, vest and neckcloth tied in a bow. The figure's curly locks and long curling sideburns frame his strong features. A modern wood mounting board is currently attached to the original lacing board that would have attached the "Merrie Monarch" to his vessel.[88]

a. b.

Figure 135. "Merrie Monarch," OF30, TMM: a, currently in museum storage (Photo by Catherine Green, 2000); b, side view of the striding figurehead (R.A. Tweedie et al, ed., *Arts in New Brunswick* (New Brunswick, Canada, 1967).

[88] *Registrar Sheet "Merrie Monarch," OF30*, TMM.

This stately figurehead is attributed to the 1859 ship *Merrie Monarch*, built and owned by James H. Moran of St. Martins, New Brunswick, Canada (figure 136). One of the large vessels in the Moran family's merchant fleet, the ship was 194-feet long and 1367 tons.[89] The identification of this figurehead comes from James H. Moran's son Arthur Moran who sold the "Merrie Monarch" figurehead to the Mariners' Museum in the 1930s.[90]

Figure 136. James Hamilton Moran (1817-1879). St. Martins, New Brunswick shipbuilder. Possible builder of *Merrie Monarch*. Note Moran's similar appearance to the "Merrie Monarch" figurehead. No date. (Ross N. Hebb, *Quaco-St. Martins, A Brief History* (Fredericton, New Brunswick, 1997), 92).

Museum records report the *Merrie Monarch's* figurehead was removed in England just prior to the ship's loss off the coast of Madagascar in 1874.[91] The figurehead was sent back to New Brunswick by J.H. Moran, with the intention of placing it upon a new vessel. As a result of the losses incurred from the sinking of the *Merrie*

[89] *Ibid.* Esther Clark Wright, *The Ships of St. Martins* (Saint John, New Brunswick, 1974), 16.
[90] *Registrar Sheet "Merrie Monarch," OF30*, TMM.
[91] Fred Hill correspondence in TMM Archives, Box 8, Smith-Hill-Redpath, January 1935. *Merrie Monarch* is listed in American Lloyds Universal Standard Record of Shipping, New York at least as late as 1872.

Monarch, however, Mr. Moran did not build his projected ship.[92] Instead, the figurehead remained at St. Martins in the home of Captain Moran's grandson for many years until purchased by the Mariners' Museum in 1933.[93]

The "Merrie Monarch's" rather firm attribution is challenged by an article in the figurehead's museum file from the *Richmond News Leader*, dated June 8, 1935. The article identifies the "Merrie Monarch" figurehead as Henry Clay, describing Clay's appearance, "somewhat like a corpulent Prince Consort."[94] It goes on to relate that the figurehead was purchased in Nova Scotia and the following story came with him:

> "Carved in Salem, Mass. The ship to which he belonged was wrecked in the Bay of Fundy. The figure was saved and placed on the bow of the *Crown Prince* built at St. Martin's, New Brunswick. Registration papers are said to have been refused this ship in England due to the foreign figurehead. It was therefore removed and returned to Canada...Lloyds register gives the following information of the *Crown Prince*: 'wooden bark under Norwegian flag. Built in 1871 at St. Martin's New Brunswick.' but the registry fails to say what the figurehead represents so it may be Henry Clay, Edward VIII, or even with a sailor's imagination, Baldur the Beautiful."[95]

One is tempted to discount this frivolous account, except that there was indeed a ship of 987-tons named *Crown Prince* built in 1871, also by J.H. Moran in New Brunswick.[96] A third ship named *Prince Regent* built at St. Martins in 1869 could also be a possibility for the identity of this figurehead.[97]

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[92] *Registrar Sheet "Merrie Monarch," OF30,* TMM.
[93] *Catalogue Worksheet OF30,* TMM, 1988.
[94] Julia Sully, "Ship's Figureheads Recall Dim Past – Mariners' Museum Has Many Examples of Old Art," *Richmond News Leader*, June 8, 1935, 125.
[95] *Ibid.*
[96] Hebb, *Quaco-St. Martins, A Brief History*, 109.
[97] *Ibid.*

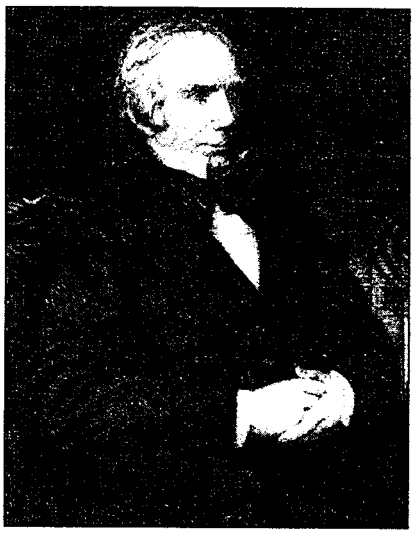
a.  b.

Figure 137. Possible identities of the "Merrie Monarch" figurehead: a, American statesman Henry Clay (Howard W. Caldwell, *Henry Clay, the Great Compromiser* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 1899), frontispiece); b, King George IV of England, popularly known as the Merrie Monarch (www.wikipedia.org).

Furthermore, if we believe the above story, there is also a possibility that this figurehead represents American statesman Henry Clay (1777-1852), who admittedly resembles the Mariners' "Merrie Monarch" more closely than Edward IV, who was a clean-shaven man who is most often portrayed wearing extravagantly ruffled shirts and breeches. Clay, on the other hand, had pronounced sideburns, and is depicted circa 1840 in dress similar to that of the Mariners' figurehead (figure 137a and b). The Mariners' Museum must have thought the Clay identity was a possibility, because a letter in the "Merrie Monarch's" file from the Peabody Museum of Salem, Massachusetts to the Mariners' Museum appears to respond to a request for any ships in their records listed as *Henry Clay*. The museum responded that the *Henry Clay* of 1207 tons was built in New York in 1845 and hailed from New York in 1858.[98]

[98] Letter from L.W. Jenkins, Assistant Director, Peabody Museum, Salem, Massachusetts to Mr. H.L. Ferguson of the Mariners Museum, dated July 14, 1934.

"Neptune"

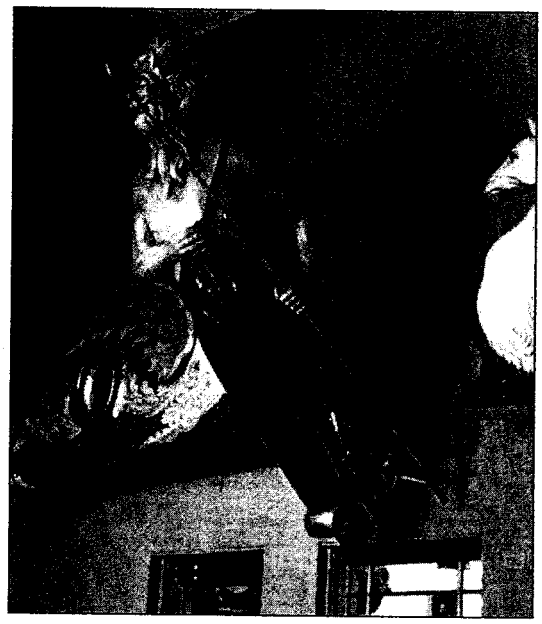


Figure 138. "Neptune," OF65 (TMM).

Exemplary in its portrayal of the human form, the three-quarter figurehead of "Neptune" depicts the aqueous deity emerging from a scroll-base, forming the terminal end of the vessel's cutwater, just below the bowsprit (figure 138). The drapery of this figure provides a convenient transition from ship structure to human form. Neptune's bright red toga-like garment swirls around the scroll, threatening to envelop it. This successful transition convinces one that a human torso growing from the bow of a ship is a natural occurrence. Bare above the waist, the artist's portrayal of the male anatomy is both realistic and expressive. The figure tips forward in a commanding attitude verifying the strength and swiftness of his vessel. Neptune holds his right arm to his chest and grasps his trident, which likely was unshipped at sea, tightly in his clenched left hand at his side. While graying, his beard and hair are full and neatly flowing into thick tendrils,

capped with a golden crown as a symbol of Neptune's status as ruthless sovereign of the seas.

Figure 139. Pre-restoration photo of "Neptune" (*The Mariners Museum: A History and Guide*, (Newport News, Virginia, no date), 218).

A Mariners' Museum agent purchased the "Neptune" figurehead in Rotterdam, Netherlands in June of 1937.[99] The pre-restoration photograph of the sea king sitting outside at the Riusdijk Scrapyard in the Netherlands documents "Neptune's" dramatic transformation during nearly yearlong repairs from 1939 to 1940 (figure 139). Another repainting in 1955 constitutes the only other restoration efforts, and the figurehead remains in good condition.[100]

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[99] *Registrar Sheet, "Neptune," OF65*, TMM. This figurehead was included in this North American study because of its tentative attribution as the figurehead of the *Ocean King,* Subsequent research establishes "Neptune" as a likely European carving because of its scroll-skirt style and its acquisition in Northern Europe.

[100] *The Mariners' Museum: A History and Guide* (Newport News, Virginia, no date), 218.

Figure 140. "Neptune calming the Tempest," Peter Paul Rubins, 1635. Note the nearly identical depiction of Neptune in Rubins' seventeenth-century masterpiece and the figurehead in the Mariners' Museum. The flowing red drapery, muscular stature, long gray beard and hear, tightly held trident, and the commanding presence of this mythological god (Mythmedia Project at Haifa University, http://lib.haifa.ac.il/www/art/MYTHOLOGY_WESTART.HTML).

An appropriate ship figurehead subject, Neptune, in Roman religion and mythology, is the god of water. Originating as a god of fertility, Neptune eventually became associated with the Greek god of the sea, Poseidon.[101] Neptune/Poseidon is often represented as extremely powerful with a violent and implacable disposition, carrying an earthquake inducing trident (figure 140). His vengeful nature aside, Neptune was also a protector of all waters, ruling the seas and freshwater realms.[102] In a study of nineteenth- and twentieth-century ship names, Neptune was the most recurrent ship name taken from Roman or Greek mythology.[103]

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[101] *Columbia Encyclopedia*, Sixth Edition (online version, 2001).
[102] *Ibid.*
[103] Don H. Kennedy, *Ship Names: Origins and Usages during 45 Centuries* (Newport News, Virginia, 1974), 51.

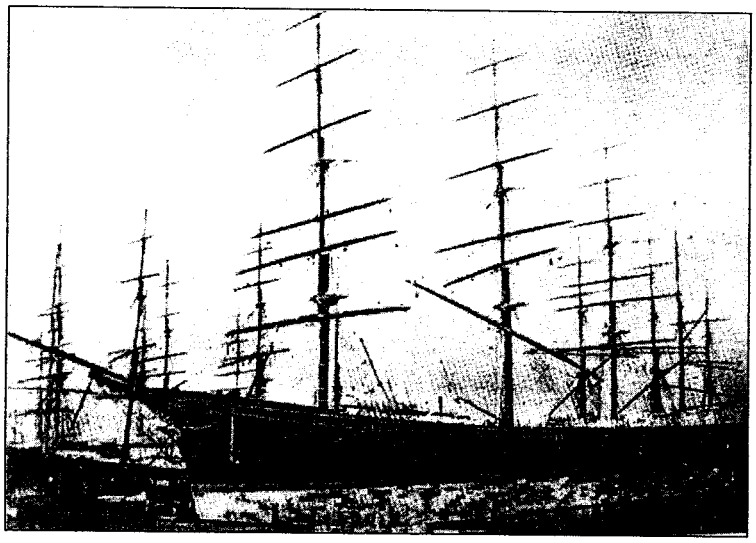

Figure 141. Ship *Ocean King*. Although a full-length figurehead is visible in this photograph, one cannot make out the design (Courtesy of the Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Massachusetts; in Margaret Jefferds Thompson, *Captain Nathaniel Lord Thompson of Kennebunk, Maine, and the Ships He Built, 1811-1889* (Searsport, Maine, 1937), facing 72).

Information in museum files tentatively attribute this figurehead to the ship *Ocean King* built in Kennebunkport, Maine in 1874, the largest wooden ship built in the state (figure 141).[104] *The Portland Argus* of October 26, 1874 bestowed "great credit" on her shipbuilder, Captain Nathaniel Lord Thompson and his workmen, "for their skill and success in building such a noble vessel."[105] The article also praises the figurehead of the *Ocean King,* describing it as a, "magnificent and appropriate figurehead, carved so well by Messrs. Littlefield of Portland....This figurehead measures nine feet in height. It is the largest and best piece of wood carving ever done in Maine. Anatomists say that the

[104] *"Neptune," OF65 File*, TMM.
[105] *The Portland Argus*, October 26, 1874 (Portland, Maine).

artist must have been unusually familiar with the human form to have carved the limbs so true to nature."[106]

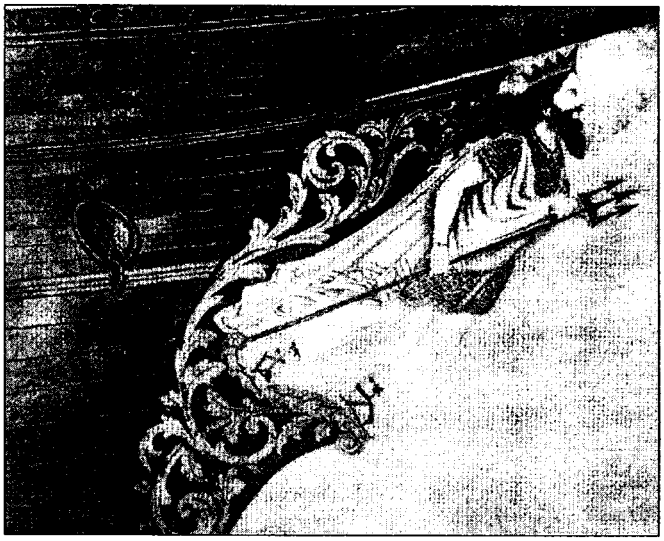

Figure 142. Figurehead of the ship *Ocean King*. The drawing was reportedly submitted by Portland, Maine carvers Littlefield Brothers to Captain Nathaniel Lord Thompson, builder of the *Ocean King* for his approval (Thompson, *Captain Nathaniel Lord Thompson*, facing 73).

The Mariners' Museum's "Neptune" figurehead has been listed in magazine articles as carved by Littlefield Brothers of Portland in 1874 for the ship *Ocean King*. The "Neptune" figurehead, however, did not arrive at the Mariners' Museum in 1937 with that attribution.[107] Correspondence between Mrs. Anne Lord Rogers and a Mariners' Museum curator in 1994 contradicts the *Ocean King* attribution. Mrs. Rogers' husband's maternal grandfather was Captain Nathaniel Lord Thompson, the builder of the *Ocean King*. She wrote the Mariners' Museum expressing her joy at having viewed the actual figurehead from Capt. Thompson's largest ship, the *Ocean King* in the Mariners' Museum. Mrs. Rogers included a photocopy of a watercolor drawing she and her owned.

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[106] *Ibid.*

This was the drawing submitted to and accepted by Capt. Thompson by the figurehead's carvers, Littlefield Brothers of Portland, Maine (figure 142). Mrs. Rogers admits that, "to our amazement King Neptune was not dressed as our watercolor drawing of the figurehead depicted...I have no explanation of the differences."[108]

The Rogers' watercolor shows a full-length figure cut "clear and through" with bare legs striding forward and dressed in a short tunic and flowing cape. The Mariners' Museum three-quarter length "Neptune" figurehead morphs the lower body, covered by drapery, into the scrollwork base and leaves the upper body nude. The watercolor painting has Neptune's trident in his right hand, while Mariners' "Neptune" depicts the trident held in the opposite appendage.[109]

Accepting the watercolor as a primary document for the design of the *Ocean King's* figurehead, the Mariners' Museum most likely does not possess the figurehead of the *Ocean King.* The "Neptune's" figurehead's true identity may not even be North American in origin. While stylistically it is almost certainly a later nineteenth-century carving, the three-quarter configuration that depicted the figure emerging from vessel's cutwater is more characteristic of European, rather than North American figureheads.[110] Currently, this figurehead is in Mariners' Museum storage, if exhibited, it should be displayed as "Neptune," not the figurehead of the *Ocean King.*

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[107] Lillian H. Corey. "Maine Ship Carvers in the Golden Age of Sail," *Down East Magazine.* November 1967: 41-42. And *Registrar Sheet, OF65.* TMM.
[108] Mrs. Anne Lord Rogers to Miss Lisa Royse, May 19, 1994, OF65 File, TMM.
[109] Figure 141 shows the port side of the ship *Ocean King,* but the figurehead is too small to discern if the ship's figurehead is the Mariners' "Neptune" or a full-length carving reflecting the Littlefield drawing.
[110] Norton, *Ships' Figureheads,* 112-115.

Conclusions and Recommendations: The Interpretation and Display of the Mariners' Museum's Nineteenth-Century Figureheads

Archer M. Huntington founded the Mariners' Museum in 1930 and took a global view of the sea and its effects on human history.[1] The museum's collection of over ninety figureheads reflects this view. The twenty-two nineteenth-century North American figureheads discussed here are only a faction of the international scope of the museum's figurehead collection, which includes twentieth, as well as nineteenth-century bow decorations.

Incredibly, very few of the museum's figureheads are currently displayed in the museum's public galleries. In fact, of the figureheads discussed in this thesis, only the *USS Lancaster*, *Commodore Morris*, and "Hope of Salem" figureheads are currently exhibited.[2] It is hoped that by providing an evolutionary timeline for the tradition of ships' figureheads and illuminating the intriguing stories associated with a number of the nineteenth-century North American figureheads, the museum will exhibit more of their figurehead collection, one of the largest in the world. More than mere pieces of decorative or folk art, the Mariners' Museum nineteenth-century North American figureheads provides a rich-hued portrait of American and Canadian maritime history.

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[1] *Guide to the Mariners' Museum* (Newport News, Virginia, 1997), 3.
[2] Jeanne Wiloz-Egnor, Director of Collections Management, TMM. Personal communication, June 2003.

Figure 143. Figureheads from the Long John Silver collection now in the hold of the *Cutty Sark*, London (Courtesy of the R. Hunter Collection; in Karl-Eric Svärdskog, *Jenny Lind and the Clippter* Nightingale *Figurehead* (Portsmouth, New Hampshire: 2001), 191.).

Many museums interpret their figurehead collections by displaying them together, allowing museum visitors to see the diversity in the ship carving tradition. The "Long John Silver" figurehead collection at the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich, England illustrates the effectiveness of this kind of exhibition (figure 143).[3] Likewise, Mystic Seaport Museum's figurehead collection has been assembled into an exhibit devoted to their figurehead collection, (figure 144).[4]

[3] S.F. Bailey, *Cutty Sark Figureheads, The Long John Silver Collection* (Shepperton, Surrey, England, 1992.

[4] Mystic's figureheads have been displayed together in the Wendell Building since 1977. Hamilton, *Silent Pilots,* 30.

Figure 144. Mystic Seaport Museum's figurehead collection as displayed in the Wendell Building (Georgia Hamilton, *Silent Pilots, Figureheads in Mystic Seaport Museum* (Mystic, Connecticut, 1984), 29).

This certainly is an effective way to expose the public to these beautiful pieces of maritime heritage, and the companion book, *Silent Pilots,* published in 1994, highlights the histories of these figureheads and provides context to ship carving traditions.[5] The Mariners' Museum's much larger collection of figureheads would benefit from this kind of interpretation, but, I believe, would be best served by including their histories in the museum exhibit itself. Providing an overview of the history of bow decoration and incorporating historic photos and associated artifacts with displayed figureheads will transform these carvings from artwork to multifaceted artifacts that proverbially narrate stories of maritime history to museum visitors.

[5] *Ibid.* Carol Olsen wrote her Master's thesis on figureheads in Mystic Seaport Museum in the 1980s, providing the initial research for *Silent Pilots.*

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