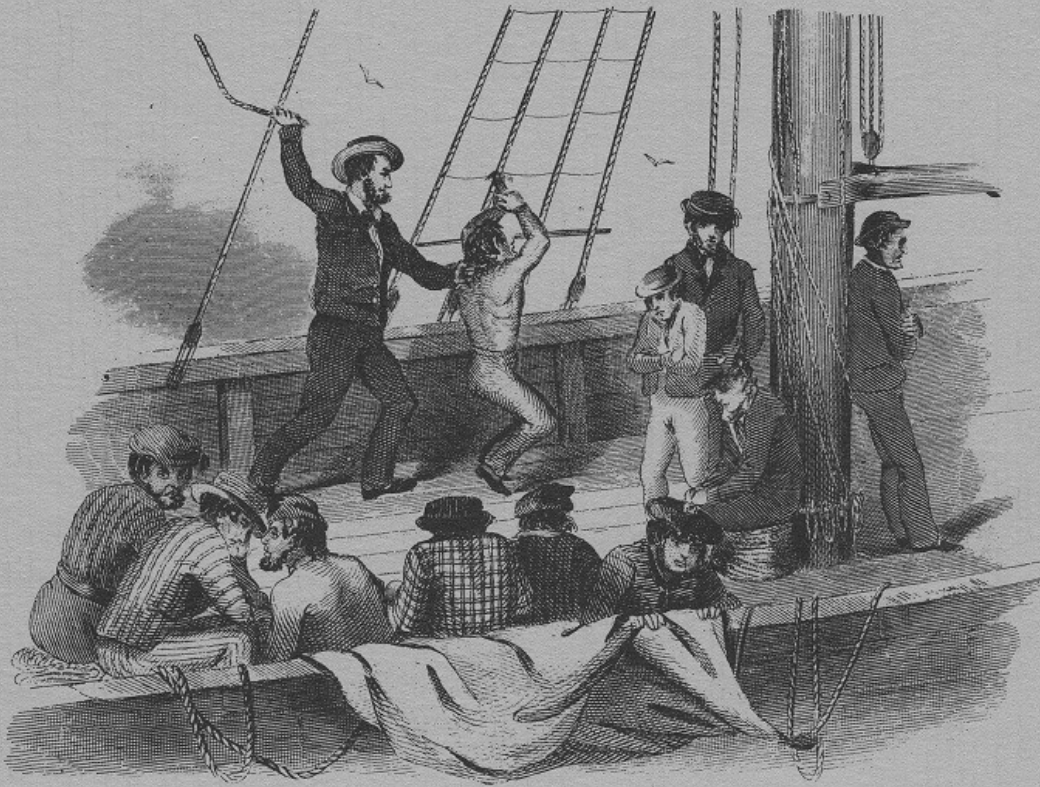


ANATOMY OF A MUTINY

SHIP *Sharon*, 1842



OLD DARTMOUTH HISTORICAL SKETCH

Number 75

ANATOMY OF A MUTINY SHIP *Sharon*, 1842

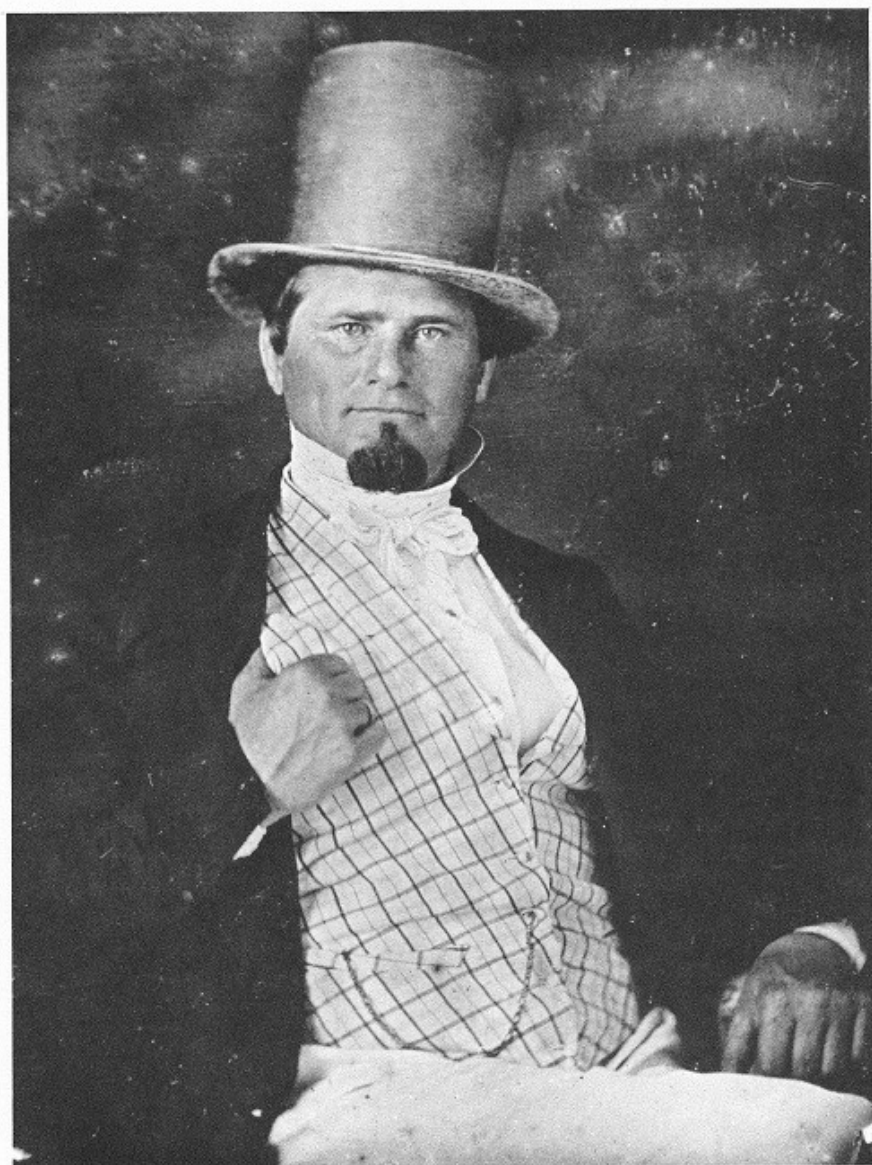
PHILIP F. PURRINGTON



OLD DARTMOUTH HISTORICAL SKETCH

Number 75

New Bedford 1968



Captain Benjamin Clough
Third officer of *Sharon* at the time of the mutiny, Clough
is shown here at a later date, after he had become a
whaling master.

INTRODUCTION

Mutinies in the days of sail usually resulted from the resentment built up in members of the crews by the actions of their officers. The frictions that generated the heat and pressure could generally be traced to a single individual. So it was in the *Sharon*.

Life on a whaleship was extremely monotonous, especially on the long sperm-whaling voyages. Days, weeks and months were spent at sea without sighting land and only occasionally were whales sighted and chased. The narrow confines of the vessel held the same individuals day after day. Food varied little. Discipline was strict, punishment harsh and sometimes vindictive. Petty frictions became enduring and cumulative. Yet in spite of this mutinies were actually a rarity.

During the century and a half before 1906, when newly invented spring steel replaced whalebone in Victorian corsetry, the American whalemens achieved an unquestioned primacy in a worldwide industry. In these years about 2,600 American vessels made some 15,000 whaling voyages. Seventy-one of these voyages, less than half of one percent, are recorded as having had mutinies or other more surreptitious acts against the "establishment." Included in the seventy-one are sixteen cases of vessels set on fire by their crews, and two scuttlings.

Only eight of the recorded mutinies resulted in the death of an officer; and on five, including the *Sharon*, only a single officer lost his life. Four other mutinies brought death to one or more of the mutineers. The ability of a potential mutineer to escape from his personal floating hell by deserting saved many whaleships much trouble. Many of *Sharon's* crew had deserted, but, in retrospect, not enough.

The *Sharon* mutiny was the direct result of the brutality of one man, a man whose mind was twisted by some severe derangement. Probably a psychiatrist should have written this introduction rather than an amateur historian.

Philip Purrington has told the story very well.

Charles F. Batchelder
Milton, Massachusetts

Anatomy of a Mutiny

AN ever-popular tale of the New England whaling trade is the *Sharon* mutiny, classic in its recital of tragedy and heroics like something from the Greek drama, a Norse saga or perhaps the Old Testament. No matter how often repeated, and there are many versions, it is a story with a serious fault as it is bare of comic relief. Through murder, manslaughter and accident only a handful of the original ship's company returned to port.

The whaleship *Sharon* departed Fairhaven, Massachusetts, 25 May 1841, for the Pacific Ocean under command of Howes Norris of Martha's Vineyard.¹ His age was thirty-eight and he had been a whaling master since twenty-five, a mariner since seventeen. Behind him was left his wife of nine years, Elvina Smith, and two children who were soon to be fatherless. Supporting him on a planned four-year voyage were Thomas H. and Nathan Skiff Smith, first and second officers respectively, also Vineyard natives. Benjamin Clough, the third officer, from Monmouth, Maine, had first tried his luck whaling in 1836 at the age of sixteen in the bark *Jasper* of New Bedford. This voyage was followed by another short cruise in *Friendship*. According to a descendant he sailed next in the bark *Rajah*, leaving the vessel at Lombok because of difficulties and after some dangerous adventures returned in *General Pike*. This was normal schooling for advancement in the whaling trade. Certainly Clough had been through the mill by the time of his *Sharon* voyage and was well prepared for his important role in the events that followed.

Sharon's course from Fairhaven was of the normal sort, stopping at Fayal, Azores, on 5 July for supplies. It was probably here that a minor hero boarded the vessel, Manuel Jose dos Reis. There was next a call

¹ A printing error in Starbuck, *History of the American Whale Fishery* (Waltham, 1878), lists *Sharon* as sailing 14 April, returning because of sickness among the officers and sailing again 29 October. In three private journals kept aboard *Sharon* no mention is made of any turnabout. The ship did not return until 10 February 1845, her catch for the voyage being 900 barrels sperm oil, 1,050 barrels whale oil and 9,000 pounds of whale bone.

at Brava, Cape Verde Islands, and after rounding the Cape of Good Hope the usual Indian Ocean voyage was made by way of St. Paul's Island. As an aside before plunging into the *Sharon* tragedies the following lines are given from a letter by Clough and give a little hint of the romance that a whaling voyage could be for a young observer from a Maine village:²

We stopped here a few hours [at St. Paul's] and I went ashore in a boat. We pulled into a small basin on the east side of the island, which is supposed to have been the crater of a burning mountain, having boiling springs on the beach where you can catch a fish and heave him over your head into the spring where he will be cooked and salted in a few minutes, the water being salt. We saw a few hogs, but too far distant to be got at with ease. There is nothing grows on the island but scurvy-grass. We saw the grave of the mate of the *Aeronaut* of New London [Mystic], who was killed by a whale in 1837. We caught a few fish and went on board, pulling past a great number of Wright Whales. We then shaped our course for Copang, where we arrived Oct. 26, dropped anchor and lay three days, but found nothing to be got but water. A few Dutch here and a thing by the name of Fort, but not much more. Some Chinese and the rest Malays. The Chinese have a Temple here and the Malays a Mosque, which are of not much account. After we left here, we passed through the Straits of Timor, Banda Sea, Pitt's Passage, Lokisang Channel, and Gillot's Passage into the Pacific Ocean, seeing sperm whales once in the Straits, but got none, three of our boat steerers having missed. We then started for Pleasant Island on the Equator in Long. 167 20 E., the place of our destination.

It may here be said that boatsteerers (harpooners) who missed whales and harpoons that either drew or broke did nothing to soothe the nerves of Captain Norris whose private journal contains several grumbling entries on this score. In their private notes both Clough and Norris considered the voyage plagued by ill luck. Captain Norris's reaction to bad fortune is best expressed by continuing with the above letter:

I would here observe that Capt. Norris has frequently been beating the steward, Geo. Babcock, a mulatto belonging at Newport, R.I., in the most barbarous manner. On the 12th Dec. 1841 I heard the Steward say, 'O Sir, you will kill me,' and the mate went down and the Capt. came on deck and ordered him put in the rigging where he gave him 2 dozen with the double part of 18 yarn, cut him down, and ordered him to go to his duty again. About 7 p.m. the bell rang for the steward but he not coming the mate went forward and sung out for him, when one of the men sung out that he was not coming until he was used better. He was then brought out

² Rees, *Nineteenth Century Letters* (New York, 1919), pp. 535-540. On 9 February 1843, Clough wrote a lengthy letter to his father, Asa Clough of Monmouth, Maine. In it he described important events aboard ship up until that date when the letter was apparently passed to another vessel bound home. The letter never reached its destination and in later years fell into the hands of Andrew Snow, Jr., a New Bedford antiquarian who permitted its publication. The Clough family was very much upset that the letter was made public inasmuch as it showed Captain Norris in an unfavorable light.

by force and 8 of the crew put in irons. 2 of them were then seized up and given 2 dozen a piece and the rest, promising to do better, were all sent to their duty again.³

This occurrence was when the voyage was only seven months old and the venture was planned to last about four years. In this period a vessel needed about four or five months to reach the Pacific whaling grounds and as much to return, consequently considerable time was required on the grounds to pay expenses for both passages. These long voyages were hard on a ship and even harder on a ship's company. In the case of *Sharon's* master, this particular voyage was too long at the end of six months. It was common at this time for whaling masters to stay home a year between voyages and perhaps that is what Captain Norris needed. A forecastle hand could, and often did, relieve his tensions by jumping ship at whatever spot seemed agreeable, but this alternative was not open to a disgruntled shipmaster. The standards of his profession required him to see it through—all four years of it. Mrs. Norris, by the way, presented her husband with a son a month before the violent events of 12 December.

To get on with events aboard *Sharon*, 7 April 1842, the vessel anchored for wood and water at Rotumah (Grenville) Island in Lat. 12° 30' S., Long. 177° 4' E. Nine men seized this opportunity to desert and two white men and four natives, referred to in whaleman fashion as *Kanakas*, were shipped in their places. Two of the natives were from Rotumah, one from Hope Island and the other from Ocean Island, the last two being left there by other ships. *Sharon* started next for her whaling grounds and appears to have picked up three more natives at Hope Island. This would mean that the number of *Kanakas* aboard ship had reached at least seven; three of these people subsequently mutinied and murdered Captain Norris. Reliable sources say that the natives recruited at Rotumah were the culprits, one being the Ocean Islander.

The next important event in this chronology was the death of the steward. There have been at least two published accounts of this tragedy, one the Clough letter to his father while the other was from a journal kept by a man thought to have been the cooper who was probably Andrew

³ Also from the Clough letter: "The 4th of July [1842] he gave him 7 dozen on the back, one on the head and one on the feet, he being made what is called Spread Eagle, that is, he being tied by the wrists so that his feet could not touch [the deck] and his legs seized out taut each way. The rope used was hemp whale line. From the first of July to the first of September he beat him [the steward] almost every day. . . ." A fuller recitation of these goings on makes unpleasant reading.

⁴ *Abstracts from a Journal Kept Aboard the Ship Sharon of Fairhaven* (Providence, 1953), privately printed, published and edited by Paul C. Nicholson. Lacking certain documents Mr. Nicholson fell into some minor errors in his foreword and editorial comment. The original is now in the Paul C. Nicholson collection of logbooks at the Providence, Rhode Island, Free Public Library.

White of Tiverton, Rhode Island.⁴ Clough and the cooper gave virtually the same account. On 1 September 1842, Captain Norris came on deck about 6:30 A.M. and was told by one of the crew that the steward, Babcock, had left a morsel of meat from the previous night's supper. Clough, by the way, noted that the steward had had no meat. In any event, the shipmaster flogged and kicked the unfortunate steward intermittently until his death at 9:00 A.M. Curiously, Captain Norris took time out to administer a dressing to Babcock's foot which had been badly scalded some time before and he was quoted as saying that he 'expected to go to Hell' for his actions. Clough, in his letter, concluded, 'So ends as cold-blooded a murder as was ever recorded, being about eight months taking his life.'

The cooper's account described the burial at sea at 6:00 P.M.:

John [George] Babcock a culered man was taken to the wast and launched overboard without a word of seramony or a tear shed to my noledge. he has gone I hope to rest he has asked many times previous to this what would become of him if he jumped overboard or cut his throat when Capton Norris had been flogging him it seames that he wanted to Dy but did not want to go to hell as he had said before I hope that he has gone home to Glory may God bless him and I hope this will be a warning to Capton Norris and all the rest of his officers on board Lat by 0° 01 11 S Long. 167 0 0 E.

John Babcock breathed his last at 9 A M

The cooper was an able reporter of the passing scene. A week previous to the above he had written: '... at 7 A M all hands lifting the blacksmiths anvill and I lifted it with my teeth and let the roap slip through my teeth and took out 4 the anvel weighed 135 lbs.'

There exists yet one other record of Babcock's death, a private journal kept by Captain Norris. The complete entry reads: 'Thursday, Sept. 1st First part steared East. Wind from N.N.E. Middle and Latter parts calm—at 9 A M. George Babcock died very suddenly—he complained of having the cramp—'

'Lat 1:11 South Long. 167.00 East.'⁵

The Norris journal is marked by excellent penmanship and brief but precise entries. There is no indication of a clouded mind. His son used back pages for an account book and when presenting it to the Duke's County Historical Society stated that the journal was complete. The last record remaining in the captain's hand is for 29 October 1842, a week before his murder. Several pages have been roughly cut out following the last entry but enough remains to show that what is missing was in a

⁴ Journal of Captain Howes Norris, Duke's County Historical Society, Edgartown, Massachusetts.

strange hand and in different ink. Perhaps the son wrote here an account of his father's death, later eliminating the story. Unfortunately the last page in the captain's writing was also cut out but there is no reason to suppose it contained anything vital.

On 15 October 1842, *Sharon* was at Ascension Island in the Carolines where, as the cooper expressed himself, the ship's company 'bought 1 hog, some fish and plenty of Girls for tobacker and shels for tobacker.'

Clough reported that while at Ascension the captain kept drunk and that twelve men deserted saying they would not sail with a murderer. Captain Norris was increasingly out of sorts, reviling the cooper, ordering him into the forecastle, and beating the Kanakas. Once when off Pleasant (Nauru) Island one of the men shipped at Rotumah, John Brown (probably a white man), attempted unsuccessfully to desert, whereupon the captain abused him, had him tied hand and foot with spun yarn and placed in a canoe. It was afterward learned that he never reached shore.

Leaving Ascension *Sharon* was pointed for New Zealand where it was hoped to fill out the depleted crew. On 5 November 1842, whales were sighted and, although only two boats could be manned, a chase was made. One sperm whale was taken and marked with a waif-flag after which the two boats went for another whale. *Sharon* ran down to the captured whale, taking it alongside. At this point Captain Norris was aboard ship with three Kanakas and Manuel dos Reis who had been elevated to the uncertain position of steward. Presented with this opportunity, the Kanakas went after the captain with cutting spades. In fear of his own life the steward climbed aloft where he witnessed the captain's end. From the masthead he managed to signal the boats of trouble aboard. One account has it that Captain Norris was 'mercifully about half drunk at the time.'

News of this happening reached home the following June and was prefaced in a newspaper with these remarks: 'We have been politely favored with a letter from the second mate of the ship *Hope* of this port [New Bedford] giving an account of the mutiny on board ship *Sharon*, of Fairhaven.'

What followed seems to be a fairly straightforward description but it was not until after *Sharon's* return that a firsthand story could be had, this time from Benjamin Clough who finished the voyage as second officer. This appeared in a local paper 27 February 1845.⁶ It is this version that caught the public's imagination and has been most frequently

⁶ *The Mercury*, New Bedford, Massachusetts.

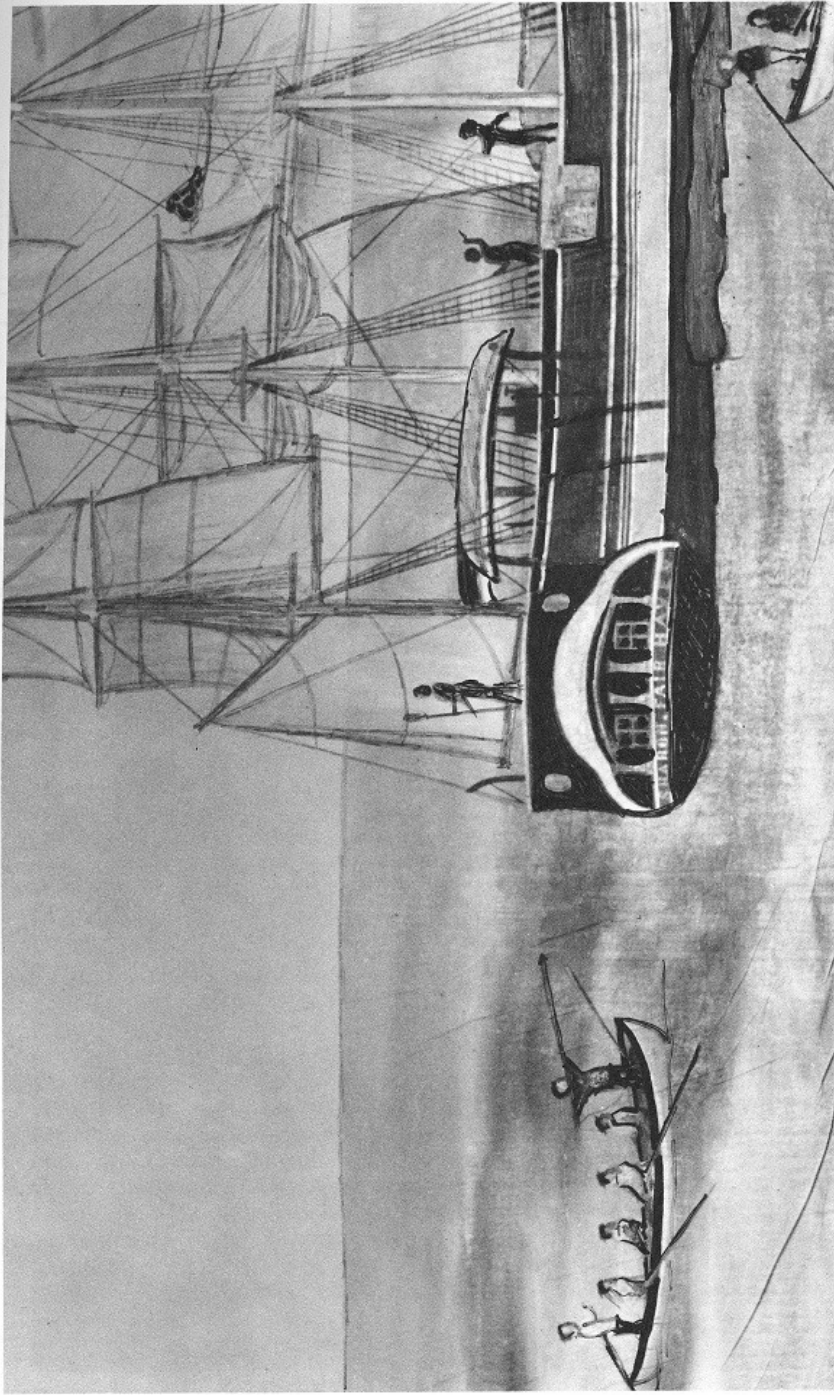
quoted and enlarged upon. Although the newspaper implied that it had printed a verbatim story as told by Clough, the narrative differs somewhat from his style of expression and is not in accord with his known reticence concerning details of the *Sharon* tragedies. The Clough story having impugned the characters of his superiors, these individuals wrote a letter to the editor which was published 10 March. While it would be ideal to reprint both articles for comparison, this would seem to be an extravagance. In addition to his newspaper interview, Clough wrote two versions himself. One is included in the letter published by Snow while the other was entered in his private journal.⁷ While the reporter may have placed undue emphasis on some aspects of Clough's adventure, and while the central figure may have been indiscreet during the interview, this seems the best of the several stories and is given here as it appeared in *The Mercury* of 27 February 1845.

MURDER OF CAPTAIN NORRIS,

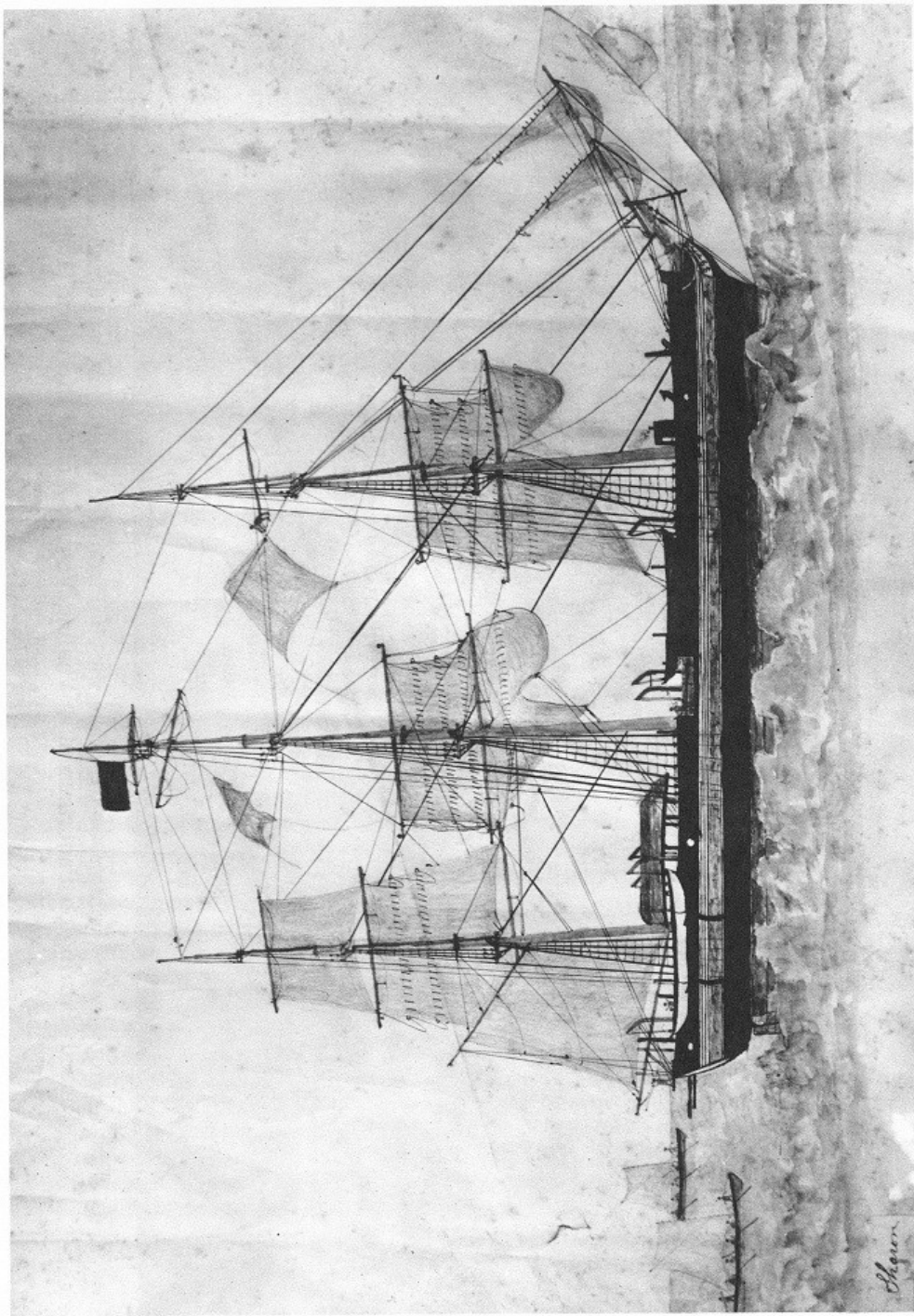
Of the whaling ship *Sharon* of Fairhaven, and recapture of the ship from Mutineers, by Mr. BENJAMIN CLOUGH, her 3rd. Officer.

The *Sharon* having been some time cruising for whales in the vicinity of the Caroline Islands, put in at Ascension the 15th October, 1842, for wood, water, and recruits. The requisite supplies being obtained, preparations were made to proceed upon the voyage, when eleven of the crew deserted, and being secreted and protected on shore, all efforts to retake them were fruitless. The ship sailed again on the 27th October, with a crew of seventeen men, all told, four of whom were natives of King's Mill Groupe, and two of other islands in the South Sea. The intention was to touch at Bay of Islands or Port Jackson to make up the complement of men. On Sunday, Nov. 6th, lat. 2° 20' N. Lon. 162° E, whales were raised and both boats lowered in chase, leaving Capt. Norris, a Portuguese boy named Manuel Jose dos Reis, who acted as Steward, and three of the King's Mill Islanders on board. The boats soon succeeded in capturing a whale, which the ship ran down to and took alongside—they continuing in pursuit of others. At 3 o'clock P.M. the mate's boat being about a mile and a half from the ship, her signal was discovered at half mast, and he immediately pulled towards her. The singular and unaccountable management of the ship for some time previous had already been remarked by those in the boat and excited the liveliest apprehensions as they approached her. Coming up upon her quarter within speaking distance, the boy who was aloft and had cut the main-top-gallant halyards, told Mr. Smith, the mate, that the Islanders had killed Capt. Norris and were in possession of the ship. Just then one of them, armed with a cutting spade and entirely naked, leaped upon the taffrail, and, brandishing his weapon with most furious and menacing gestures, dared the crew to come on board. The other two were also naked and stationed one at each side of the ship, where they had collected all the whaling craft, billets of wood, hammers, belaying-pins, in short every thing that would serve as a missile or offen-

⁷ A microfilm of Clough's private journal is in the Providence Free Public Library.



First attempt by the boat crews to retake the ship from the mutineers, as depicted in the
Russell - Purrington Panorama of a Whaling Voyage Round the World (1848).



Ship *Sharon*, with whaleboats down, a watercolor by Benjamin Clough, probably painted when master of the *Sharon* on her voyage of 1845-1848.

sive weapon, determined to repel any attempt to board. The fourth native of the same islands was in the boat and one of the mutineers addressed him in his own language, telling him, it was supposed, what they had done and inviting him to join them. He made a gesture of disapproval, upon which the other caught up the cook's axe and hurled it at him with such precision of aim, though a ship's length distant, that it cut through the back of his shirt as he stooped to avoid the blow. A shower of missiles followed, thrown with such force that the bone belaying-pins were broken into several pieces on striking the boat, but fortunately no one was seriously injured by them. The mate then ordered Manuel to cut the main-top-gallant sheets and main-topsail halyards, and to go forward on the stay and cut the halyards of the head-sails and clear them from the yards, which was done. The task of retaking the ship was evidently one of extreme difficulty and danger, for the mutineers had the advantages of position and a plentiful supply of arms, with the resolution and skill to use them effectively, so that the second mate and his crew, who had in the meantime come up, were called to consult upon the best course to pursue. It was proposed that both boats should advance and board the ship, one upon each side, at the same time: but Mr. Smith, upon whom by the melancholy catastrophe on board, the responsibility and duties of master had devolved, thought that a proper regard for the interest of the owners as well as for the safety of the men under his command, required him to avoid all personal risk, for which reason he proposed that both crews should take the other boat and proceed to the ship, leaving him alone to await the issue. This proposal met with no favor, the men declaring a wish rather to start for the nearest land—five or six days' sail distant—and the second mate relishing it so little that he suffered his boat to drop astern out of talking distance. Mr. Clough, the third mate, who acted as Mr. Smith's steersman since the ship was short manned, had darted his lance several times at the naked savage on the rail, but for want of sufficient warp it fell short three or four feet at each trial; he requested therefore that the boat might be pulled within reach, as the fellow kept his position without flinching and insolently defied him,—but the mate thought the danger too great and refused to gratify him. He then offered to go on board over the bows, if the boy would cut the fore-royal stay and let the end fall overboard so that he could ascend by it to the jib-boom with a lance warp in his teeth;—but Manuel had become so exhausted by fright and fatigue that he was unable to get up to the royal-mast-head to execute his part of the task.

His next plan, and the one he executed was, that both boats should pull ahead of the ship, and when it was quite dark, taking every precaution to avoid exciting the suspicions of the mutineers, he would jump into the sea, and passing close by the side of the ship, enter her by the cabin windows. The ship and boats were surrounded by sharks, attracted probably by the carcass of the whale killed in the morning, to defend himself against which he took a boat knife in his teeth, and let himself into the water as silently as possible. At the same time the ship took aback and it became necessary to swim;—but to 'strike out' and make the best of his way would cause a sparkling of the water, and betray his approach to the look out, so that he was obliged to 'walk water,' by which scarcely any agitation was made, and almost as little progress. It was a tedious passage of more than an hour and a half in duration, terminated at length by diving under the ship, seizing the rudder at the heel, and ascending by the after part of it to the starboard cabin window,

through which he made his entry. Two large sharks were close to the boat when he left her, and kept him company the whole time without offering to molest him, and the knife, which luckily had been useless, he left upon the transom as he got in at the window.

He then divested himself of his clothing that the enemy might have no advantage over him on the score of nakedness should they come to close quarters, and applied himself to listening to the movements upon deck;—as these indicated that there were yet no suspicions of his presence, he proceeded to search for arms and ammunition.—Two cutlasses were soon found, and amongst all the muskets, two only were fit for service, so far as he could judge by careful handling—it was too dark to see;—every locker and drawer in the cabin was then ransacked for powder and ball, which being found, the muskets were loaded and placed with the cutlasses at the foot of the cabin stairs—while engaged in loading a fowling piece he heard a step in the gangway and some one descended the stairs, hitting the arms at the bottom and knocking them down upon the floor. Mr. Clough ran to the spot but unable to see anything, groped about by the intruder's feet till he caught hold of a cutlass with which he run him through the body; as he drew it out a struggle ensued for the weapon, and both fell to the floor; the officer luckily uppermost; planting his knee upon his breast he took out one of his eyes, and with a good deal of trouble brought the edge of the sword to bear upon the back of his neck and made an attempt to cut off his head—he pulled it back and forth several times but it was an awkward operation, for the other kept hold of the sword and struggled violently, wounding Mr. C. severely by twisting the blade several times in his hand. After a while he became quiet and supposing him to be dead, Mr. C. got up, but the other immediately rose and struck about furiously with the cutlass, hitting him at almost every pass, until exhausted probably by loss of blood, he uttered a slight groan and fell upon the floor. Going again to the stairs, the officer saw another in the gangway with a cutting-spade pointed towards him, when, feeling for a loaded musket, he succeeded, after snapping twice, in putting a ball through his heart. At the same moment the spade dropped, or was thrown down, taking effect in the thick part of Mr. Clough's arm, and the blood gushed so violently from the wound that he supposed the artery to be severed and began to give way to unpleasant reflections, when the third came to the gangway armed also with a spade and endeavored to look into the darkness below. Mr. C. made several ineffectual attempts to gain another musket but his right hand and left arm were both disabled—the man stood still a few minutes, then dropped his spade and walked forward. Mr. Clough now hailed the boats, which were so near that he could hear the conversation going on amongst the men. He told them that two of the mutineers were dead, himself dangerously wounded, and urged them to hasten on board. They said they did not believe more than one had been killed as they had heard but one gun and did not consider it prudent for them to come near him,—so the wounded man had to sit down and suffer his blood to flow, for his right hand had become so stiff and sore that he could not use it to place a bandage on his arm. More than half an hour having elapsed since the hail, and no further noise being heard, the boats ventured alongside. A light being struck and brought into the cabin, the floor was found covered with the blood of both combatants. The man who had first entered the cabin was reclining on the transom, still grasping the cutlass and with

it the boat knife left by Mr. C. when he came on board; one of his eyes hung upon his cheek and his body was covered with gore; he was still alive but did not move, and made no noise but a kind of suppressed groan. One of the men stabbed him twice with a boat spade, and Mr. Smith discharged a musket at him;—he was then caught by the hair, dragged upon deck and thrown into the sea. The deck presented a shocking spectacle, all dabbled and tracked with clotted blood—the mangled and headless body of the unfortunate Captain was lying there, as was that of one of his murderers, which was unceremoniously thrown over the side, while the remains of Capt. Norris were collected and reserved for burial the next day. The surviving mutineer jumped overboard and swam some distance from the ship but returned during the night and hid himself in the forehold. When the crew attempted to take him out the next day he made some show of resistance, but at last came upon deck and surrendered himself; he was put in irons and taken to Sydney, where he was left in prison when the ship sailed.

The *Sharon* completed her voyage under the command of Mr. Smith, more successfully than could have been expected after such a melancholy and disheartening interruption,—Mr. Clough remained on board as second mate. To his daring and almost unaided exertions are to be attributed the return of a valuable ship and cargo, and, what is far more important, the preservation of the surviving crew from the miserable fate which must have overtaken them had they persisted in seeking the nearest land in their boats. The owners of the *Sharon* have shown their appreciation of his services by giving him the command of a fine ship, and it is to be presumed that other parties who have escaped a heavy loss, will not withhold such a testimonial of their approval as will at once gratify him and incite others, under like circumstances, to emulate his conduct.

A letter of protest by Thomas H. and Nathan S. Smith was not long in coming, appearing in *The Mercury*, 10 March 1845, with this editorial preface:

The Mutiny on board ship *Sharon*—We have already published a circumstantial account of the melancholy mutiny which took place on the ship *Sharon* on her last voyage, as related by Mr. Clough, the third officer on board said ship, and who took an active and successful part in recovering possession of the vessel from the mutineers. The following statement has since been handed to us by Mr. Smith the 1st officer on board the *Sharon*, with a request for its publication in our columns, as an act of justice to himself, in order to correct certain erroneous impressions which the former statement may have conveyed to the reader. It will be seen that both accounts agree in the main facts, and throughout except in minor particulars relating to the agency of the respective narrators in that unhappy affair.

The Smith letter began:

Seeing published in the *Mercury* of February 27th, an article headed 'The Murder of Capt. Norris of the ship *Sharon*, of Fairhaven, and recapture of the ship from the mutineers by Benjamin Clough, 3rd officer':—It is not our wish to detract from the merits of Mr. Clough, or lessen the prominent part acted by him on that

trying and unfortunate occasion, but to correct certain misrepresentations given in that article, that we now give a statement of the facts as they occurred.

The body of the letter contained nearly the same information as given by Clough but with certain significant differences. In particular it was stated that Andrew White, the cooper, had offered to accompany Clough on his night mission but that Clough and the other officers felt there would be less chance of giving an alarm if only one made the attempt. Nothing is said about *Sharon* changing course nor of Clough being in the water for one and a half hours. In fact it was stated that the second mate, Nathan Smith, *observed Clough ascending the rudder, and in about ten minutes he obtained egress into the cabin window. . . .*

And again:

It had been agreed that we should give him time to load the musket before we boarded, but on hearing the gun we rushed for the ship and were probably on board in ten minutes after he fired. On getting aboard we found Mr. Clough severely wounded and bleeding. On getting a light below, we found the native who first entered the cabin on the transom near the window, armed with a cutlass and large rifle, threatening the lives of all who approached him. We then shot him.

The Smith rebuttal concluded with:

We have given in the above narrative a brief and true account of that unfortunate occurrence on board the *Sharon*. The statements in the article before published, about our intention of seeking the land, and in the proposition of the Mate to be left in the boat while the others boarded, and keeping off from the ship after the 3rd Mate had fired, have not the shadow of truth in them. The nearest land was 700 or 800 miles from us, and we had neither food or water, and under a vertical sun. Those stories appear to have been invented to make it appear that the principal part of the officers and others were poltroons and cowards. We wish to give Mr. Clough all the praise which is due to a brave man who has taken his life in his hand, and he no doubt will receive it from all who hear the circumstances. We have continued to think the plan we adopted and pursued was the very best for us, and the result we think has proved it. If we had failed in our first plan we should have adopted some other, for it could not possibly have been that any would have given themselves to certain death in the boats, when by attacking the ship there was a certainty that if not all a part would succeed in getting possession of her.

Thomas H. Smith, 1st officer

Nathan S. Smith, 2nd officer

Neither Clough's journal nor his letter imply criticism of the Smiths. The cooper's journal adds some interesting details which suggest that the boats moved toward *Sharon* only after Clough made a hail. Also, the wounded Kanaka in the after cabin was described as having a cutlass and a knife in his hands. There is no mention of a 'big rifle.'

Whatever the merits of the several differences, considering the strain of circumstances it would be unusual for each individual involved to have come up with the same details. It is not possible to know if *The Mercury* reporter indulged in embroidery but it is at least questionable, for instance, that Clough dived under *Sharon* (which would have been about fifteen feet) after 'an hour and a half' in the water. Perhaps there were some misunderstandings between the interviewer and the interviewed.

At any rate, it is Clough's story in *The Mercury* which captured the interest of succeeding writers and is responsible for a long series of re-hash narratives which, compounding one error upon another, have even succeeded in moving the location of the mutiny from the Pacific to the Atlantic. In his book, *The American Imagination at Work*, Benjamin C. Clough (a grandson of our hero) listed a few such careless writings.⁸

As to what became of the surviving mutineer, on *Sharon's* arrival at Sydney, Australia, 22 December 1842, a Sydney newspaper reported the next day that he had been turned over to the *Water Police* and concluded with:⁹

The surviving native can speak pretty good English, and the only excuse offered is, that the captain was cross; he is a native of Ocean Island. The lad Emanuel states that he heard the captain hail him to come down from aloft; but before he could reach the rail the deed was committed, and an attempt was made to stab him, but he ran aloft again. The command of the ship devolved on the chief officer, Mr. Smith [Thomas H.], who brought her on to Sydney.

As the vessel left on 6 January 1843, it was necessary to leave the business of the mutineer's prosecution in the hands of the United States Consul. On 5 January the consul had written to (now) Captain Smith:

The authorities of this colony having decided that they have not the power of bringing the murderer of the late Capt. Norris to trial here in consequence of his not being a subject of the Queen and also that they have no power of detaining him in prison until he could be sent to the United States for trial your only alternative is to keep him on board Ship until you can fall in with an American Man of War or other Ship that will take him to the United States where he will undoubtedly meet with the punishment which his crime merits. But in case you should not meet with such an opportunity, you would be justified in my opinion in putting him on shore at any Island or Port where the means of subsistence would be within his reach.¹⁰

⁸ Rogers, *Ships and Sailors* (London, 1920?, and Boston, 1928); Anthony, *Revolt at Sea* (New York, 1937); Hadfield, *Mutiny at Sea* (New York, 1938); to which may be added at least two others, Spears, *The Story of the New England Whalers* (New York, 1908); and Hawes, *Whaling* (London, 1924). There are probably others equally suspect, including Melville who in *Extracts* in his *Moby Dick* appears to have confused *Sharon* with *Hobomok*.

⁹ *Sydney Morning Herald*, Sydney, Australia, 23 December 1842.

¹⁰ Records of the American Consulate at Sydney, National Archives, Washington, D. C.

The Consul's advice was based on a letter he had received earlier from the Australian Colonial Secretary giving the Attorney General's opinion and adding that the Governor considered that if the native were confined in any jail in Sydney, he would be discharged by the judges upon coming to trial.¹¹ Captain Smith must have known when leaving Sydney that the Kanaka would escape prosecution and it is safe to assume that he was set free. In Clough's *Mercury* interview it is stated that the Kanaka was left in prison when the ship sailed.

The boy, Manuel dos Reis, would have been the only positive witness to say if all three Kanakas participated in the Norris murder or, if singly, which one struck the fatal blow. Had the Ocean Islander been brought to the States for trial his prosecution would have been difficult as the witnesses would have been scattered to the four winds on other whaling voyages.

One would hope that for the remainder of her four-year cruise *Sharon* would be free of further unpleasantness and tragedy but this was not to be. From the cooper's journal come the following notes:

April 2, 1843 . . . a Conacker belonging to Rotumah died at 12 A M he was berried at sea he had been out of his head for 4 days he had a fit was the cause of it yesterday he went aloft and jumped on deck and broke his arm and injured him very much in other ways.

The cooper, an independent fellow, challenged his superiors several times and on 18 November 1843 had a difference with Captain Smith whom he told that he would not stand for being struck. When asked whom he had ever struck, the cooper replied, '... the steward that was killed and Jackbaker Tom Williams and goodmany more and it was the cause of there leaving the ship for I have heard them say so.'

January 8, 1844. . . . poot three men in irons and floged one of them then sente them a shore to Pokey. . . .

March 6, 1844. . . . a Portugues belonged to Phial [Fayal, Azores] was over the stern lashing some spars the rope parted and he fell overboard loared a boat for him but for a boat got to him he was gon to rise no more.

May 26, 1844. . . . at 4 P M Thomas Silsbey a native of Boston fell from the Four top gallant cros tree overboard we loared a boat got to him he went down saw no more of him he was 21 years of age or thereabouts he come out from Fairhaven in the Cadmas¹² and was cast away Capton Mayhew was master we shiped him at the Island of Rotumah. . . .

¹¹ The Archives Authority of New South Wales, location in archives: 4/3547, p. 178.

¹² The ship *Cadmus* was lost 4 August 1842 on an uncharted atoll which was then given the ship's name. After being rescued, the crew dispersed to other vessels.

Sept. 21, 1844. Thes 24 hours at 6 called all hands to heave short the men fored refused to heave [lift the anchor] on account of being short of men one ran away yesterday the capton sent for the Counsil he cum on board and poot 10 of them in irons and flogged 3 and sot them ashore the rest of them went to there Duty at 11 A M the Capton tolde the mate to take the anchor and get under way he went ashore and shiped a man at 2 P M the capton came on board and squared in the yards and kept off for hom.

Although difficult to ascertain accurately it seems that fifteen men, including a new third mate, left *Sharon* between her departure from Sydney and arrival at Fairhaven two years later.

In proper storybook ending, Benjamin Clough was rewarded by *Sharon's* underwriters with a suitably engraved navigation instrument. The vessel's owners, Gibbs & Jenney, sent forth this promising young whaleman as master of *Sharon* on its next voyage which, happy to relate, was highly successful. Captain Clough followed the whaling trade until he stepped ashore from the ship *Northern Light* in 1867, hung up his sextant and harpoons and swallowed the anchor. In his retirement he was active as a Representative to the Massachusetts General Court and tilled the acres of his Vineyard homestead as a happy farmer which, paradoxically, was the aim of most whaling masters.

The Smiths left *Sharon* to follow respectable careers in the whaling trade and later generations of the Norris-Smith-Clough families, all friendly neighbors on the Vineyard, were content to draw a veil over events of *Sharon's* tragic voyage.

