

# ComfortZone

WHALE TALE



Thomas Nickerson House is named for a survivor of the Essex who penned an account of the tragedy. Another survivor, Owen Chase, lived in the house below. Right: A sperm whale skeleton at Nantucket Whaling Museum.



By Diane Bair  
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Walk into the Nantucket Whaling Museum, past the island timeline display into the Gosnell Hall gallery, and you'll be in sight of a skeleton of a giant sperm whale, the largest of the toothed whales. The whale washed up on Nantucket's eastern shore in 1998, a rare occurrence. The massive carcass, with its gigantic skull and jagged teeth, hangs from the tall ceiling and measures 47 feet long. "Wow," is a common reaction. "That's huge!" is another. Scary.

And yet, the sperm whale that destroyed the Essex, a famous whaling ship out of Nantucket, was nearly twice as long. Essex's Captain George Pollard reported that the whale that destroyed the ship and sent its 20-man crew on a disastrous, 90-day stuck-at-sea journey was 85 feet long. First mate Owen Chase screamed when the whale dove under the boat and then slammed into its bow, "We have been stove by a whale!"

The story of one of the worst maritime disasters of the 19th century is a famous one; the Essex, sent from Nantucket to hunt whales in the South Pacific, sunk in 1820, sending its crew into three small whale boats. What ensued — starvation, death, cannibalism — has been the fodder for several books and a movie. It inspired Herman Melville to write "Moby-Dick," and local Nantucket author Nathaniel Philbrick to write his best-selling, award-winning "In the Heart of the Sea," which was later made into a movie produced by Ron Howard.

This year marks the 200th anniversary of the sinking of the Essex, and we thought the perfect time to visit the "Tragedy of the Essex" exhibit at the Whaling Museum (508-228-1894, [www.nha.org/visit/museums-and-tours/whaling-museum](http://www.nha.org/visit/museums-and-tours/whaling-museum); open 8 a.m.-6 p.m., reserve timed tickets online, private visits also available; adults \$20, ages 6-17 \$15, students and seniors \$18).

The permanent display provides details of the disaster, and a timeline that reveals perilous decision-making. Faced with starvation, the men were forced into cannibalism. At one point, late in the ordeal, the remaining survivors "drew straws,"



PAMELA WRIGHT FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

## Revisiting the Essex tragedy, 200 years later

The story of one of the worst maritime disasters of the 19th century is a famous one. And there's no better place than Nantucket to learn more about it.

to see who would be sacrificed. Owen Coffin, Pollard's teenage nephew, lost and was shot with a pistol, and eaten by his desperate shipmates. A similar circa 1815 Flintlock pistol is on display, as well as a model of the Essex, a portrait of First Mate Owen Coffin, and the last surviving artifact from the Essex, a small piece of twine made by Benjamin Lawrence, the ship's boat steerer.

An adjacent gallery has a small display on Melville and "Moby-Dick." Melville heard the story of the Essex from William Henry Chase, Owen Chase's son, while they were sailing on the New Bedford ship Acushnet. Melville then read Chase's account of the ordeal and was enthralled. It wasn't until July 1852, a year after the publication of "Moby-Dick," that Melville finally visited Nantucket.

After touring the museum, we checked into the Jared Coffin House (800-248-2405, [www.jaredcoffinhouse.com](http://www.jaredcoffinhouse.com); rooms start at \$155), the perfect choice for our Essex-focused island tour, as Melville stayed here on his visit. (At the time, it was called the Ocean House.) The three-story, brick mansion was built in 1845 by Jared Coffin, a wealthy and prominent shipbuilder. It has stood the test of time, with beautiful historic details and updated rooms. We checked out the newest accommodations, a quartet of suites in the back of the mansion, which opened early summer and feature spacious sitting areas, modern baths, classic furnishings, original oil paintings depicting Nantucket's whaling days, and cool details, like Crosley Bermuda record players and a collection of albums. Later, we dined at the reimagined Tap Room (508-228-2117, [www.nantuckettaproom.com](http://www.nantuckettaproom.com)). This one-time popular eatery/tavern on the island has reopened with a twinkly-light, heated patio and modern American cuisine.

The next day, we did the Melville Walking Tour, a DIY guide to three other historic sites. The tour map, offered by the Nantucket Historical Association, is available at the Whaling Museum. Our first stop was Captain George Pollard's house, located across from the Jared Coffin House, (46 Centre St.). The rambling building is currently unoccupied, but we could easily imagine it during the island's whaling heyday. Poor Pollard, less than a

year after he returned from the sinking of the Essex, he was given command of the whale ship Two Brothers, and that one sank, too. After that he returned to Nantucket, became the night watchman, and was well-regarded by his island community.

We walked about a half-mile to the Owen Chase House (74 Orange St.); the first mate was also one of the eight Essex survivors, and one year later authored a book about the experience, in order to make some money. The privately-owned house harbors haunting memories of its occupants. Chase was an unlucky man, too. His first two wives died in childbirth, and his third wife had a child with another man. In old age, he went insane. "It's said that when Chase died, people found food and water hidden away in the rafters and in pockets and corners throughout the house," Peggi Godwin, manager of visitor operations for the Whaling Museum, told us.

Our final visit was the Thomas Nickerson House (2 Cliff Road), named for another survivor who penned his own account of the tragedy: "The Loss of the Ship Essex." The manuscript was lost for years, and later found and sent to the Nantucket Historical Association. The association owns both Chase's and Nickerson's original manuscripts. We stood outside the well-kept private home and imagined being a 14-year-old cabin boy on the ill-fated Essex.

Our final night we dined al fresco at Brant Point Grill, overlooking an expansive lawn rolling to the water (800-445-6574, [www.whiteelephantnantucket.com/dining/brant-point-grill](http://www.whiteelephantnantucket.com/dining/brant-point-grill)). The harbor, once filled with whaling vessels, is now home to ferries and yachts, pleasure boats and charter fishing vessels. We almost felt guilty dining at this lovely eatery, sipping on pinot noir, and enjoying dishes like ultra-fresh white fish and shrimp ceviche in a passion fruit, mango, and lime marinade, and crusted halibut with summer cherries and smoked mussels and clams. A delightful, scrumptious dinner, and didn't we deserve this after nearly six months of COVID-ridden anxiety and isolation? Yes, we did. Who knows what tomorrow may bring?

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ALES FOR ALS

## Old Planters and Youk team up on a beer inspired by Pete Frates

By Gary Dzen  
GLOBE STAFF

Old Planters Brewing co-founder Matt Sullivan grew up across the street from Pete and Andrew Frates in Beverly. Brewery cofounder Ben Garry, friends with Sullivan since high school, grew up in Beverly, too. "We're townies," Sullivan told me in 2017, in a story about Old Planters' first beer release.

When Old Planters opened a tap room in 2019, the Frates brothers were on hand to celebrate.

"Pete was there opening night," Andrew Frates writes in a blog post on Old Planters' website. "Lifelong friendships with the Old Planters Crew make it a favorite of ours."

The Frates brothers are known to Bostonians and sports fans for their tireless work supporting research in search of a cure and treatments for ALS. Pete Frates died last December after his very public eight-year battle with the disease. Through the Ice Bucket Challenge and other initiatives, the former Boston College baseball player helped raised millions of dollars to fight it.

The Frates family has also long maintained a strong relationship with the Red Sox. Frates's former coach at BC, Mike Gambino, used to room with Kevin Youkilis when both were in the minor league system with the Portland Sea Dogs. Since retiring from baseball, Youkilis has teamed up with his brother, Scott, to open Loma Brewing in Los Gatos, Calif.

It's that Red Sox connection that has inspired a new beer release between Loma Brewing and Old Planters. Swing Oil, a hazy triple IPA, was brewed as a collaboration between the bi-coastal breweries.

Swing Oil plays on Frates's No. 3 jersey number, and features three grains (2 Row, Wheat, and Golden Oats) and three hops (Sabro, Mosaic, and Idaho 7). One dollar from the sale of each 4-pack goes to Ales for ALS. One dollar goes to the Frates Family Foundation.

Old Planters' version of Swing Oil is available now for online ordering and curbside pickup. Loma's version will be released on Sept. 8.

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## Pingree School offering socially-distanced exhibit

By Niecee Regis  
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Enjoy two fun activities — strolling through a lovely landscape and looking at art — at the 11th annual Flying Horse Outdoor Sculpture Exhibit located on the 100-acre campus of Pingree School in South Hamilton.

Billed as one of the largest displays of outside art in New England, this year's show, "Art at a (Social) Distance," opens Sept. 5 with close to 50 pieces representing a wide range of genres, materials, and sizes.

As the show's theme suggests, all work will be placed at least 10 feet apart. The public is invited to view the exhibit during daylight hours on weekends, and

during holidays when school is not in session (Oct. 12, Nov. 25, 26, 27) until Nov. 29.

A free electronic catalog can be accessed online. 978-468-4415, [www.pingree.org/news-events/flying-horse-outdoor-sculpture-exhibit](http://www.pingree.org/news-events/flying-horse-outdoor-sculpture-exhibit).

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ERIC OLSON

All work in the Flying Horse Outdoor Sculpture Exhibit will be placed at least 10 feet apart.

COMING SOON

## We're launching a parenting newsletter

By Kara Baskin  
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

We knew this moment would come eventually: September. Back to school. Back to a new form of strange reality, and all of the questions that it entails for parents. Are you wondering whether it's safe for your kids to play sports this fall? What about — gasp — mixed playdates between your remote learner and his hybrid best friend? Are you navigating a learning pod or working in between logging your sullen student into a dozen Zoom calls per day? We're right there with you.

That's why we're launching In the Family Way, a newsletter and column focused on how to parent during this crazy COVID-19 era — while your family is, let's face it, in your way. It'll tackle sticky questions regarding health, family life, education, and socializing. (What does that even mean anymore?) It will appear every Thursday in your inbox and in Friday's print edition. Consider it a candid dose of help and humor when we parents need it most.

Sign up to receive the newsletter at [mailchi.mp/bostonglobe/parenting](http://mailchi.mp/bostonglobe/parenting).

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