

Basic Detail Report



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Title

Plate 186. The Whale Fishery. Whaling schooner AMELIA is of New Bedford, Mass.

Date

1887

Primary Maker

C S Raleigh

Medium

Ink on paper

Dimensions

Overall: 290 x 235 mm

Name

Engraving

History

During the 1800s whaling was a large scale commercial enterprise that was conducted across the globe. The main industry centred on the American north-east coastal town of New Bedford which saw hundreds of ships heading out to the Pacific Ocean on a weekly basis. Industry and households depended on whale products for which there was no substitute. Whale oil was used for lighting and lubrication until 1860 when kerosene and petroleum started to gain popularity. The pure clean oil from sperm whales was a superior source of lighting and the finest candles were made from the whale's wax-like spermaceti. Light and flexible, baleen - the bristle-fringed plates found in the jaws of baleen whales - had many uses in objects which today would be made out of plastic. In the 19th century American whalers sailed south to the rich Pacific whaling grounds in search of sperm whales. During the 1840s several hundred ships pursued whales off the coast of Australia. Many called into Australian ports for repairs or supplies after a voyage half-way around the world. Meeting a whaler was the first contact many colonists had with an American. Despite the lengthy voyages undertaken by whaling ships, many were small and lightweight. In 1880, the American whaling fleet included forty-six schooners - the smallest of which was the schooner UNION at just over 66 tons. Most of these smaller vessels were employed in the Atlantic Ocean whaling, while the larger and best equipped vessels were sent to the Pacific and the Arctic Oceans.