

# Basic Detail Report

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**Title**

Alaska sperm - 14 May 1923 - Dawn of Romance - Ralph:  
Whale teeth - 7 May 1924 - Sunrise of Love - Myrle

**Date**

1923-1924

**Primary Maker**

Ralph A Whaleman

**Medium**

Sperm whale teeth, brass, wood

**Dimensions**

Overall: 145 x 206 mm, 1 kg

**Name**

Scrimshaw

**History**

Scrimshaw is a maritime folk art tradition that developed onboard whaling ships in the early 19th century. No one knows for sure where the term originated, but it comes from the Dutch words 'scrim' meaning to etch and 'shorn' meaning to make. Scrimshaw is produced by engraving, carving, inlaying or assembling bone from marine mammals, including whale bone, teeth and baleen, walrus tusks and shell. Using jackknives, saws, homemade files and sharp sail needles, sailors etched images of women, whaling scenes or other memories of home to pass their time onboard. During the 19th century, the average whaling expedition lasted anywhere from three to five years. This could bring about unbearable boredom and loneliness for the sailors. Whalers would fill their long hours by crafting presents for their loved ones back home and carved designs into whale teeth and bone that reflected scenes of everyday life afloat and the sailor's memories of home. It is one of a handful of American folk arts that has maintained a presence in contemporary craft practices.