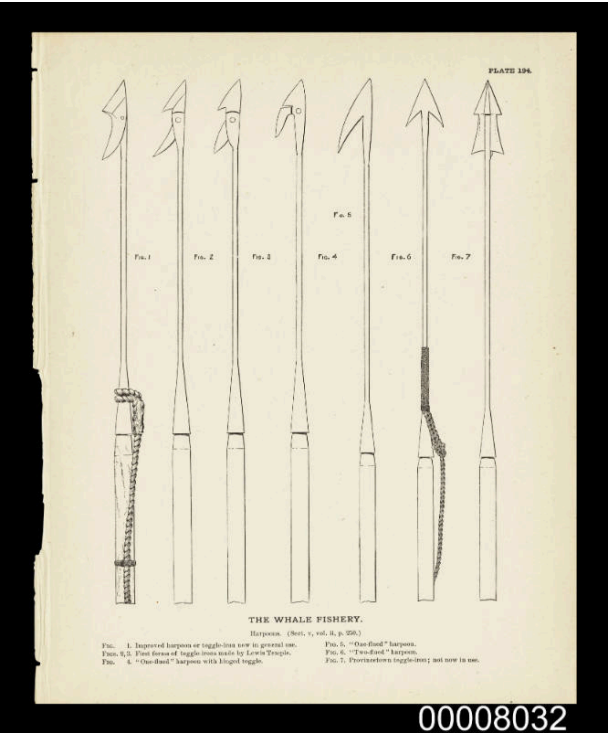


Basic Detail Report



00008032

Title
Plate 194 from The Whale Fishery titled Harpoons

Date
1887

Medium
Ink on paper

Dimensions
Overall: 289 x 233 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. Whaling was an extraordinarily dangerous occupation in the 19th century. Whales were hunted from small open boats by men often only armed with hand-held harpoons and killing lances. The hand-thrown harpoon (or iron) was used merely to attach the rope to the whale resulting in an angry, wounded whale. This would more often than not end with the whaleboat and its crew being towed by the whale in an effort to rid itself of the pain inflicted by the harpoon. This was referred to by American whalers at the 'Nantucket Sleighride'.