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A Family Affair: Whaling as Native American Household Strategy on Eastern Long Island, New York

Emily Button

Nineteenth-century Native Americans from the northeastern United States became locally famous as mariners in the commercial whaling fleet. In the struggle to protect their small land bases and maintain their communities, going to sea became part of household practices for cultural and economic survival. From approximately 1800 through 1880, indigenous whaling families from Long Island used wages from commercial whaling to combat the limitations of land, credit, and capital that they faced on and off reservations. Whaling's opportunities supported household formation and property accumulation among Shinnecock and Montaukett people for three generations, but whaling's instability and risk meant that these gains were hard to pass on during and after the industry's collapse.

En suivant la vie de membres des communautés Shinnecock et Montaukett de Long Island au cours du XIXe siècle, cette étude examine les façons uniques par lesquelles les familles amérindiennes ont incorporé leur travail dans l'industrie baleinière au sein de leurs économies domestiques. Cet article s'appuie sur des recherches historiques, des inventaires après-décès, et une collection de céramiques du Shinnecock National Museum and Cultural Center, afin d'explorer la démographie des ménages, le travail, et la culture matérielle dans les villes de Southampton et East Hampton, N.Y., et le port de Sag Harbor. Les théories des cycles et changements dans les maisonnées et l'ethnohistoire amérindienne se combinent pour fournir un cadre interprétatif permettant de comprendre ces tendances.

Historical Background

The ancestral homelands of the Shinnecock and Montaukett peoples are on the south fork of eastern Long Island, New York, in the modern towns of Southampton and East Hampton. The former whaling port of Sag Harbor sits on the boundary between these towns. When Sag Harbor's deep-sea whaling industry took off around the turn of the 19th century, indigenous people had already been participating in offshore commercial whaling for around 150 years in response to the economic and environmental pressures of colonialism.

Native whalers from the Northeast were skilled mariners, familiar with local waters and drift whales. On Long Island, Cape Cod, and Nantucket, they were key members of early English whaling crews in the 17th century, whaling from shore and in nearby waters (Macy 1835; Vickers 1997; Strong 2001; Nicholas 2002; Johnson 2006; Braginton-Smith and Oliver 2008; Little and Andrews 2010; Philbrick 2011; Strong 2011). Whaling brought necessary access to cash and trade goods. Agreements between the Montaukett and English after King Philip's War led to the reduction of Montaukett lands to a small parcel on Montauk Point, while the

Shinnecock lost land through sales and court settlements, and both groups dealt with damage to their remaining lands from roaming English livestock (Stone 1983; Strong 2001). Dispossession pushed many Native Americans into indenture and wage labor. Extended family networks crossing reservations, farms, towns, and even oceans played important roles in mediating social connection and economic survival in the Anglo-American economy (O'Brien 2010; Reiser 2011). Many indigenous people's labor practices were highly mobile, including whaling, along with seasonal work in agriculture, Shinnecock and Montauk men's work as guides around the marshes and bays of Long Island, the careers of many Algonquian women as traveling craft producers, medicine practitioners, and domestic workers (Stone 1983; Herndon and Sekatau 2003; Mandell 2007; Mancini 2009; Handsman 2010).

In the late 17th and 18th centuries, maritime labor was both a means of economic survival and a threat to it. The income it provided could be vital, but colonial legal systems often snared Native American men in cycles of debt and punishment that they tried—and often failed—to pay off through work on whaling ships (Strong 1983; Vickers 1997; Nicholas 2002).

Whaling on Long Island changed after the American Revolution; it grew into a global industry that could offer economic opportunity rather than exploitation for indigenous people. Ships from Sag Harbor reached the South Atlantic and eventually the Pacific and Arctic (Starbuck 1964; Bockstoce 1986; Frank 1991; Lund 2001). Until 1882 Native American whalers from Long Island signed on to multiyear voyages out of major northeastern ports, like Sag Harbor, Nantucket, New Bedford, and New London (Frank 1991: 41; Barsh 2002; Mancini 2009; Shoemaker 2014). Sag Harbor grew from a small village to a significant port due to its whaling industry and customs house (Thompson 1843; Ross and Pelletreau 1905; Zaykowski 1991). In the early nineteenth century, Native Americans lived on their own lands on the Shinnecock reservation and Indian Fields on Montauk Point, in rural households throughout the area, and in settler villages, including Sag Harbor's working class neighborhood known as Eastville. From the 1800s to the 1880s, the fortunes of the whaling industry and Native American households evolved together (FIG. 1).

Whaling was dangerous work, poorly compensated at the lowest levels; yet, it offered rare opportunities for advancement for Native American mariners. By the 19th century, whaling was most often wage labor, not indenture. Sailors received their pay at the end of the voyage as shares of the total profits, or "lays," minus the debts they had incurred on the voyage (Busch 1994). These debts could include outfitting with clothing and equipment at the beginning of the trip and use of items from the slop chest (i.e., ship's supply) throughout. Lay sizes followed the ship's hierarchy: captains and masters received the largest, or "shortest," lays, followed by officers. Skilled harpooners, boat steerers, and coopers received the smallest lays, which ranged from 1/8 to 1/100 of the profits. Common sailors, stewards, cooks, and blacksmiths earned 1/100 to 1/160, while "long lays" went to "greenhands" and cabin boys in fractions as low as 1/160 or even 1/250 (Hohman 1928). Among black and Indian whalers from Sag Harbor, known lays ranged from 1/55 to 1/175 (Providence Public Library 1802–1880; Shoemaker 2012, 2014).

In Sag Harbor, available records show that debt was still part of whaling, but it did not

lead to the inescapable cycles of the previous century. Sailors took out loans to outfit themselves for the voyage, as this incomplete 1843 loan record from the firm Cooper & Jenings illustrates:

Whereas I owe Cooper & Jenings the sum of blank with interest until paid, for my outfits as seaman, on board the ship. ... I do assign to the said Cooper & Jenings all such wages, share and proportion of money, oil and bone, as may be due me at the expiration of the voyage I am about to make in said ship: to have and to hold to their own use towards payment of the aforesaid debt, and also, for all necessaries they may furnish my family, during my absence, and all other moneys and mierchanize they shall advance to me, and for me, up to the time of the settlement of such voyage, the overplus, if any, to be paid to me. (Providence Public Library 1802–1880)

Working-class whalers took out these loans when their families could not afford to outfit them for their voyages (Norling 2000). Loans burdened individual sailors, but minimized impact on their households; the availability of credit meant that families did not have to pay up front and wait until the men's return to recoup their investments. The accounts of Cooper & Jenings show that even men with debt could still complete voyages with sums that were substantial for the time. Henry Wright and Stephen Fowler earned lays of 1/110 for their voyages ending in 1848. They received pay of \$86.90 and \$92.55, respectively, after Cooper & Jenings deducted \$255 from Fowler's work on the Huron (Providence Public Library 1802–1880). The accounts of Sag Harbor merchant John D. Gardiner also indicate that outfitting mid-century whalers did not create cycles of debt. He lent sums ranging from \$39.57 to \$186 to outfit working-class whalers like Native Americans John Joseph, Henry Cuffee, and Jeremiah Cuffee, in the early 1840s, and all of them paid off their debts in full from their whaling shares (Gardiner 1840–1845). In these examples, credit was not exploitative. As Little (1987) argues for 18th-century Nantucket, it was, instead, a tool that facilitated everyday life for whalers in an industry with delayed payments.

From the perspective of absolute earnings, whaling was not necessarily the most profitable option. As economic historian Hohman (1928: 240) calculated: "[T]he average whaleman was

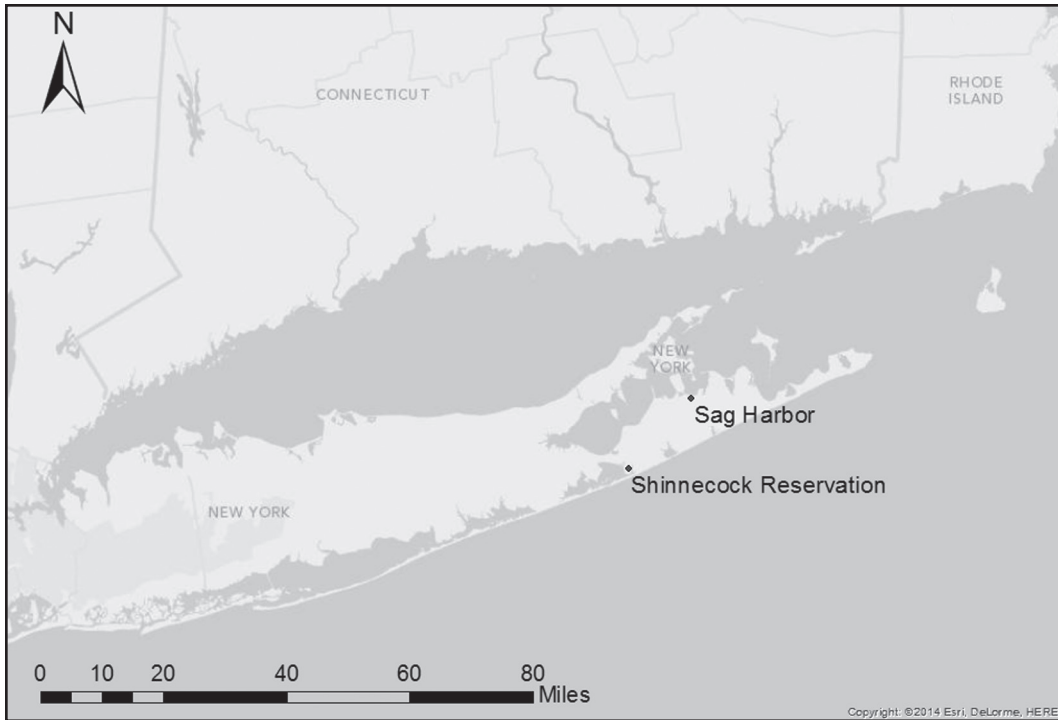


Figure 1. Research area: Sag Harbor and the Shinnecock reservation on eastern Long Island, New York. (Map by Emily Button, 2013.)

receiving about twenty cents per day, plus food and bunk space ... when the average unskilled shore worker was being paid about ninety cents per day without room and board." Native American career whalers were neither average whalers nor average unskilled shore workers, however. As agricultural laborers, they earned less than Hohman's average: Montaukett men in East Hampton in the 1830s made \$8–\$11 per month, or \$111–\$125 per year, not including food or housing (East Hampton Library 1830–1837). In contrast, on one voyage they could make that much or more. Lays were also released at the ends of whaling voyages in sums greater than day laborers would ever receive at once. This method of delaying pay could function as a mode of accumulating wealth.

Changing racial dynamics in New England also made whaling attractive to Native American men in the mid- to late 19th century. The stereotype that native mariners were talented boat steerers may have helped them advance into more lucrative officer positions (Shoemaker 2013). Additionally, in the late

19th century, overall wages in the whaling industry declined, and Portuguese-speaking sailors from the Azores and Cape Verde Islands began to fill more berths than native-born American sailors (Bolster 1997; Warrin 2010). The corresponding exodus of white sailors from the whaling industry might have given Native Americans who retained a comparative advantage in competition for officer positions. For instance, Shinnecock whaler Moses Walker served as first mate on the *Niger* out of New Bedford, and Orlando Eleazer as second mate on the *Ohio*, with crews consisting mainly of Portuguese sailors. While no Native American whalers from Long Island became whaling captains, several became officers, and many became boat steerers (Providence Public Library 1877–1881; Mancini 2009; Shoemaker 2013, 2014). This would have qualified them for larger lays in this period of maritime-wage stagnation. One whaler, Aaron Cuffee, also became a captain on a local boat in his retirement (Rabito-Wypenswah 1993a).

Native whalers established their careers in a context of widespread, intergenerational, and often-communal trips to sea. Shinnecock and Montaukett often joined with their brothers, cousins, or neighbors in the practice of “cohort whaling,” which was common among Native Americans from the Northeast (Mancini 2009; Handsman 2010; Shoemaker 2013). On New Bedford voyages, cohorts often consisted of two to five men (Providence Public Library 1877–1881; New Bedford Whaling Museum 2012; Shoemaker 2012). On ships from Sag Harbor or New London, Shinnecock and Montaukett men sometimes constituted half or more of the crew. For instance, in 1847 the *Panama* carried ten Shinnecock men out of Sag Harbor, while the *Nimrod* enlisted seven in 1853, and the *Pioneer* left from New London with six in 1862 (Brown 2002; George W. Blunt White Library 2007). Mid-19th-century Shinnecock whaling cohorts formed three overlapping generational groups (Providence Public Library 1802–1880; N. & G. Howell 1833–1847; Providence Public Library 1877–1881; Brown 2002; New Bedford Whaling Museum 2012; Shoemaker 2012). In one, men began sailing ca. 1818–1830 through the early 1840s, the years in which Sag Harbor’s whaling industry expanded and the neighborhood of Eastville began to form. A transitional group spanned the 1840s and 1850s, the years in which Long Island whaling peaked and began to decline, and the port neighborhood of Eastville grew significantly. The last cohort began whaling during the 1860s and ceased in the 1880s. The whaling industry was already declining nationally due to the Civil War and the discovery of oil in Pennsylvania, but more significantly for Long Island, most of a whaling generation died when 11 Shinnecock men perished in 1876 while attempting to rescue the crew of the wrecked *Circassian* (Starbuck 1964; Stone 1983; Shoemaker 2014; Shinnecock Nation Cultural Center and Museum 2011).

For most of a century, whaling cohorts functioned as informal men’s associations that crosscut households and helped to define generations. Yet, the absence of significant numbers of working men for years at a time meant that the women and men left at home were responsible for supporting their households (Herndon 1996). The Anglo-American wives of

whalers on Nantucket and in New Bedford violated the 19th-century domestic ideology of “separate spheres” to support their households during their husbands’ long absences at sea (Norling 2000). In contrast, Algonquian gender systems supported women’s economic leadership. Indigenous social systems involved women in decision making (Shoemaker 1995; Strong 1998; Richmond and Den Ouden 2003; Rubertone 2012). Land, cultivation, and household leadership had strong female associations, while hunting was associated with men (Bragdon 1996; Roesch Wagner 2001; Rubertone 2001; Haile 2013). On Long Island, Indian women have been active in negotiating land transactions and maintaining agricultural, botanical, and cultural knowledge since the 17th century (Guillaume 1998; Strong 1998). As indigenous land bases were decimated in the 18th and 19th centuries, many native women also provided cash income, selling crafts or working for wages as seamstresses, laundresses, servants, and cooks (Stone, Johnson, and VanDeroef 1988; O’Brien 2010; Reiser 2011). Native American women in whaling households assumed positions of responsibility and productivity prior to, rather than because of, men’s participation in whaling.

19th Century Household Cycles

The responsibility that whalers’ absence placed on youth, adults, and elders in their households, and the wealth they brought back when lays were distributed, made Native American whaling a family affair. Indigenous household structures, family networks, and labor practices both shaped and responded to men’s participation in the whaling industry. The links between houses as physical structures, the social groups who use them, and the activities that take place within them vary cross-culturally, and changes in the broader social organization of production also affect household formation, as household sizes grow or shrink with the availability of land or wealth (Wilk and Rathje 1982; Barile and Brandon 2004; Voss 2008). Household patterns and biographies from the Shinnecock reservation and the neighborhood of Eastville in Sag Harbor show how families and communities responded to the pressures of limited land and economic inequality in the 19th century; the

boom years of the whaling industry fostered the construction of new houses and participation in the consumer economy.

The Materiality of Everyday Life at Shinnecock, 1800-1840

The decades between 1800 and 1840 spanned the first generation of cohort whalers and the beginning of the boom in Sag Harbor's whaling industry. Materially, it was a time of continued transition to a mixed economy that incorporated both local resources and European American market goods. Comparing whaling and non-whaling families is difficult, due to the incredible integration of whaling into household and community life, so I consider these material changes evidence of practices in the "whaling economy," in which the economic impact of maritime labor became entangled with terrestrial wage labor, household formation, and consumption.

Historical evidence from the Shinnecock reservation is sparse for this period. The census recorded no households there until 1840, when it enumerated 18 (U.S. Department of the Interior 1840; Eichholz and Rose 2009). Shinnecock oral histories and ethnographies recall the importance of local fishing, shellfish and plant gathering, hunting, and production of basketry and scrubs (Carr and Westey 1945; Stone 1983). Probate records from comparable rural Montaukett households in East Hampton also illustrate local production. The earliest Native American inventory belonged to Jason Cuffee, who worked for a shipbuilder prior to his death in 1807, but his record only includes major pieces of furniture and a cow (Surrogate Court Clerk's Office 1807). The later, but significantly more extensive, probate record for Peter Quaw describes an agricultural household well stocked with equipment for subsistence (Surrogate Court Clerk's Office 1868). He and his wife Triphenia owned two small boats, clam rakes, eel spears and pots, and nets and seines. These were stored outdoors with 15 chickens, a horse, a scythe, a grindstone, and agricultural tools. Beyond reservations, raising chickens, gardening and agriculture, hunting, and manufacture of wooden tools were common practices that enabled households in the Northeast to supplement intermittent wage labor and unpredictable harvests (Clark

1992: 97). For Native American people with family members in the whaling industry, they would have helped to smooth long gaps between payments, foster support networks among households, and reduce the need for debt.

Indigenous people were also consistent participants in the consumer economy, purchasing commodities they were unable to produce at home. Contemporaneous Montaukett households in East Hampton frequently purchased goods, including tobacco, rum, flour, and cloth, on running credit accounts with local stores, paying their debts with local products and labor (Van Scoy 1828-1829, 1835).

The purchased goods most visible archaeologically were mass-produced English ceramics. An artifact collection of 971 ceramic sherds illustrates consumption preferences on the Shinnecock reservation. This collection was salvaged by volunteers during construction of the Shinnecock Family Preservation Center in 2004. It is now housed at the Shinnecock National Museum and Cultural Center. The location of the site was near two households on an 1873 map (Beers 1873), but sources identifying the inhabitants or earlier households have not been found. The deposit was primarily a kitchen midden, and local oral traditions hold that multiple households shared middens until the 1970s. In addition to ceramics, the deposit included a large number of clam shells, a smaller number of cattle bones, and a few other artifacts, including 22 sherds of bottle glass, 5 utensil fragments, and 4 pieces of broken pipe stem. This analysis focuses on ceramics because they were the bulk of the material excavated.

The collection consists of 757 refined earthenware and porcelain sherds (78.0%), and 211 stoneware and redware sherds (21.7%). The refined earthenwares include shell-edged pearlware, transfer-printed and hand-painted pearlware and whiteware, annular and mocha ware, and undecorated whiteware and ironstone. (Figs. 3 and 4) There are also eight sherds of hand-painted and undecorated English porcelain. Stonewares are primarily American salt-glazed gray fabrics, with and without Albany-slip and cobalt decoration. Redwares are primarily lead glazed, with few other identifying features, although a few sherds have yellow and blue

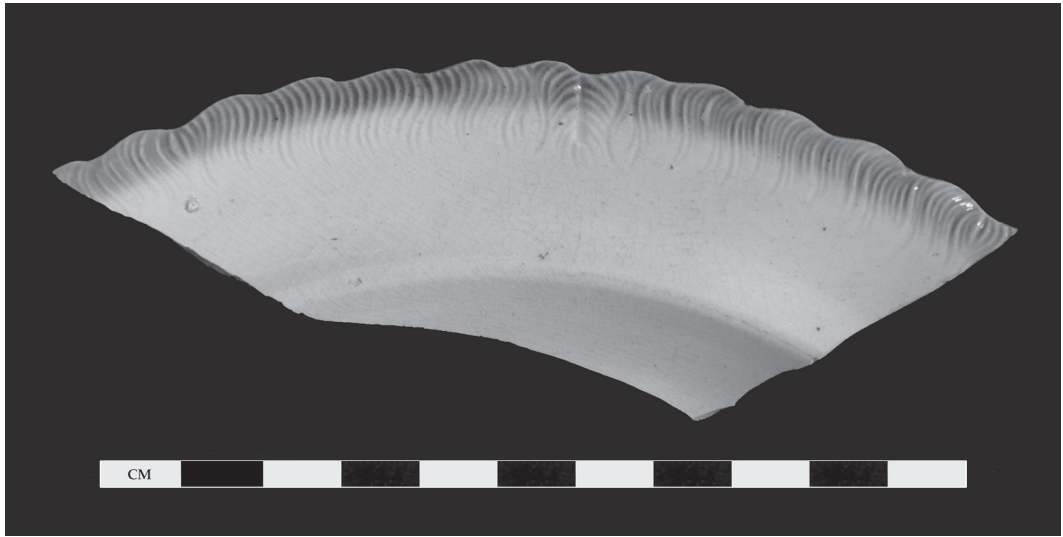


Figure 2. Shell-edged pearlware excavated from the Shinnecock reservation, in the collections of the Shinnecock National Museum and Cultural Center. (Photo by Emily Button, 2013.)

trailed slip decoration. I calculated a mean ceramic date of 1835 from 747 sherds of pearlware, whiteware, ironstone, and porcelain (South 1977; Samford 1997) (TAB 1).

The majority of these ceramics is imported English styles, mainly used for table and tea wares. Of the total, 266 had identifiable shapes: 149 plates, 49 bowls, 56 teacups, and 1 saucer. Most shell-edged, transfer-printed, and hand-painted white ceramics were made for dining, so it is likely that the number of table and tea wares is much higher. The redwares and stonewares were most likely storage and serving vessels. Fourteen are identifiable as pieces of jugs or pitchers, including seven sherds of terra-cotta imitation Jackfield ware, and sixteen sherds of yellow slip-trailed redware are fragments of platters. This collection is heavily skewed toward dining over preparation or storage, and toward English imports over American-made ceramics.

On a small scale, these ceramic data from Native American whaling households on Long Island mirror the larger-scale complexity of ceramic taste and consumption dynamics. After the American Revolution, ceramic fashions among upper-class white women created a symbolic language of civility and prosperity that middle-class women also strove to emulate. Chinese porcelain and its British imitations became popular status goods in the 18th century,

but by the early 19th century imitations were mass-produced and affordable, and they became mainstays of American dinner tables at more middling income levels (Sussman 1977; Wall 1994; Samford 1997).

This does not mean that Native American women necessarily bought into the European American ideologies of separate spheres and ritualized dining that were often associated with these ceramic trends (Wall 1994; Spencer-Wood 1995). The possibility that the Shinnecock collection might be part of a shared midden, and the presence of clam shells, which were associated with more communal meals, means that people may have enjoyed the shell-edged plates beyond the boundaries of nuclear families. Since the ceramics were found on the reservation itself, they represent an adaptation of imported goods for internal audiences, an “indigenization” of European consumer goods that undermined stereotypes of race and class (Silliman 2009; Pezzarossi 2014). These choices are important “not for what they represent in the society of origin but for their perceived use and meaning in the context of consumption” (Dietler 2010: 55). In this context, ceramics signified that whaling-era Shinnecock families had the purchasing power to integrate popular European goods into their everyday lives, even as they used them to consume local food

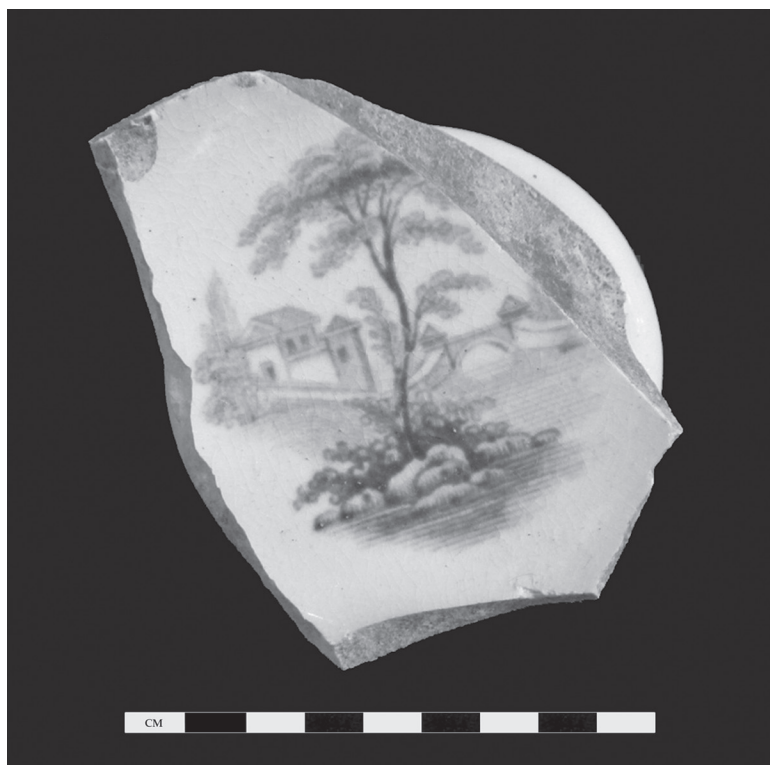


Figure 3. Transfer printed whiteware excavated from the Shinnecock reservation, in the collections of the Shinnecock National Museum and Cultural Center. (Photo by Emily Button, 2013.)

items from land they protected from settler incursions.

Even more significantly, the houses, in which Native American whaling families used their dishes, were increasingly built from whaling profits. Ethnohistorical accounts identify the early 19th century as the period in which Shinnecock dwellings changed from wigwams built of local materials to frame houses, in part due to the loss of the local plants traditionally used in house construction (Shoemaker 2014). On Montauk Point, two houses from the period 1790–1830 exemplify this transition. An earlier structure is round and bounded by fieldstones, evidence of indigenous construction techniques, while a later structure is larger and square, with a footprint more comparable to European American houses of the time period (Johannemann 1993; McGovern 2014). In New England, the first European American house among the Aquinnah Wampanoag was built

around 1800, and later homes combined frame houses with traditional cellar holes and sometimes seasonal coastal wigwams (Burgess 1926). In the early 20th century, Shinnecock residents remembered the mid-19th-century frame houses on the reservation as products of “whaling money” (Haile 2013; Shoemaker 2014). The oldest standing example was from 1850 (Red Thunder Cloud [1940–1949]).

Little (1981) found that, on Nantucket, wigwams and other traditional architecture were not recorded in probates or transferred as property, but frame houses were. The fact that the census first recorded 18 Shinnecock households in 1840, indicates that men in

the first generational cohort to sail in Sag Harbor’s growing whaling industry were able to build new frame houses from their lays (U.S. Department of the Interior 1840). On the Shinnecock reservation, land was allotted for three-year leases, the land base itself was limited, and mortgages were unavailable. While land could not be purchased, houses could—but only with cash. Holly Haile Davis recounts in an oral history that whaling was one of the only ways possible to gain sums large enough to build or buy a house (Shoemaker 2014). In contemporary societies, it can be difficult for low-income households to save regular wages due to unpredictable financial demands, and people develop creative strategies to save larger sums (Collins et al. 2009). Lays could function as delayed savings to make large purchases possible. Upon their returns, Shinnecock whalers may have had accounts at local stores, like Isaac Plato’s in East Hampton. In 1828, “Captain” Plato suddenly showed up

Table 1. Ceramics from the Shinnecock National Museum and Cultural Center

| Type | Number | Percent |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|--------|---------|
| Refined earthenwares | 749 | 77.1 |
| Shell-edged & undecorated pearlware | 165 | 17.0 |
| Transfer-printed pearl & whiteware | 139 | 14.3 |
| Hand-painted pearl & whiteware | 119 | 12.3 |
| Sponged and flow-blue whiteware | 36 | 3.7 |
| Undecorated (transitional whiteware, whiteware & ironstone) | 241 | 24.8 |
| Annular ware | 49 | 5.0 |
| Porcelain | 8 | 0.8 |
| Stonewares | 27 | 2.8 |
| Albany slip or imitation | 8 | 0.8 |
| Other | 19 | 2.0 |
| Redwares | 184 | 18.9 |
| Imitation Jackfield | 9 | 0.9 |
| Glazed | 153 | 15.6 |
| Unglazed | 6 | 0.6 |
| Slip trailed | 16 | 1.6 |
| Other or unknown | 3 | 0.3 |
| Total | 971 | 100 |

in Isaac Van Scoy's account book, purchasing sets of dishware, knives, forks, wood, and nails, as well as food and rum (Van Scoy 1828–1829). It is tempting to imagine that he was building and furnishing a home after time at sea.

Demography after Whaling's Peak, 1850–1880

Shinnecock

Demographic data from the whaling years of the second and third generations help to paint a more detailed picture of the families living in these frame houses. Beginning in 1850, the census recorded names of all individuals within households. The Shinnecock reservation was home to 22 families in 1850, and 29 in 1865 (U.S. Department of the Interior 1850; New York Department of State 1865). The 1860, 1870, and 1880 censuses did not enumerate the reservation population, making demographic changes difficult to trace after the Circassian disaster and the decline of the industry.

During these decades, when the second and third generational cohorts of 19th-century whalers were setting out on voyages, many Shinnecock households were multigenerational. They included several adults of working age: a middle-aged or older head or couple, adult children and their spouses, and sometimes grandchildren. Other household models consisted of young nuclear families or multiple adult family members. Few women were explicitly listed as household heads, but since Shinnecock histories remember a number of women as important community figures, this says more about the assumptions of census takers than about indigenous attitudes (Stone, Johnson, and VanDeroef 1988). Thirty-nine of the men were known whalers, many of them fathers, brothers, and cousins. Most men under 50 were also identified in the census as mariners or fishermen, while many older men and former whalers were farmers. Although men's maritime labor might indicate that women would make up a significant majority of the reservation's population, gender ratios

were roughly even. Absence from home during early working years was common across gender lines, and many women with Shinnecock and Montaukett names appear in the census as resident household servants (U.S. Department of the Interior 1850; New York Department of State 1865).

These demographic trends illustrate how whaling fit into household cycles (Handsman 2011). Families relied on the cooperation of multiple adult laborers, both at home and at sea. Young men and women often left their parents' households as teenagers to work as servants, farm laborers, and whalers. Many young parents continued to stay with their own parents or move in with in-laws, while others started independent households. In middle age, career whalers retired and worked on local farms. As they grew older, they often became leaders of their own multigenerational households, and men took official positions of responsibility as tribal trustees.

This way of life was an adaptation of tradition to the spatial and economic constraints of colonialism. Wilk and Rathje (1982) predicted that agricultural communities with insufficient land will feature both large households, in which adults hoping to inherit remain with their parents, and the growth of a class of landless wage laborers. Limited resources drove Shinnecock people to find work off the reservation, and whaling provided an important source of independent income and potential cash windfalls in large families in which adult children could not expect to inherit land. However, the limited duration of voyages prevented strict divisions between wage laborers who stayed off the land and farmers who stayed on, which could have generated inequality within the community.

Eastville

Other Native American families of the mid-19th century used their earnings to move off communal lands into the growing port neighborhood of Eastville. Many of Sag Harbor's Indian and black whalers began to settle in ethnically diverse Eastville in the 1840s, after the founding of the St. David African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church (Zaykowski 1991). By 1850, Eastville was home to almost 30 households of Irish immigrants,

and people of African, Shinnecock, Montaukett, and Unkechaug ancestry (U.S. Department of the Interior 1850; Strong 2001; Grier-Key, McGovern, and Button Kambic 2013).

Out of 41 people of color who lived and sailed out of Sag Harbor's Eastville neighborhood from 1840 to 1880, at least 18 were mariners of Native American descent, and another 8 mariners were connected to Native American families through marriage or co-residence. Like their counterparts at Shinnecock, many went whaling in the 1810s–1850s and then transitioned to farm labor, piloting local boats, or work in tourism as their families grew, while their sons struck out on voyages into the 1880s (N. & G. Howell 1833–1847; U.S. Department of the Interior 1840, 1850, 1860, 1870, 1880; Brown 2002; George W. Blunt White Library 2007). Over half the men who went to sea were heads of households during or within a decade after their whaling years. Many of these men and their neighbors bought properties by the 1870s: house lots of approximately 30 × 100 ft., with houses of one-and-a-half to two stories and outbuildings, valued by local tax assessments at \$100 to \$200 (Beers 1873; East Hampton Assessors 1883; Rabito-Wyppensenwah 1993b). Most Eastville households were nuclear families, with a few headed by women with their children or parents. Large households containing numerous related adults were far less common than in Shinnecock. While single adults often lived with relatives, and a few households hosted the occasional boarder, larger composite family households were more common among European immigrants than among Native American, African American, or multiethnic families in Eastville (FIG. 2). Eastville stands out as a counterexample to an explanation that would identify large households as simply an indigenous tradition, rather than a useful economic adaptation.

Many whalers in Eastville lived in single-family homes, owned their properties, and sometimes passed land on to their survivors, just like their European American neighbors, but they also maintained indigenous social networks. Links of kinship tied together many Native American nuclear families in Eastville. For instance, six separate households in the 1850s–1880s belonged to Shinnecock/Montaukett siblings: the five daughters and

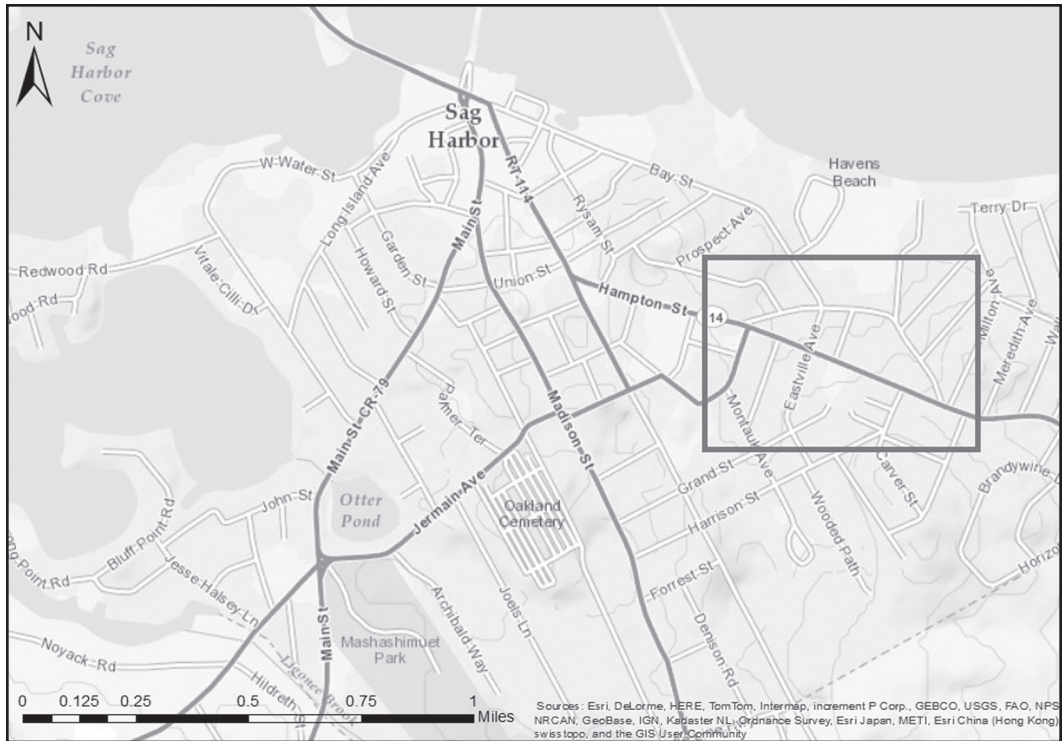


Figure 4. Research-area detail: Present location of the historic neighborhood of Eastville, in Sag Harbor, New York. (Map by Emily Button, 2013.)

one son of Lucinda and Lewis Cuffee of East Hampton (East Hampton Library [1860–1869]; Beers 1873). These six siblings all established their own families through maritime networks and communities of color, marrying Shinnecock, Unkechaug, and African American whalers and women (Surrogate Court Clerk’s Office 1898). Without the constraint of limited Shinnecock and Montaukett lands, families who might have lived together in composite households became spatially diffuse, spread over multiple dwellings, but with adult siblings and parents only steps away. Perhaps with access to both wages from whaling and land, families were able to optimize indigenous household models by combining space, property, and independence with close family relationships nearby.

Handsman’s (2011) household-cycle approach to the archaeology of Native American whaling suggests that income from young men’s whaling voyages supported consumption and fostered prosperous standards of living, while later in life their families relied

more on local production. For Native American households in Shinnecock and Eastville, it appears that whaling in particular supported the purchase of housing through materials on the reservation or property in Eastville, which led to the expansion of young households into nuclear family units in Eastville. The relationship between local production and household cycles is less visible: Shinnecock and Montaukett men often continued to work for wages after the ends of their whaling careers, and probate records indicate that rural households generally relied more on household production than ones in port, regardless of age or occupation (Surrogate Court Clerk’s Office 1868, 1898, 1905).

Complementing Handsman’s model, Long Island’s demographic patterns and probate records highlight the significance of family support networks and additional labor activities in combination with whaling. Whalers brought in large amounts of cash at widely spaced intervals, but women, youth, and older male workers maintained basic household

living standards through wage labor, local production, and kinship networks. At Shinnecock, men and women's collaborative terrestrial activities helped to maintain multigenerational households while whalers were at sea. In Eastville, neighboring households of close-knit kin meant that the pattern of nuclear-family households did not foreclose potential for mutual support.

Household Biographies: Three Generations of Whalers

Probate, land, and tax records from three Native American families living off-reservation from 1857 to 1897 show how household economies integrated maritime labor and women's leadership—and why debt, risk, and low overall levels of wealth still made it difficult to pass on property between generations.

The Cuffees of Eastville

The household of Wealthy Ann Cuffee exemplifies the early Native American whaling family in Eastville. She died in her home in Sag Harbor in 1857 at age 52, survived by her husband, Shinnecock whaler William H. Cuffee; and her children Wealthy Ann Johnson, Sarah Ann Cuffee, James L. Cuffee; and three minor sons, Cornelius, Isaac, and Stephen Cuffee. Following the common model at Shinnecock, Wealthy's children lived with their parents as young adults (U.S. Department of the Interior 1850), but by the time of her death the younger generation became part of the expansion, through whaling, of young nuclear family households. Daughter Wealthy had married black whaler Amos Johnson of Eastville, Eliza had married Sylvester Wright of Southampton, Isaac and Stephen were at sea on the *Odd Fellow*, and James, also a whaler, was living at Shinnecock (Surrogate Court Clerk's Office 1857).

Wealthy Cuffee's probate record is a snapshot of the home life of a family spanning multiple generations of cohort whalers, soon after the peak of the industry in Sag Harbor in late the 1840s. She owned seven chairs, a stand, and a bed and bedding, which added up to a value of \$6.58; a bureau, a walnut table, another kitchen table, a rocking chair, a chest, a looking glass, carpet, a mantle, window shades, and a cupboard, which were

valued together at \$10.58; and crockery worth \$1.50. She also had books worth \$3, the same value as her most expensive piece of furniture, which hints at ideals of cultural capital and education as a source of social mobility. Wealthy's belongings were appraised at \$20.49 altogether, significantly less than the sums men could bring home from whaling voyages. This supports the argument that whaling windfalls were significant enough to contribute to major purchases, like housing and property, beyond the everyday costs of living.

However, Wealthy Cuffee's probate inventory is the only one to show the importance of credit and debt for perishable goods and medical care, which dwarfed the value of her household furnishings. Accounts with local doctors, merchants, and moneylenders were an integral part of this Native American household economy. Her largest debt, \$33.80, was to Edgar Miles, a Sag Harbor doctor known in particular for his use of traditional and herbal medicines (Zaykowski 1991). Between December 1856 and April 1857, dates that probably marked her final illness, she regularly purchased drops, tonic cordials, powders, laudanum, other medications, and house calls. She also owed Dr. B. Buck \$11.11 for prescriptions. She purchased groceries from B. Brown & Co., with credit carried over from before February 1857: three months of purchases and interest added up to \$25.36. The majority of her purchases were perishable goods like butter, sugar, potatoes, soap, lamp oil, and candles, purchased once or twice a week. The Cuffees treated the store as a source of staple foods, flavor enhancers, and goods that could not be produced at home. The majority of their fresh foods must have come from gardening, hunting, purchases from other vendors, or food sharing with others.

For unknown reasons, she also owed the estate of William H. Nelson \$21.57, with steep interest of \$11.59. Nelson was a Sag Harbor lawyer who lent money to whaling captains and crew members before voyages in return for shares of profits (Nelson 1831–1848). Cuffee's household may have taken advantage of this service. The registration of the loan in her name could indicate either that she required a loan for her own purposes, or that she acted as guardian for her two sons at sea.

Wealthy made a will stipulating that her land and house in Eastville should remain for

her husband to live in for the rest of his natural life, at which point it should be divided among her minor sons Isaac, Stephen, and Cornelius. The Cuffees carried the Shinnecock tradition of women's stewardship of land to the purchase of property in Wealthy's name outside the reservation. This is also evidence of economic mobility for a whaling family: she was one of the first, if not the first, Native American woman in Sag Harbor to purchase land and obtain a residence without a mortgage. Perhaps access to credit at local stores, combined with windfalls from whaling voyages, allowed her to gain property in her earlier and healthier years. On the other hand, when she became ill, her household struggled to pay those debts, and she was ultimately unable to pass on her land. It was sold at public auction in October 1858 for \$170 to pay her debts of \$100.43. Only her children Wealthy Johnson and James Cuffee remained in Eastville as adults.

The Platos of Southampton

The volatility of household economies in the whaling era was not limited to issues of inheritance. Montaukett whaler Silas B. Plato's young nuclear family experienced worse hardships when he died at sea in 1863 (Surrogate Court Clerk's Office 1864). He had signed on in 1862 as third mate on the barque *Eagle* of New Bedford (New Bedford Whaling Museum 2012). His wife Juliet and daughters Ursula Ann and Harriet survived him at their home in the town of Southampton, which was likely located near Juliet's sister Clarissa Rugg in the village of Bridgehampton (Surrogate Court Clerk's Office 1868; U.S. Department of the Interior 1870).

Silas Plato had no recorded debts, and he had \$80 cash on hand and \$1,000 due from the agents of the *Eagle*. His probate inventory reads as though the appraisers listed objects as they moved through the house, visiting at least four rooms. These rooms were furnished not only with sufficient furniture for the four members of the family to sit, sleep, and work, but with 18 chairs, 2 bureaus for storage, and several tables and stands that could have served as work and dining surfaces. The Plato house was divided into more multipurpose spaces than earlier Native American dwellings in the area, probably including Wealthy Cuffee's (Surrogate Court Clerk's Office 1807,

1857; Rabito-Wyppensenwah 1993b). The home was decorated with books and pictures, "ornaments," curtains, and carpets. The chairs were all grouped in multiples of 3 to 6, and so were the kitchen wares, which included 6 knives and forks, 6 plates, 6 teacups and saucers, and 12 small plates.

The Plato household inventory indicates that in the early 1860s, people of color in the whaling industry were not only able to establish independent households around nuclear families, but they were also living in houses that were increasingly divided into more discrete spaces with different sleeping, work, and leisure areas. The even numbers of table and tea wares show that preferences for matching sets, noted in white middle- and upper-class households in the late 18th century, were also part of their daily life (Wall 1994; Leone 2005).

At the same time, the Platos also had equipment for household production, including a clotheshorse, carpentry tools, fishing tools, pistol ammunition, and gardening equipment, as well as bushels of corn and potatoes. These items hint at Juliet's self-sufficiency and reliance on local produce during Silas's years at sea, as well as the likelihood that she made and mended clothes for outside income.

Unfortunately, the challenge of survival after his loss must have dwarfed the household's financial and material resources. Although the agents of the *Eagle* owed the family \$1,000, there is no record of payment to Juliet. Meanwhile, Silas's listed possessions were appraised at under \$120, his "cash on hand" came to \$80, and I have found no record of his or his wife's ownership of land. Additionally, it is possible that Juliet had household debts in her own name, as did Wealthy Cuffee. Material plenty was not necessarily an indicator of material security. Even if Juliet and her daughters had produced food and earned income, three young women might have had trouble supporting their household alone.

How did Silas's death impact Juliet, Ursula Ann, and Harriet's lives? None of the three appear definitively in the census, newspapers, or poor records, so their lives beyond 1863 are a mystery. Did Juliet rely on her parents, the Quaw family in East Hampton, or her sister Clarissa Rugg, who had married a black whaler and become part of an extended family

network in Bridgehampton? Did she move west to New York, near another sister, to look for new opportunities (Surrogate Court Clerk's Office 1868)? These unknowns show that even though whaling profits could enable couples like Silas and Juliet to establish their own homes, furnish them with matching consumer goods, and even save money, the very industry that enabled this upward mobility could easily destroy it. The nuclear family household was as fragile as it was prosperous.

The Consors of Eastville

Despite this risk, a number of Native American women who witnessed multiple generations of whaling were the final survivors in their household cycles during its decline. In 1880 six women headed households in Eastville, and by 1902 their number had doubled (U.S. Department of the Interior 1880; E. Belcher Hyde Map Co. 1902). One of them, Eliza Consor, was the daughter of one Native American sailor, wife and sister to multiple whalers, and mother of a son who died at sea. She kept three whale lines and a whale spade at her home in Sag Harbor until her death, years after the death of the last whaler in the family (Surrogate Court Clerk's Office 1898). Her parents, Lewis and Lucinda Cuffee, were founders of Eastville's St. David African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, and she and five of her brothers and sisters established houses in Eastville based on work in the whaling industry during the 1850s and beyond (East Hampton Library 1860–1869; Zaykowski 1991). Her husband, African American George Prince Consor, was a whaler until the 1870s, while her son, his namesake, was lost at sea (Surrogate Court Clerk's Office 1891). Sadly, the family plot in Oakland Cemetery shows that none of her daughters lived past age 30 either. When Eliza died in 1897, she was the last remaining member of her immediate family.

Consor's 1898 probate inventory (Surrogate Court Clerk's Office 1898) lists extensive furnishings, household material culture, and possible work materials in an inventory stretching to 18 handwritten pages, detailing even "one postage stamp." Unique highlights included 126 books, 10 rocking chairs, and 274 dishes and jugs, which lead one to imagine a life of collecting oriented

around creating spaces of comfort and plenty. She had a whip, three guns, a powder horn, and a clam rake, but little gardening or fishing material compared to other probate records. As a woman living alone on a small town property near younger nieces and nephews, she relied less on her own household production than did households on the Shinnecock reservation. However, she was highly engaged with the local economy as a consumer and, most likely, an earner.

Many household objects indicate potential sources of income. A clotheshorse, significant quantities of clothing, small pieces of cloth and old clothes, and a "work basket" likely relate to work as a seamstress or tailor, a common occupation among women of color (Stone, Johnson, and VanDeroef 1988; Bowser 2007). The significant number of dishes included 211 pieces of ceramic table and tea wares (88.7%) and 27 utilitarian pieces (11.3%), as well as numerous glass serving bowls and jars. She had multiple sets of matching and "odd" plates and tea sets, which implies that she purchased entire sets of new plates to replace old, mismatched, incomplete, or unfashionable ones. With five sets of siblings and in-laws in the neighborhood, she likely cooked for major family and church events, but she may also have used her home as a restaurant or boardinghouse. There is no known documentation or oral history associating sizable boardinghouses with whaling-era Native American families on eastern Long Island, but women commonly ran them in ports (Bolster 1997; Norling 2000; Mancini 2009). Eliza Consor's quantity of serving and dining wares may be a material signature of one such home-based business.

Throughout her adult life, Consor accumulated numerous possessions compared to the younger households of Wealthy Ann Cuffee and Silas Plato, and many of these items may have helped her to support herself through the deaths of her husband and children. Yet, ceramics on archaeological sites can be poor indicators of household wealth in minority households in this period, in comparison to land ownership (Bower 1986; Landon 2007). All of Consor's possessions were appraised at a total value of only \$126.84. Her home and property in Eastville, valued at \$150 in 1883, were auctioned off after her death (East Hampton Assessors 1883; Surrogate Court

Clerk's Office 1898). Perhaps if one of her children had survived through adulthood, the Consors would have been a successful example of economic mobility for a whaling family, passing down property through generations. Instead, their example illustrates the difference between plentiful material culture and wealth.

All three of these household biographies show the importance of women's leadership at all stages of the household cycle: when men were at sea in young families like the Platos, when young adult sons like the Cuffees were setting off on voyages and women and parents remained home, and when older women survived the men in their families and maintained roots and family connections in port. They show that both credit and women's labor fostered consumption in comfortable households that relied on a combination of mass-produced material culture, store-bought staples, and local products. Yet, for each of these families, whaling supported household expansion and consumption for only one or two generations at a time.

Conclusion

In Sag Harbor, Southampton, and East Hampton, New York, whaling was a risky but often profitable strategy for 19th-century indigenous communities in combination with credit, household production, and women's labor and leadership.

Demographic and historical overviews of the Shinnecock reservation show that resource constraints, in the form of a limited reservation land base, shaped multigenerational household structures that supported the tradition of cohort whaling in the mid-19th century. This trend also supports historians' claims that limited access to land and capital contributed to the growth of maritime wage labor in Britain and the American colonies in general, and to Shinnecock and Montaukett participation in whaling specifically (Rediker 1987; Strong 2001). In both Shinnecock and Eastville, whaling also supported the formation of new households, because in comparison to terrestrial wages it offered windfalls. Oral histories and the documentary record show that whaling voyages had unique potential to provide large one-time payments that could function in place of savings, allowing families to invest in

housing and establish new households, both on and off the reservation.

Some families maintained this property over multiple generations, although similarly detailed financial and material data are unavailable for these households. For example, by the turn of the 20th century Wealthy Cuffee's daughter and son-in-law, Wealthy and Amos Johnson, and Eliza Consor's sister and brother-in-law, Helen and Miles Ashman, both passed on houses to their children (East Hampton Assessors 1883; E. Belcher Hyde Map Co. 1902). For these families, whaling in the early years of household cycles helped foster long-term prosperity, and their descendants often moved on to work in agriculture and tourism after the decline of the whaling industry (U.S. Department of the Interior 1880).

Nevertheless, individual household biographies illustrate the precariousness of life in the whaling industry. Whalers risked death at sea, which was particularly dangerous for young nuclear families without many other adults supporting the household, and the tragedy of the Circassian shipwreck in 1876 also had a massive impact on the Shinnecock reservation community. Furthermore, Native American whaling households still faced barriers to intergenerational economic mobility, such as reliance on credit, which could result in the loss of hard-earned property. Bolster (1997) has found that among black families in northeastern ports, maritime labor was an economic pillar of the community, but its unpredictability meant that many mariners were unable to maintain their own households. Native American families on Long Island had parallel experiences of greater communal mobility, but faced serious individual risks. While the wages of whaling were usually worth their costs, they rarely eclipsed the economic inequality that had limited Native American families for centuries.

This study's combination of historical and archaeological data reveals that native households used the labor opportunities of the whaling era to invest in some symbols of mainstream respectability, such as housing and ceramics, but that gains in property ownership were difficult to pass on after the industry's decline. Most evidence for labor patterns is drawn from historical documents,

while material culture data primarily relate to consumption. This mismatch between archaeological and historical evidence for certain areas and time periods leaves open questions for future research. For example, probate and tax records provide a wealth of historical detail for households in Sag Harbor, but there is not yet any direct archaeological evidence pertaining to this whaling community. Field research at Shinnecock and in Eastville could better contextualize the ceramic collection at the Shinnecock Museum, yield measurements of changes in house construction, household practices, and consumption over the course of the 19th century, and indicate whether there were material differences between on- and off-reservation households. Archaeology can have much more to contribute to understanding the whaling industry and how it transformed both the American economy and Native American ways of life.

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