



UNTOLD TALES OF FALMOUTH

from the archives of Museums on the Green

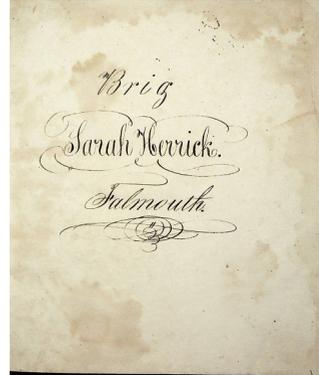
Sarah Herrick's Slop Book

In the archives at Museums on the Green is a book of slop accounts from Falmouth's first whaler, the *Sarah Herrick*. A whaleship's slop chest was its general store, filled with odds and ends of clothing and other small supplies. Sailors who needed a new pair of mittens, or who craved a chew of tobacco, could resort to the slop chest—for a price. A mate kept track of what each man took. At the end of the voyage, each man's pay was reduced by the value of what he had taken from the slop chest.

The *Sarah Herrick* slop book also lists provisions that were supplied to the men for free: food, drink, soap, and candles. Another page shows how much money was spent while the ship was in port. It was always important to stock up on fresh fruits and vegetables, to keep scurvy at bay. At St. Jago [Santiago], Cape Verde, the captain spent \$22.50 on fresh supplies, plus \$3.00 for a half barrel of tar.

Even more than an official ship's log, a slop account can provide valuable clues about the sailors and their daily lives. Our slop book demonstrates the presence of at least two Wampanoag crew members, Nicholas Pocknet and William Mingo. Mingo was a well-known figure in his community. Two years before this voyage, he had petitioned the legislature (unsuccessfully) to remove Mashpee's white overseers.

Finally, *Sarah Herrick's* slop book contains a direct message from shipowner Elijah Swift to his captain, with advice on how to carry out his mission.



Top: Title page from the *Sarah Herrick* slop book, 1820, at Museums on the Green.

Bottom: Oil portrait of Elijah Swift, builder and owner of the brig *Sarah Herrick*. Painting is on display at Museums on the Green.

Falmouth, June 1st, 1820
Capt. Moses Chase

Sir, you will proceed from hence with the Brig Sarah Herrick on a whaling voyage to the coast of Virginia, commonly called the southern ground; and there cruise one month, and as much longer as you may think best; from thence, you will go to the Western Islands' whaling ground, & there cruise till October, or as much longer as your judgement shall direct; from there if you shall have gotten any oil, you will touch at one of the Western or Cape de Verd Islands & ship your oil to me at Falmth or to Nantucket, to the care of William Coffin Esq. . . . You will not return with the Brig, unless you obtain Four Hundred Barrels of Oil, or upwards . . . or [till] your provisions are all consumed. . . .

You are hereby authorized to draw Bills on me for any sum not exceeding one thousand dollars, at ten days sight, for any thing that may be wanted on board the Brig Sarah Herrick. If you should be shipwrecked, you are authorized to draw for the amount of your repairs etc.

You are earnestly requested to write to me every opportunity that presents. When the Brig's bends get under-water you will paint them with verdigris once a month at least.

You are further requested to deliver the clothes out of the Slop Chest to any of your crew, that in your opinion may need them, & charge them with the price marked upon each article. . . .

You will keep a regular Log Book & Board, and if any misfortune should befall your vessel, you will regularly protest at the first port at which you arrive.

Yours respectfully,
E. Swift

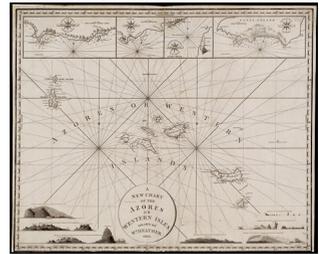
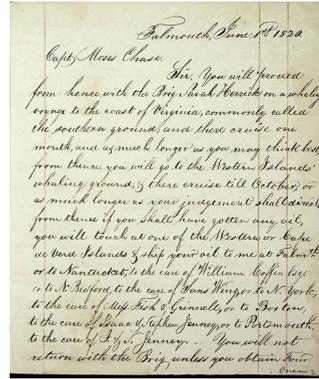
Sarah Herrick departed from the wharf at the end of Shore Street in 1820. Having fulfilled Elijah Swift's charge, it returned home in 1822.

Meg Costello

Learn more:

Visit our exhibit "We Who Adventure Far: Falmouth Whalers Return," on display at Museums on the Green, June 4—October 15, 2018.

Click [here](#) to see a 5 minute video version of this tale.



Top: First page of Elijah Swift's letter to Capt. Chase in the Sarah Herrick slop book.

Middle: Chart of the Azores or Western Islands, 1803, at Digital Commonwealth. See [high-res version here](#).

Bottom: Franklin L. Gifford, The Stone Dock. Oil on canvas, at Museums on the Green.