

Welcome to our inaugural eWHALES newsletter

The eWHALES project extracts maritime weather data from ship logbooks of historical New England whaling voyages to address contemporary questions related to weather patterns over the world's oceans. The project is a collaboration between oceanographer Caroline Ummenhofer¹ at Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution (WHOI) and historian Timothy Walker² at the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth (UMassD).

We thank all project participants, contributors, and funders for their support of eWHALES that has led to more than 140,000 daily weather records in our database to date. With this newsletter we provide regular updates on project developments and exciting new findings. Please stay tuned!



The eWHALES project leads at the New Bedford Whaling Museum reading room. Photo credit: Jayne Doucette (WHOI).

The holiday season at sea on a whaler

Whaling logbooks and private whalers' journals indicate that on sailors' birthdays, or on special occasions - such as the ship's thousandth barrel of whale oil rendered and stowed in the hold - the captain would allow the preparation of delicacies like fruitcake, or macaroni and cheese, for the enjoyment of his ship's crew¹. On holidays like Christmas, when celebrated at sea, it was customary for officers to share their regular allotment of fresh meat (provided by livestock on board) with the rest of the common sailors. To stretch the small available meat portions to serve a typical whaleship's complement of twenty to thirty men, it was usually used to enrich a large pot of soup or a stew². It's possible that the December holidays and other special events would have seen the occasional sharing out to regular crewmembers of some of the vessel's limited supply of chocolate, as well as a bit of the few precious flavoring agents on board (cinnamon, pepper, mustard). Perhaps a hearty treat made of chocolate mixed with rice would have been served on deck or in the galley after a particularly trying day of cutting, hauling, and boiling down blubber. The work of a whaling ship at sea didn't pause for holidays celebrated on land. Chocolate, with its caffeine and relatively high protein and caloric content, was a highly desirable but rare indulgence for whalers - much more valued than coffee or tea after an around-the-clock shift of hard labor³.

¹Oliver, S. L., *Saltwater Foodways: New Englanders and Their Food at Sea and Ashore in the Nineteenth Century* (Mystic, CT: Mystic Seaport, Inc., 1995), 103.

²Draper, C. L., *Cooking on Nineteenth Century Whaling Ships* (Mankato, MN: Blue Earth Books, 2001), 26.

³Kelly, Christopher, "Chocolate and North American Whaling Voyages," in *Chocolate: History, Culture and Heritage*, Louis Grivetti and Howard Shapiro, editors (Wiley, 2009), 413-422.

¹Dr. Caroline Ummenhofer (cummenhofer@whoi.edu)

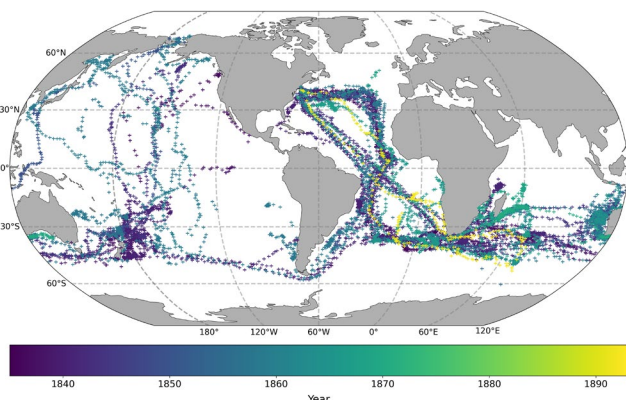
²Dr. Timothy Walker (twalker@umassd.edu)



Select newly completed logbooks in our database

Ship name	# of entries	Researcher	Repository
<i>Alto</i> (Bark) 1857-1862	709	D. Miller	Falmouth Museum on the Green
<i>Amazon</i> 1856-1860	902	S. Yalamanchili & M. Cynar	New Bedford Whaling Museum
<i>Amethyst</i> (Ship) 1838-1840	525	P. Thakkallapally	New Bedford Whaling Museum
<i>Cora</i> (Bark) 1839-1841	734	S. Luce	Providence Public library
<i>Elisha Dunbar</i> (Bark) 1854-1858	1229	J. Desrosiers	New Bedford Whaling Museum
<i>Falcon</i> (Bark) 1865-1867	776	S. Singh	New Bedford Whaling Museum
<i>Fenelon</i> (Ship) 1840-1842	654	P. Thakkallapally	New Bedford Whaling Museum
<i>Francis Allyn</i> (Schooner) 1891-1893	614	S. Singh	New Bedford Whaling Museum
<i>Governor Hopkins</i> (Brig) 1839-1840	372	S. Luce	Providence Public Library
<i>Herald</i> (Ship) 1834-1837	844	S. Wolf	New Bedford Whaling Museum
<i>Hibernia</i> (Ship) 1842-1844	290	J. Desrosiers	New Bedford Whaling Museum
<i>Jasper</i> (ship) 1839-1841	615	S. Luce	Providence Public library
<i>Neptune</i> (Ship) 1837-1839	638	S. Luce	Providence Public Library
<i>Pioneer</i> (Bark) 1858-1861	480	S. Singh	New Bedford Whaling Museum
<i>Rodman</i> (Bark) 1855-1859	1232	J. Desrosiers	New Bedford Whaling Museum
<i>Sea Breeze</i> 1865-1871	1562	S. Yalamanchili	New Bedford Whaling Museum
<i>Young Phenix</i> 1867-1871	1096	C. Bice & P. Thakkallapally	New Bedford Whaling Museum

New entries to our historical maritime weather database



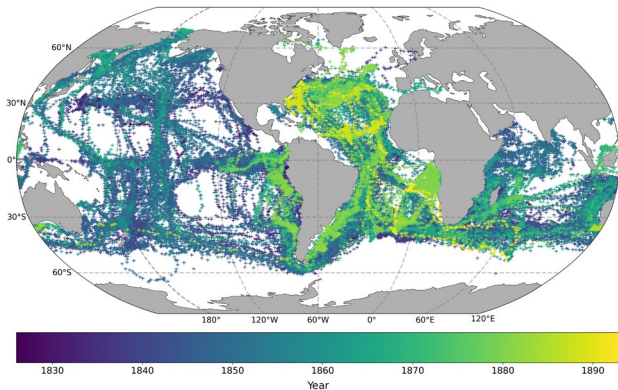
Over the last 8 months, our researchers have added ~10,500 new daily weather entries to our database.

Poem from the log of the *Clarice*

Poem entry provided by Stephen Luce from the log of the *Clarice*. Writing by Arnold B. Sisson on June 18th 1848 near the island of Assumption, Seychelles.

*Remember me when all is still
 And quiet (?) the world all is still
 When not a breeze disturbs the (ril?)
 And twilight falls upon the hill
 And eves dim veil unfurls
 Remember me when
 Remember me when thou dost sigh
 And softly bend the knee
 To offer up thy prayer on high
 Whilst kindred spirits hover nigh
 Oh then remember me*

Current status of our historical maritime weather database



We have reached a total of over 81,000 usable daily wind entries in our database.

Featured archival researchers

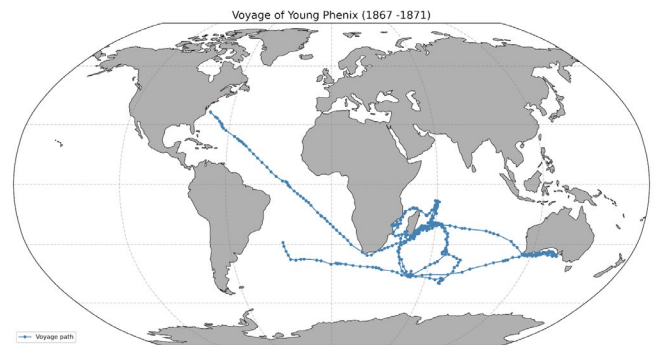
Stephen Luce – is our longest-serving archival researcher, who started on the eWHALES project in December 2021. He earned an M.A. in History with an archaeology focus from the University of Rhode Island. This, along with his years in the U.S. Army, has helped hone his skills with complex datasets. He also maintains and improves the 100+ acre Melville Park in Portsmouth, RI. In his free time, he enjoys motor cycling, clearing and promoting a Revolutionary War redoubt in Newport, and hiking areas around Aquidneck Island with his dog, Zappa. Amazingly, Stephen recently completed extraction of weather data from his 45th logbook, entering a total of 30,506 days of weather data.

Susan Wolf – is our newest contributor completing data entry for a logbook, namely the *Herald* (1834-1837) from the NBWM archive. In addition to noting the weather *en route*, as a psychologist, she also wondered about the mental health of the ship crew, as there wasn't much info entered on a daily basis.

Congratulations on these milestones and our heartfelt thanks for all the valuable weather records from all our archival researchers!

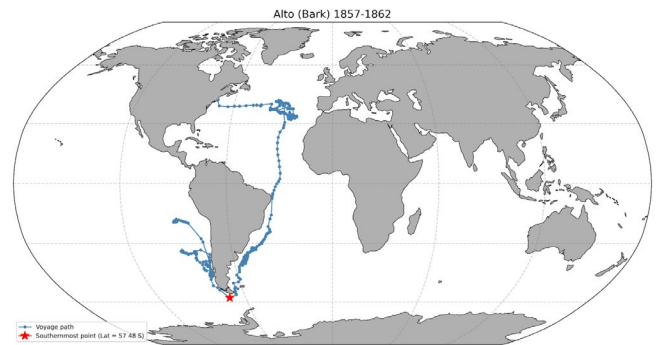
Fun facts from new log entries

The longest voyage was performed by the *Young Phenix* from 1867 to 1871. The ship traveled 9,900 km (~6150 mi) in 1,206 days.



The windiest day recorded was a hurricane (a Beaufort scale 12) experienced by the *Jasper* on March 23rd, 1840 to the Northeast of New Zealand. The ship weathered the storm, continued whaling, and then headed to Talcahuano, Chile where it took harbor.

The *Alto* reached the southernmost recorded location during its unusual journey westward through the Drake Passage on June 6th, 1858 – and in the Southern Hemisphere winter to boot!



Media coverage

Antonoff, A. (2025). [Charting climate change with whaling logs](#). *Vineyard Gazette*, July 31, 2025.

Telling the story

It was a busy period with four joint public presentations on the eWHALES project that Tim and Caroline gave: on May 30th at the Osterville Public Library in Osterville, MA; on July 19th at the Martha's Vineyard Museum, Vineyard Haven, MA; on October 15th at the Nantucket Whaling Museum in Nantucket, MA; and on November 5th at the Newport Historical Society in Newport, RI.

Tim also reported on the results at the European Society for Environmental History conference in August 2025 in Uppsala, Sweden; and Caroline presented a poster on findings to date at the Ocean Sciences Meeting in Glasgow, UK, in February 2026.



Tim and Caroline presenting on findings from the eWHALES project at Osterville Library (top right), Martha's Vineyard Museum (left), and Nantucket Whaling Museum (bottom right). Photo credits: Caroline Ummerhofer (WHOI), Addison Antonoff (Vineyard Gazette), Laurel Redington (Martha's Vineyard Museum), and Caroline Ummerhofer (WHOI) in clockwise order.

Publications

Ummerhofer CC, Sander N, Wimberly F, Gordon H, Giacoppo T, Münch B, Bice C, and Walker TD. (2026). **Nineteenth century global wind data from historical New England whaling ship voyages (1820-1900 CE).** *Scientific Data*, accepted.

Maritime weather data from historical ship logbooks are used to assess 19th century surface wind conditions. Housed across several New England archives, logbooks of U.S. whaling voyages contain systematic weather observations (e.g., wind strength/direction, sea state, precipitation) at (sub-)daily temporal resolution. Here, qualitative wind descriptions by the whalers from ~200 ship logbooks are quantified to generate a dataset with ~74,000 daily records of wind strength and direction *en route* and covering key whaling grounds in the Atlantic, Pacific, Indian, and Southern Ocean during the period 1820-1900 CE. Our results demonstrate that the historical records provide an important long-term context for maritime wind patterns in ocean regions lacking direct observational data during the 19th century.

Funding updates

Exciting news – thanks to the generosity of a **donor**, we are now expanding our efforts to extract maritime weather data to the Martha's Vineyard Museum whaling ship logbook collection! Stay tuned for updates. Thanks to renewed support by the **Heinz Family Foundation**, we can continue weather extraction, quality control, and climate analyses from logbooks at New Bedford Whaling Museum and Nantucket Historical Association. A generous donation by **Lisa B. Donohue** will enable extraction and analysis of weather data from the *India* and *Roger Williams*.

Thanks to all the funders for vital support in 2025 that allows continuation of the eWHALES project!

If you'd like to support our efforts to uncover unique weather and climate information from historical ship logbooks to help answer critical questions about shifting wind and rainfall patterns over the world's oceans – please contact development@whoi.edu.



Photo credit: Jayne Doucette (WHOI).

Contact

Newsletter content by Caroline Ummerhofer (WHOI), Timothy Walker (UMASSD), Finn Wimberly (WHOI).

For any feedback or suggestions, please reach out to cummerhofer@whoi.edu.

You can sign up for updates on the eWHALES project webpage: <https://ummerhofer.whoi.edu/ewhales/>