

GLOSSARY OF NAUTICAL TERMS

Three nineteenth-century lexicons of nautical terms are particularly useful to those interested in usage of sea terminology roughly contemporaneous with the world of *Moby-Dick*: Richard Henry Dana's *The Seaman's Friend* (1857), W. Clark Russell's *Sailors' Language: A Collection of Sea-Terms and Their Definitions* (1883), and W. H. Smyth's *The Sailor's Word Book* (1867). Both Jill Gidmark in her *Melville Sea Dictionary* and Harrison Hayford and Hershel Parker in the Glossary of the Norton edition of *Moby-Dick* make use of these works. *The Marine Mammals of the North-western Coast of North America* (1874), by Charles Scammon, includes a glossary of terms particularly associated with whaling. The brief glossary that follows is a distillation of the definitions found in those works named above in combination with the more conventional and accessible definitions to be found in *The American Heritage Dictionary* (1969).

Melville is often highly metaphoric in his use of nautical terminology, as when he writes "Ahab's hawser tows his purpose yet" (a *hawser* is a large rope used for towing). On the other hand, there are instances where context not only does not supply a clue to what the word might mean but may actually be misleading, as when Stubb resumes "his supper at the capstan." Melville, as in most things, is distinctive in his use of sea terms. In order to better see how nautical terminology plays out with amazing variety in the text, I have quoted a specimen passage from the novel after each definition. I have not defined terms relating to the several parts of a ship because the illustrations (beginning on page 655) give a sufficient idea of the location and probable function of them, nor have I included those terms, such as *gam*, which Melville defines himself.

abaft Toward the stern; coming from behind: ". . . a shower of outcries and anathemas proceeding from the Captain's round-house abaft . . ." [443:30-31].

- aft** Toward the stern of a ship: "Before lowering the boat for the chase, the upper end of the line is taken aft from the tub" [305:5-6].
- athwart** Across: "[The carpenter's] bench was securely lashed athwartships"—that is, the bench was tied down across the ship, as opposed to fore and aft. [509:3].
- avast** Command to stop what one is doing: "'Avast Stubb,' cried Starbuck, 'let the Typhoon sing, and strike his harp here in our rigging . . .'" [547:21-22].
- belay** To secure or make fast a rope or line to a *belaying pin*, or a removable bar fitted in a hole in the rail of a ship: ". . . hardly was the rope belayed to its pin on deck, when [Ahab] struck the key-note to an orchestra" [606:33-35].
- block** A pulley or system of pulleys used for securing and hoisting: ". . . the huge lower block of the tackles was swung over the whale . . ." [330:12-13].
- boom** A spar run out to extend the foot of a sail: ". . . the tremendous boom was now flying from side to side, completely sweeping the entire after part of the deck" [67:19-21].
- bow** The forward end of a ship, beginning where the sides of the ship bend toward one another, and ending at the prow: "Foremost through the sparkling sea shoots on the gay, embattled, bantering bow . . ." [184:23-24].
- braces** Ropes attached to the yard of a ship and by means of which the yard is swung: "[Ahab shouted,] 'To the braces! Up helm!—square in!'" [545:1-2].
- capstan** An apparatus used for hoisting great weights, consisting of a cylinder or barrel around which a rope is wound and revolved by means of long bars: ". . . Stubb stoutly stood up to his spermacetti supper at the capstan-head, as if that capstan were a sideboard" [319:4-5].
- chronometer** A precise time-piece adjustable for all climates and used for the purpose of finding longitude: ". . . like a patent chronometer [Starbuck's] interior vitality was warranted to do well in all climates" [124:17-19].
- companion-way** Stairway leading from a ship's cabin to the deck: "'[The Captain of the *Town-Ho*] called for the steward to bring the brass padlock belonging to the companion-way.'" [276:1-2].
- crowd** To spread all sail in order to increase speed: "'On deck there!—brace sharper up; crowd her into the wind's eye'" [615:9].
- fore** The forward part or bow of a ship: ". . . the fore and main topsails are reefed and set . . ." [560:2-3].
- furl** To roll up sails and tie them to the yard: ". . . we ignorantly furled the skirts of our jackets into the sails . . ." [484:31-32].
- gaff** A boat hook; also a spar used to extend the top edge of a fore

- and aft sail: "With his gaff, the gaffman hooks on to a sheet of blubber . . ." [458:6].
- gunwale** A piece of timber on the upper edge of a ship's side: ". . . my boat's crew could only trim dish [adjust the way the boat sat in the water], by sitting all their sterns [their posteriors] on the outer gunwale" [478:12-14].
- halyards** Ropes used to hoist or lower sails: "Suspended from [Daggoo's] ears were two golden hoops, so large that the sailors . . . would talk of securing the top-sail halyards to them". [131:4-7].
- heave to** To turn a ship into the wind in order to steady it and keep it still in a gale: "'Where do you expect to go to, cook?' 'Go to bed berry soon,' he mumbled. . . 'Avast! heave to! I mean when you die, cook'" [323:16-18].
- kelson** Sometimes keelson; an internal timber placed over the floor timbers and running parallel to the external keel and bolted to it: "'Is not the main-truck [piece of wood capping the mainmast] higher than the kelson is low?'" [54:17-18].
- kentledge** Pig iron used as ballast and placed over the kelson planks: "She is ballasted with utilities; not altogether with unusable pig-lead and kentledge" [416:34-35].
- larboard** The left, or port, side of a ship or boat: "The boats were here hailed, to tow the whale on the larboard side . . ." [357:25-26].
- lee** The side of a vessel away from the wind: "[Fish] are creatures that warm themselves under the lee of an iceberg . . ." [334:19-20].
- luff** To steer a vessel nearer into the wind: "'Luff, luff a point!'" [595:29-30; a "point" is 1/32d the circumference of the compass].
- quadrant** Instrument for measuring altitudes in order to determine longitude and latitude: "[Ahab] saw the crushed copper sight-tubes of the quadrant he had the day before dashed to the deck" [563:9-11].
- reef** To decrease by rolling, tucking, or tying off the amount of sail exposed to the wind: ". . . we hung there, reefed fast in the howling gale . . ." [484:32-33].
- rigging** The network of ropes and tackle used to support the masts and control the sails and yards of a vessel: ". . . every reclining mariner started to his feet as if some winged spirit had lighted in the rigging . . ." [253:23-24].
- scud** Thin, wind-driven clouds: ". . . high above the flying scud and dark-rolling clouds, there floated a little isle of sunlight . . ." [45:1-2].
- scuppers** Opening on the deck to allow water to run off; a gutter: ". . . you would have scanned with no small curiosity a very strange, enigmatical object . . . lying along lengthwise in the lee scuppers" [459:4-6].

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scuttle A small hatchway in the deck: "All night a wide-awake watch was kept by all the officers . . . especially about the fore-castle scuttle and fore hatchway . . ." [276:6-8].

shiver To trim the sail in such a way that the sail flutters in the wind: " 'Hard down the helm!—brace up! Shiver her!—shiver her!' " [595:36-37].

shrouds Ropes extending from each masthead to the ship's sides to support the mast: ". . . with one hand grasping a shroud, [Ahab] ordered Starbuck to send everybody aft" [175:1-2].

starboard Facing forward, the right side of a ship: " 'And harpoons sticking in near [the whale's] starboard fin' " [478:19].

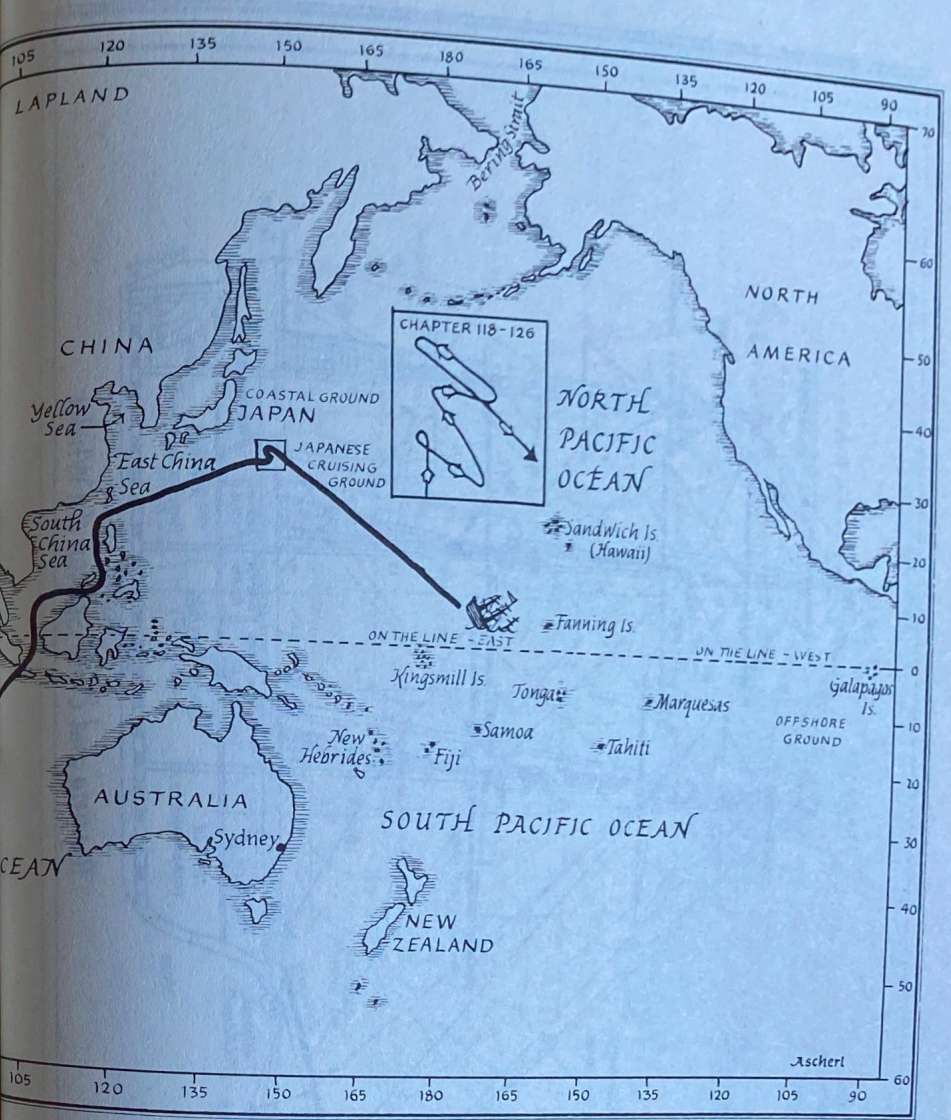
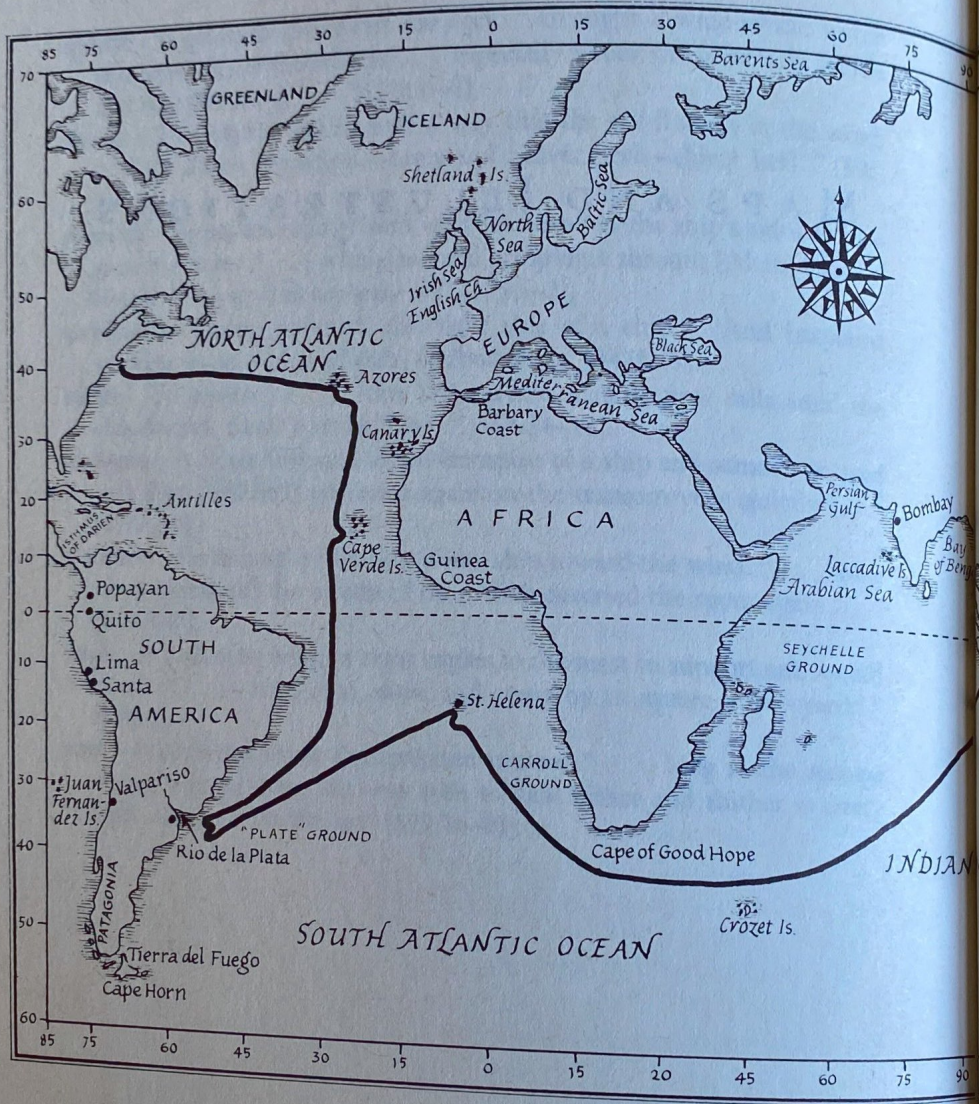
strike To lower: " ' . . . this brain-truck of mine now sails amid the cloud-scud. Shall I strike that?' " [553:14-16].

transom A beam fastened to the sternpost of a ship and sometimes used as a seat: "[Bildad] sat down again on the transom very quietly . . ." [87:9-10].

weather Pertaining to the side of the ship toward the wind: ". . . some three points off the weather bow, Ahab descried the spout again . . ." [615:4-5].

yard A long spar hung at right angles to the mast to support and spread a sail: " ' . . . run, men, now, and stand by to square in the yards' " [579:3].

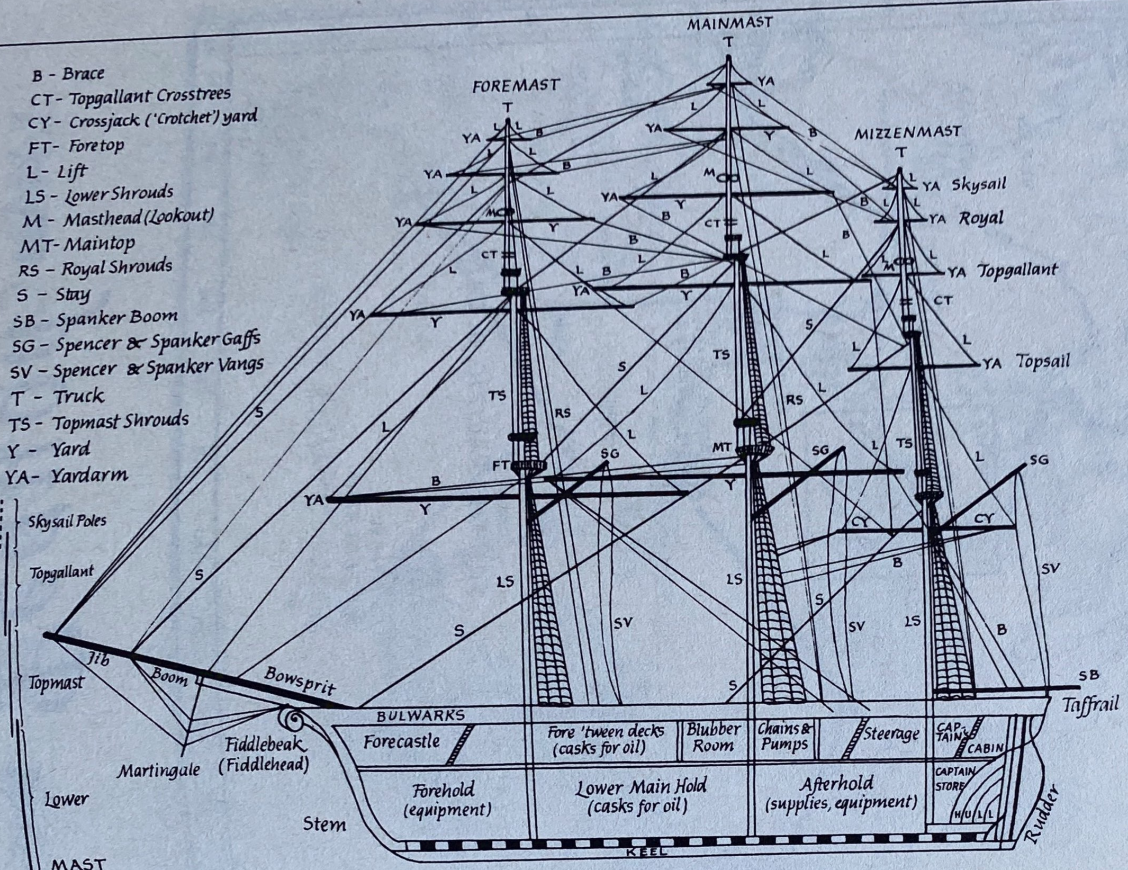
yaw A deviation from the intended course: ". . . long as the strange vessel was in view, she was seen to yaw hither and thither at every dark spot . . . on the sea" [579:16-18].



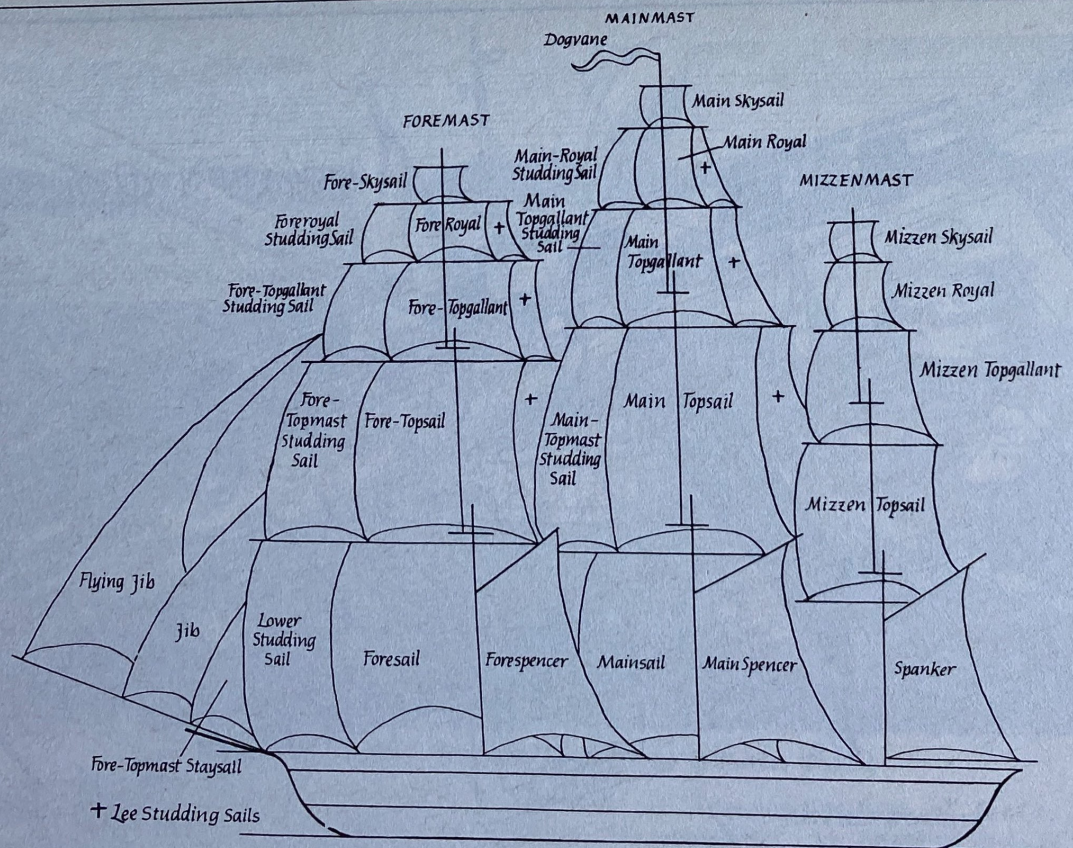
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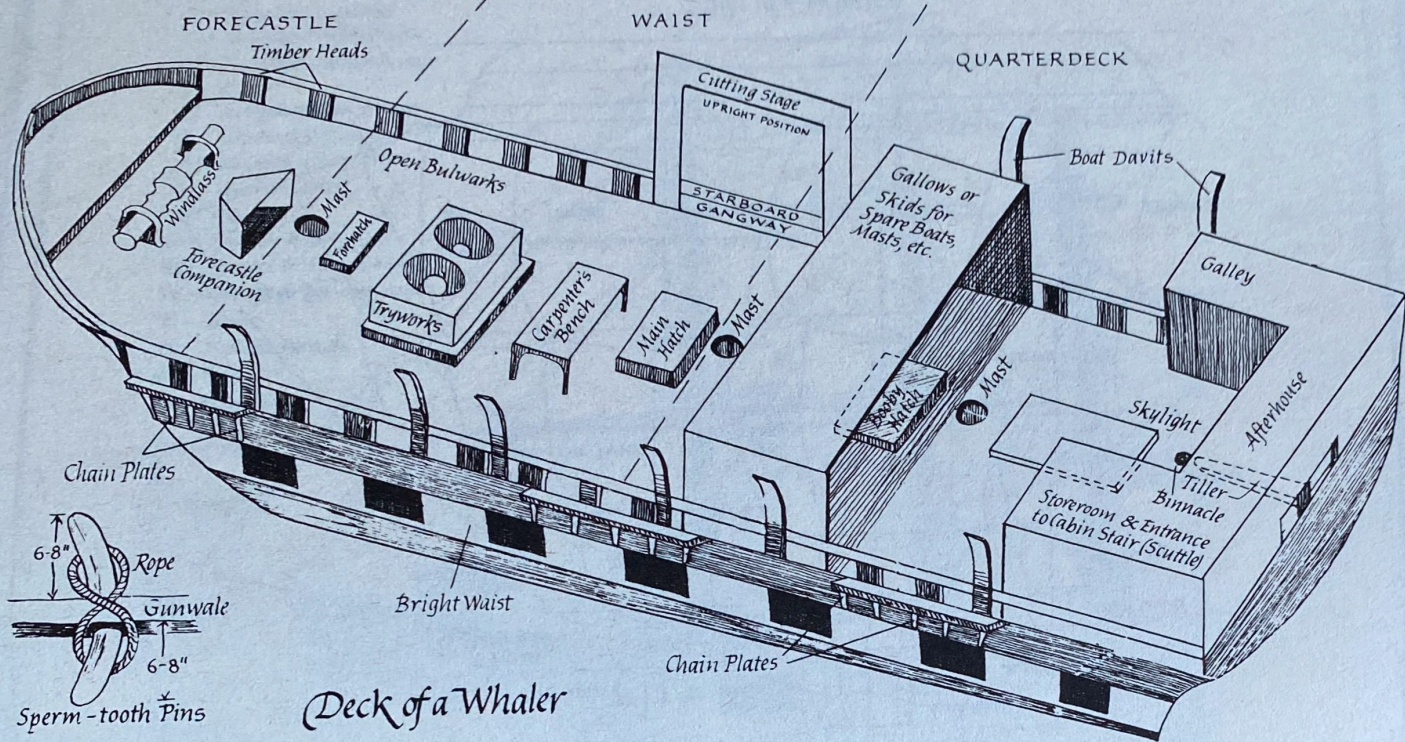
- B - Brace
- CT - Topgallant Crosstrees
- CY - Crossjack ('Crotchet') yard
- FT - Foretop
- L - Lift
- LS - Lower Shrouds
- M - Masthead (Lookout)
- MT - Maintop
- RS - Royal Shrouds
- S - Stay
- SB - Sparker Boom
- SG - Spencer & Sparker Gaffs
- SV - Spencer & Sparker Vangs
- T - Truck
- TS - Topmast Shrouds
- Y - Yard
- YA - Yardarm



Rigging and Cross-Section of a Whaler



Sails of a Whaler

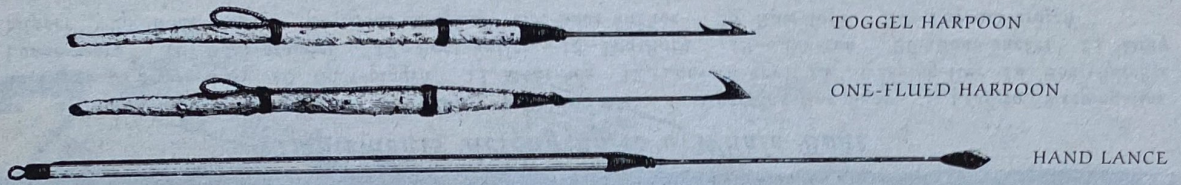


Deck of a Whaler

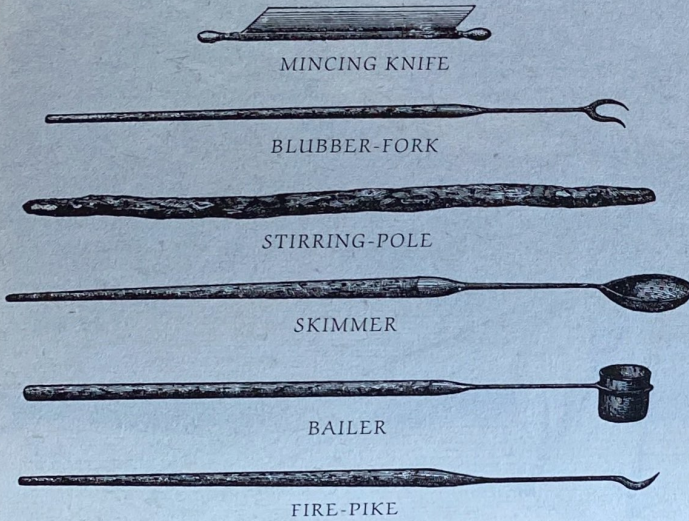


Implements Belonging to a Whale Boat

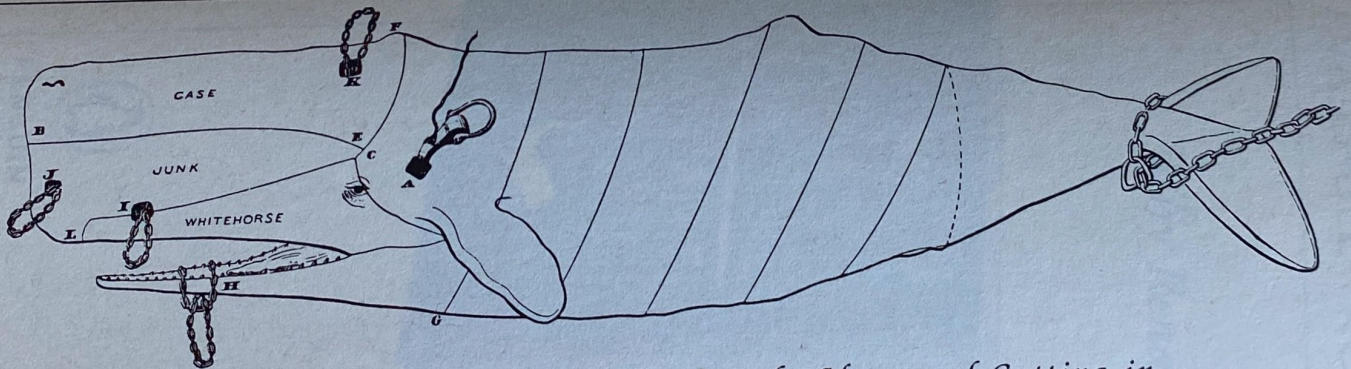
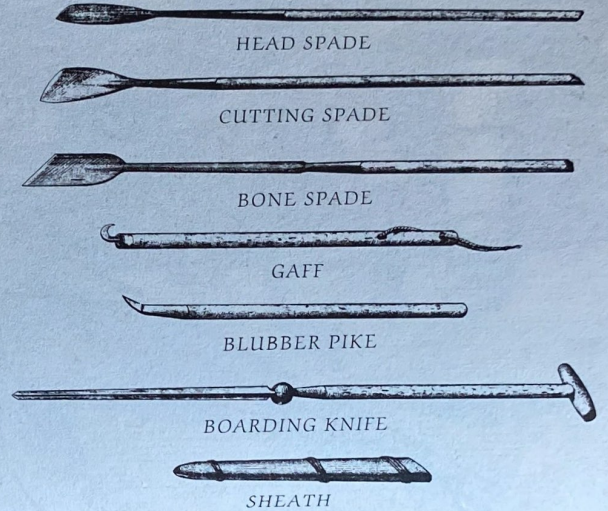
- 1. Oar 2. Boat-waif 3. Boat-hook 4. Paddle 5. Boat-sails 6. Sweeping-line-buoy 7. Lead to Sweeping-line
- 8. Chock-pin 9. Short-warp 10. Boat-piggin 11. Boat-keg 12. Lantern-key 13. Sweeping-line 14. Boat-hatchet
- 15. Lance-warp 16. Boat-grapnel 17. Boat-knife 18. Fog-horn 19. Line-tub 20. Boat-bucket 21. Drag
- 22. Nipper 23. Boat-crotch 24. Boat-compass 25. Boat-anchor 26. Row-lock 27. Tub-oar-crotch



Implements Used in Trying-out the Whale



Implements Used in Cutting-in a Whale



Outline of a Sperm Whale, Showing the Manner of Cutting-in

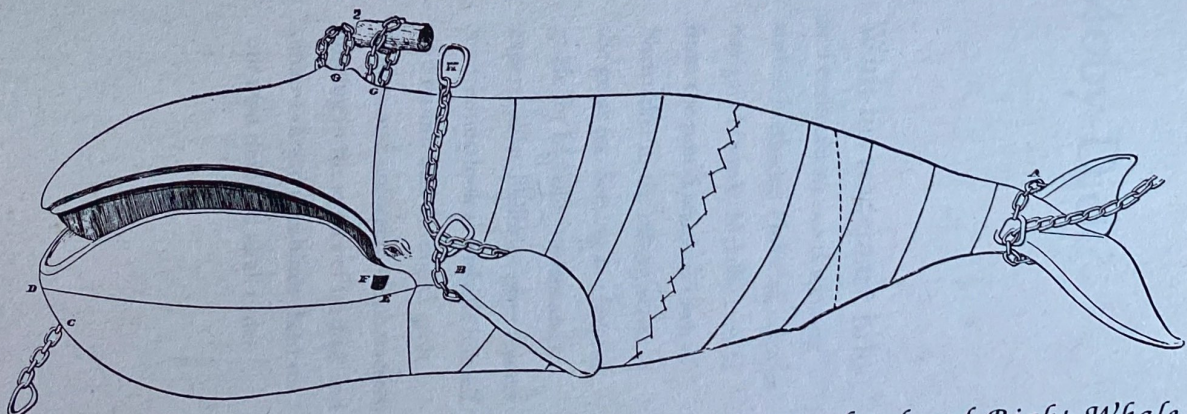


Diagram Showing the Manner of Cutting-in the Bowhead and Right Whale