

## Lightning Strikes Twice

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Nearly six hundred miles northwest of Honolulu, in the remote Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument, the final chapter of Captain George Pollard, Jr.'s ill-fated seafaring career rests on the seafloor amidst a dramatic coral reef. Following nearly two years of survey and research, maritime archaeologists from NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries have identified the shipwreck site of the Nantucket whaleship *Two Brothers*, wrecked on a stormy night at French Frigate Shoals on February 11, 1823.

The whaleship *Two Brothers* set sail for the Pacific, leaving Nantucket on November 26, 1821. On board were three men who had just months earlier returned to their island home after a harrowing, and now infamous experience on the whaleship *Essex*. Thomas Nickerson, Charles Ramsdell and Captain George Pollard, Jr. had all endured a fateful voyage on the *Essex* that became disaster when their ship was rammed by a whale in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, an event which later became the inspiration for Herman Melville's famous work of literature, *Moby Dick*. The three survived a traumatic 95 day journey that resulted in sickness, starvation, and ultimately, cannibalism. The story of Pollard, *Essex* and *Two Brothers* was reintroduced to American audiences when Nathaniel Philbrick penned his New York Times bestseller, *In the Heart of the Sea*.

When Pollard was given command of the whaleship *Two Brothers*, merely three months after returning to Nantucket after the *Essex* disaster, he set sail with optimism that reflected his belief that "lightning would not strike twice." A vessel smaller than the *Essex* at 222 tons, the *Two Brothers* set sail for the Pacific and made her way around Cape Horn, up the west coast of South America, and headed towards newly discovered whaling grounds in the Pacific. Sailing in consort with the whaleship *Martha*, they encountered stormy weather in the vicinity of French Frigate Shoals in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands. Not long after, the ship struck the reef and found herself surrounded by breakers. Stunned by the disaster and by his horrible misfortune, Captain Pollard was reluctant to abandon the ship. The crew pleaded with their captain to get into the small boats, to which they clung for survival throughout the night. When they awoke, the crew found the *Martha* anchored in the lee of a fifty foot tall rock (now called La Perouse Pinnacle). The entire crew of *Two Brothers* was rescued and they headed back to Oahu.

For the last 188 years, the wreckage of the *Two Brothers* has been lost on the ocean floor in the remote and nearly inaccessible Northwestern Hawaiian Islands. The story of this shipwreck, and the mystery of her possible discovery, connects the small island of Nantucket with one of the largest marine protected areas in the world. In 2008, a team of NOAA maritime archaeologists made an exciting discovery at French Frigate Shoals that began the journey to discover the first Nantucket whaling ship discovered so far in an archaeological context. Divers spotted a large anchor in approximately 15 feet of water near "Shark Island" at French Frigate Shoals. The age and size of this anchor gave the impression that it was not simply left as a mooring in an anchorage. After three large try pots (cast iron pots for melting whale blubber to produce oil), another large anchor, hundreds of bricks and the remains of the ship's rigging confirmed that the team had discovered an early 19<sup>th</sup> century whaling ship. There was not enough evidence at this time, however, to positively identify the shipwreck site. The team wondered what ship could this

be trapped on the sea floor beneath the waves at French Frigate Shoals for so long? The trypots and bricks clearly indicated a whaler, and features of both anchors point toward an early 19th century date. Only three whaling ships, all American vessels, have been reported lost at French Frigate Shoals: the *South Seaman*, wrecked in 1859; the *Daniel Wood*, wrecked in 1867; and the *Two Brothers*, the Nantucket whaler wrecked in 1823 and described earlier through her connection to the ill-fated career of Captain George Pollard.

In 2009, the maritime heritage team returned to the unidentified whaling shipwreck site at French Frigate Shoals (referred to by the team as the "Shark Island Whaler" for the sandy island nearby). At this time, the team came across an exciting new portion of the wrecksite. In addition to the discovery of a fourth trypot, three blubber hooks, a grinding wheel, and a kedge anchor, the team found four small cast iron pots that resemble small trypots. There are records describing the sale of these type of cast iron pots in Nantucket for use on ships. The team also came across what appears to be the tip of a whaling harpoon, another exciting discovery with the potential to yield information about the identity of this site.

It wasn't until May of 2010 when a small team was able to return to the site when maritime archaeologists began to believe they were indeed looking at the scattered remains of the Nantucket whaleship *Two Brothers*. At this time, the team uncovered an incredible collection of whalecraft (the tools of whaling) on the seafloor. Four more whaling harpoon tips (for a total of five), four whaling lances, ceramics, glass, and a sounding lead (among dozens of other artifacts) all date to an 1820s time period with an American provenience. In August of 2010, maritime archaeologists on the second expedition to the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands of the season acquired the permits to recover two more whaling harpoon tips, along with two whaling lances, ceramics, glass, and one of the cooking pots. These artifacts were thoroughly documented and will undergo conservation at the Heritage Resources Conservation Laboratory at the California State University, Chico. Once conserved and treated, the artifacts will be analyzed and returned to Hilo, Hawaii to become part of the Monument's maritime heritage exhibit at the Mokuāpapa Discovery Center in Hilo, and possibly part of a traveling exhibit.

The *Two Brothers* is an exciting find and an important maritime heritage site in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands. This and other American whaling ships lost in Papahānaumokuākea are the material remains of a time when America possessed over 700 whaling vessels and over one fifth of the United States whaling fleet may have been composed of Pacific Islanders. Dozens of vessels called upon Honolulu, and these ships, for better or worse, transformed the islands. Many of these vessels would travel up to two years and around the world to get to whaling grounds in distant places. The whaling shipwreck sites in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands help us to tell this part of Hawaiian and Pacific history, and remind us about the way that this remote part of the United States is connected with small communities in New England half way around the world.