

**Andrew W. German. *The Charles W. Morgan: The World's Last Wooden Whaleship*. Essex CT: Lyons Press and Mystic Seaport Museum, 2024. 173 pp., illustrations, appendixes, glossary of terms, sources, further readings, index. US \$24.95, paper, ISBN 978-1-493-084432.**

Andrew German's latest work is, in essence, a memoir of a specific whaleship, the *Charles W. Morgan*. The book, however, is much more. It is a multifaceted story of the whaling industry, largely of the nineteenth century. The author introduces his audience to the men, women, and families that owned and/or sailed the vessel and the many ethnic peoples of the world who served onboard. German guides his reader through the physical evolution of this vessel with time, while providing a study of the nature of the various leviathan species and their varied environments, the variety of implements used to capture whales, and the occupation of whaling during the ship's various voyages, which covered nearly a million miles. Finally, the author devotes a large section to the vessel's preservation as Mystic Seaport Museum's exhibition flagship, through which it was remarkably restored to functionality.

University of Connecticut English professor and Melville Scholar Mary K. Bercaw Edwards, who worked for many years as an interpreter onboard the *Morgan*, wrote the book's forward. She noted that the ship "now serves as a link to the whales, the people, the cultures, and the world encountered by whalers" (viii). The vessel is a typical wooden whaleship of the day, and that makes it an impeccable model to better understand the commercial history of the whaling industry and those interconnected with it whether ashore or upon the oceans the *Morgan* traversed.

The book commences with a treatise about whaling in general, introduces the reader to the prey, some of the pioneers who opted to catch these illusive and dangerous creatures, and then the genesis of the whaling fishery. This is followed by a description of how a whaling vessel was constructed, and why and what distinguished it from other sailing vessels of the time. Next is an account of the first owner and captain and the birth of the book's true protagonist, the *Charles W. Morgan*. This is followed by a series of chapters outlining its voyages from 1841 through 1913. German provides the reader with details about the ship's modifications over time, its voyages to exotic places around the world, the variety and ethnicity of its crews during this time, and the ship's productivity in the changing market for its products: largely oil for lubrication, spermaceti for candles, ambergris for perfumes, and baleen, the bones and teeth of various species of whales used in a variety of products, many of which were common implements in a nineteenth-century household. Whale baleen was the 1800s predecessor of what is today plastic. The author describes the ethnic and age composition of the crews and the quasi-domestic evolution that allowed women and occasionally children on these very long

passages. Additionally, he explores the methods employed by various captains to maintain discipline among sometimes violent crews under challenging circumstances. He also describes how the vessel almost miraculously avoided becoming a victim of the Confederate raider CSS *Shenandoah* as it hunted defenseless whaleships during the Civil War by being partly frozen in ice while pursuing prey in the Sea of Okhotsk.

The final portion of the book describes the return of the vessel to New Bedford, Massachusetts, shortly after the turn of the twentieth century and its last days of whaling under sail from 1916 through 1921. Ultimately the ship became an occasional movie set, then was placed in a coffer dam as a museum of a bygone era to rest upon the sands of Round Hill on the shore of Buzzards Bay southwest of New Bedford. In 1922, she was refloated and shipped to Connecticut's Mystic Seaport Museum. In a strategic gamble, in 2009 the ship was completely refurbished and modernized to Coast Guard standards to have its thirty-eighth "storybook rebirth voyage" in 2014. Now moored at the museum's Chubb Wharf, it welcomes visitors who wish to relate to the vessel's glory days of whaling, allowing people to perhaps imagine themselves thrust into Melville's *Moby Dick* or other similar adventures.

German's richly illustrated book summarizes the completion of the *Morgan*'s thirty-seventh whaling voyage. The United States then spanned the North American continent with a population of over 106 million people. "Eighty years earlier, when the *Morgan* was launched, the nation lighted its homes with spermaceti candles and whale oil lamps, lubricated its machinery with whale oil and used baleen for its elastic properties. Whaling was considered the nation's fifth most important industry. During the vessel's eighty years of sea, nineteen presidents had served, twenty-two states had joined the union, and the population of the United States had grown by seven hundred percent. The nation was now an industrial giant rather than a maritime power" (107).

The last wooden whaleship, *Morgan* is more than an historical artifact of the craft and business of whaling. It is the last living example of what it must have been like to take part in the now oddly romanticized but brutal and dangerous occupation. It is also monument and cenotaph to the diverse people who laboured and died in this industry. *The Charles W. Morgan* is a third and final volume about this iconic ship written by the talented and articulate Andrew German, the former Director of Mystic Seaport Museums Publications Department. This relatively short but meticulously researched work is just one more of his many erudite contributions to maritime history, a substantial and extremely valuable work.

Louis Arthur Norton  
West Simsbury, CT