

Whaling Off Island Beach

During the sixth year of reign of the Sovereign Lady Ann by the Grace of God of England, Scotland, France and Ireland a license was issued on April 11, 1707, by Edward Viscount Cornbury, Captain Cornwall and Governor in Chief in and over his Majesty's provinces of New Jersey, New York and other countries and tracts of land depending thereon in America to Joseph, James and Benjamin Lawrence.

It authorized them to secure, cut up and try to use the most proper method to catch all fish whales or other Royal fish that may be driven on shore between Sandy Hook and Barnegat Inlet, which included Island Beach. One half of the proceeds, after deducting charges, was to go to Edward Viscount Cornbury. All other persons were prohibited from taking away any drift whale or other Royal fish within said district.

In the years between 1750 and 1815, whaling off the coast was a tremendous business. The market for whale oil lamps and bone for commercial uses grew.

Waters off the Jersey Shore were considered good grounds for whaling. Probably the first Europeans to come to the Island Beach area were fishermen who landed to cure their fish and to try the oil from the whales they harpooned. Incentives to settle along the shore caused them eventually to bring their families. A catch of two or three whales a season by each family averaged anywhere from forty to fifty bar-

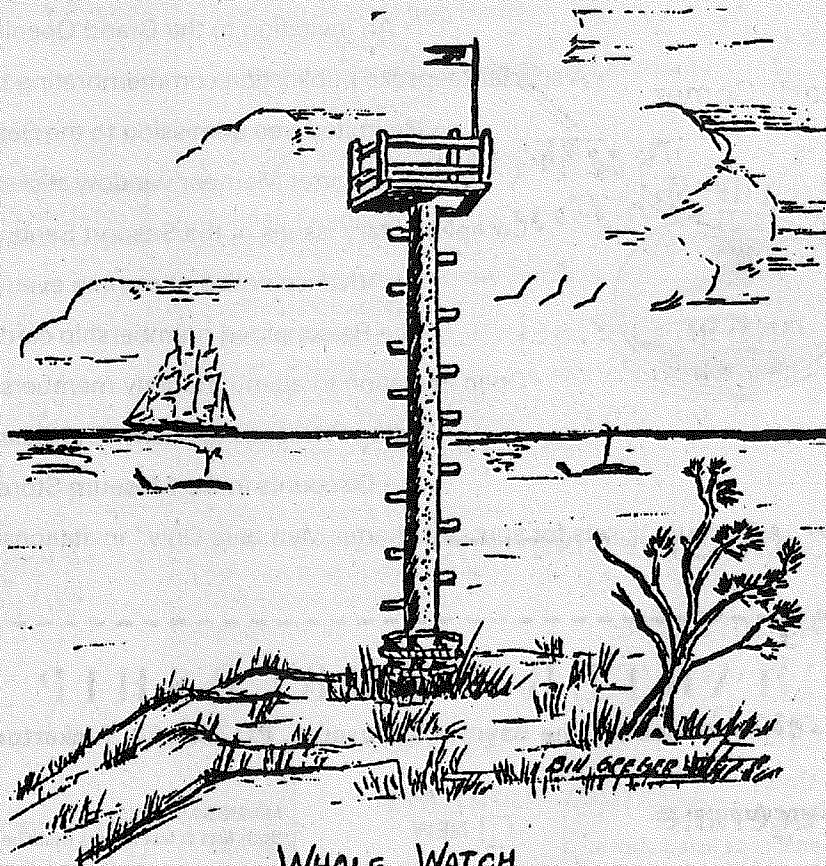
rels of oil. This was important for the economy of the area.

The dunes were used as lookouts. Some used tall poles with a crow's nest on top. Watches were maintained during the whaling season of February and March. The pole was pierced with holes at regular intervals. Round sticks were fastened into the holes to make a ladder. If a whale was sighted, men were summoned by, "Thar she blows!" Usually a crew of six men manning a whale boat, put out to cap-

ture the whale.

Captured whales were towed ashore and cut on the beach. Men, women and children rushed to the beach as observers. Now, occasionally, a whale is found on the shore. Some are towed away; others are buried deep in the sand.

Excerpt from "Sea Side Park Memories and Remembrances" by Andrew J. Anderson & D. Gail Anderson, © 1998
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WHALE WATCH
1830