A Whale of an Archive

The New Bedford (Mass.) Whaling Museum presents massive sights for its visitors: the skeletons of blue, humpback, sperm, and North Atlantic right whales, and a half-scale whale ship built in 1916. But something even larger can be found in the museum’s library. It holds an immersive array of whaling-related materials: more than 18,000 books on US and international whaling history and New England regional history, 750,000 photographs, a 700-piece cartographic collection, 2,400 log books and journals—the largest collection in the world—and three first editions of *Moby-Dick* (Herman Melville worked in New Bedford as a whaler and used the town as a setting in the book).

For Mark Procknik, the museum’s librarian, working there has been a dream come true. “I’ve always had an interest in maritime history,” he says. When a position opened while he was an intern at the library seven years ago, Procknik was placed at the helm. “The stars just kind of aligned,” he says. Now he steers researchers toward primary sources, educates school groups, and maintains the collection.

When asked to name his favorite piece, Procknik describes a whaling journal kept by Captain Edmund Gardner aboard the ship *Winslow* in the early 1800s. “It’s a firsthand account of a whale chewing his head,” he says. “It’s a pretty remarkable story.”

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