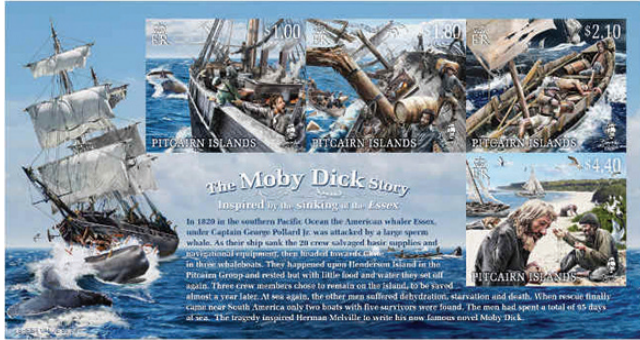


The Event That Inspired Melville's "Moby Dick"



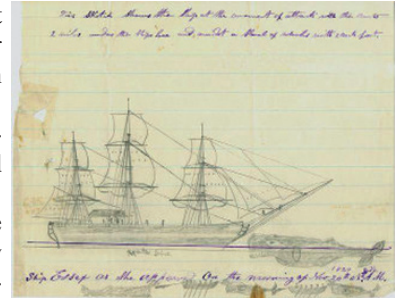
In August 1819 the 238-ton whaleship *Essex* sailed from Nantucket, Mass., beginning a planned two-and-a-half year voyage to the rich “whaling grounds” of the South Pacific. In November 1820 in the southern Pacific under Captain George Pollard Jr. the *Essex* was attacked and sunk by a large sperm whale. The ship sank within two days but the crew of twenty was saved and headed in the direction of Chile in three small boats, with navigational equipment and sail cloth.

The survivors were more than 1,900 kilometers (1,200 miles) from the nearest islands (the Marquesas) without adequate supplies of food and freshwater. They came across Henderson Island in the Pitcairn

Group and rested there, but with little food and water available they set off again leaving behind three crew. At sea again, the men suffered with dehydration and starvation, and many died.

When rescue came near South America, only two boats with five survivors were found. The three crew members who stayed behind on Henderson Island were also saved almost a year after the *Essex* sinking. The tragedy attracted international attention, and inspired Herman Melville to write his now famous novel *Moby Dick*.

On February 28 the Pitcairn Islands Philatelic Bureau released its “Sinking of the *Essex*” issue in a mini-sheet of four stamps and a First Day Cover. For more information and to purchase this and previous still-available issues, please go to the official website of the Pitcairn Islands Philatelic Bureau, <http://www.stamps.gov.pn>.



Whale attacking the Essex, an illustration by ex cabin boy Thomas Nickerson. Courtesy of the Nantucket Historical association.