

# The Loss of the Ship Essex, Sunk by a Whale: First-Person Accounts (Penguin Classics)

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The gripping first-hand narrative of the whaling ship disaster that inspired Melville's *Moby-Dick* and informed Nathaniel Philbrick's monumental history, *In the Heart of the Sea*

In 1820, the Nantucket whaleship *Essex* was rammed by an angry sperm whale thousands of miles from home in the South Pacific. The *Essex* sank, leaving twenty crew members drifting in three small open boats for ninety days. Through drastic measures, eight men survived to reveal this astonishing tale. The *Narrative of the Wreck of the Whaleship Essex*, by Owen Chase, has long been the essential account of the *Essex*'s doomed voyage. But in 1980, a new account of the disaster was discovered, penned late in life by Thomas Nickerson, who had been the fifteen-year-old cabin boy of the ship. This discovery has vastly expanded and clarified the history of an event as grandiose in its time as the *Titanic*.

This edition presents Nickerson's never-before-published chronicle alongside Chase's version. Also included are the most important other contemporary accounts of the incident, Melville's notes in his copy of the Chase narrative, and journal entries by Emerson and Thoreau.

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Thomas Philbrick is professor emeritus of English at the University of Pittsburgh.

Nathaniel Philbrick is a leading authority on the history of Nantucket Island. His *In the Heart of the Sea* won the National Book Award. His latest book is *Sea of Glory*, about the epic U.S. Exploring Expedition of 1838-1842. His other books include *Away off Shore: Nantucket Island and Its People, 1602-1890* (which Russell Baker called "indispensable") and *Abram's Eyes: The Native American Legend of Nantucket Island* ("a classic of historical truth-telling," according to Stuart Frank, director of the Kendall Whaling Museum). He has written an introduction to a new edition of Joseph Hart's *Miriam Coffin, or The Whale Fisherman*, a Nantucket novel (first published in 1834) that Melville relied upon for information about the island when writing *Moby Dick*.

Philbrick, a champion sailboat racer, has also written extensively about sailing, including *The Passionate Sailor* (1987) and the forthcoming *Second Wind: A Sunfish Sailor's Odyssey*. He was editor in chief of the classic *Yachting: A Parody* (1984).

In his role as director of the Egan Institute of Maritime Studies, Philbrick, who is also a research fellow at the Nantucket Historical Association, gives frequent talks about Nantucket and sailing. He has appeared on "NBC Today Weekend", A&E's "Biography" series, and National Public Radio and has served as a consultant for the movie "Moby Dick", shown on the USA Network. He received a bachelor of Arts from Brown University and a Master of Arts in American Literature from Duke. He lives on Nantucket with his wife and two children.

Nathaniel Philbrick's *In the Heart of the Sea* described the loss of the whaler *Essex* in the Pacific Ocean--the whale attack that inspired the climax of Melville's *Moby Dick* and the horrors the crew suffered as they strove to return home. Philbrick's book sought to balance first-mate Owen Chase's classic version of the *Essex* disaster against the narrative, discovered in 1981, of Thomas Nickerson, an *Essex* cabin boy. This volume collects these and other primary sources: letters sent back to Nantucket when the first survivors reached South America; Chase's narrative and Melville's notes in his copy of it; Nickerson's sketches, written years later, and a Nickerson letter; interviews with the ship's captain; the story of one of the men who remained in the islands near the wreck; and "memories and apocrypha." These are not literary documents; they are sailors' stories of a terrifying experience, full of maritime detail. Appropriate where Philbrick's book or other studies of nineteenth-century men at sea circulate. Mary Carroll

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