Scottish Over-Winter Whaling at Cumberland Gulf, Baffin Island, 1853-1890

Chesley W. Sanger

Introduction

Commercial whaling evolved through stages, each of which began with discovery and hopeful enterprise; passed through a phase of rapid expansion, intense competition and ruthless exploitation; and ended in declining resources and failure (see figure 1). While the discovery of new grounds or the introduction of innovative techniques could rejuvenate an ailing trade, over-exploitation, unregulated hunting and accelerated resource depletion invariably led to further decline. Scottish Northern whaling followed this cyclic pattern.

The decision to fit-out over-wintering voyages in the early 1850s and to establish land stations in Cumberland Gulf helped extend whaling into the twentieth century. While the symbiotic relationship that evolved between natives and non-indigenous populations is well documented, the actual scale of

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2There have been numerous attempts to provide comprehensive histories of global whaling. All, to varying degrees, identify discrete phases which cover different time periods, occupy unique spatial niches and exploit distinct species. For a detailed discussion of sources and the whaling model, developed initially as an organizational and explanatory device, see Chesley W. Sanger, “The Origins of the Scottish Northern Whale Fishery” (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Dundee, 1985), 1-182.


the Scottish effort is poorly understood, as are the complex forces that caused Cumberland Gulf participation and productivity rates to fluctuate widely. This study examines major factors underlying the evolution of this component of Scottish Northern whaling, with an emphasis on its growth and subsequent decline between 1853 and 1890. The general analysis is facilitated by the compilation of a comprehensive statistical base that enables the identification of the ebb and flow of Aberdeen and Peterhead companies, vessels, personnel and capital. Moreover, geographical and ecological perspectives permit a detailed consideration of changing spatial patterns, fluctuating annual returns and the roles of different environmental influences.

Setting

The transformation of Scottish involvement in Arctic whaling from a tentative venture into a large seasonal operation was slow. Although Scots sailed on Muscovy Company vessels in the early seventeenth century and on Dutch expeditions, they initially did little more than participate in outside enterprises. It was not until 1667 that a truly Scottish Northern whaling venture was organized. Subsequent participation was temporary until the mid-eighteenth century, when a period of cautious, but continuous, involvement began. By the early 1800s Northern whaling had become a traditional mode of economic activity in many parts of Scotland (see figure 2).

4For the best accounts of over-winter whaling at Cumberland Gulf and its impact on local populations, see Franz Boas, The Central Eskimo (Washington, DC, 1888; reprint, Toronto, 1974); Boas, “The Eskimo of Baffin Land and Hudson Bay: from Notes Collected by Captain George Commer, Captain James S. Mulch, and Rev. E.J. Peck,” Bulletin of the American Museum of Natural History, XV (1907); Dorothy H. Eber, When the Whalers Were Up North: Inuit Memories from the Eastern Arctic (Montréal, 1989), 7-20; Daniel Francis, Arctic Chase: A History of Whaling in Canada’s North (St. John’s, 1984); and W. Gillies Ross, This Distant and Unsurveyed Country: A Woman’s Winter at Baffin Island (Montréal, 1997). Ross also provides excellent descriptions of relationships in Hudson Bay in Whaling and Eskimos: Hudson Bay, 1860-1925 (Ottawa, 1975). Particularly useful on Scottish involvement is Gordon Jackson, “Why Did the British Not Catch Rorquals in the Nineteenth Century?” in Bjørn L. Basberg, Jan E. Ringstad and Einar Wexelsen (eds.), Whaling and History: Perspectives on the Evolution of the Industry (Sandefjord, 1993), 111-120. Jackson examines not only the forces that explain why Peterhead and Aberdeen played leading roles in fitting-out over-wintering voyages and establishing land stations but also broader questions such as why the British Northern fishery devolved to just a few Scottish ports and continued with traditional whaling.

5For details on Scottish Northern whaling from its origins to 1801, see Sanger, “Origins,” 358-627; Sanger, “The Origins of British Whaling: Pre-1750 English and Scottish Involvement in the Northern Whale Fishery,” The Northern Mari-
Over-Winter Whaling at Cumberland Gulf

Figure 1: Pre-Twentieth Century Whaling: Historical Patterns

Source: Courtesy of the author.

Figure 2: Scottish Northern Whaling Vessels by Port, 1793-1801

Sources: Scottish Record Office (SRO), Scottish Bounty Payment Records and Pipe Rolls; and various newspapers.
While Scots were among the earliest pelagic whalers in the Arctic, by the time they were finally able to secure a permanent foothold in East Greenland and the Davis Strait, whaling in those two areas was in decline (see figure 3). Although other nations were prepared to range further afield, the Scots were content to carve out a niche which, although increasingly reliant on ancillary activities, continued to focus on the pursuit of the Greenland right whale, or bowhead (B. mysticetus), a species first exploited by Europeans about 700 years earlier. Among these new enterprises was the fitting-out of

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over-wintering expeditions and land stations at Cumberland Gulf that employed local inhabitants to assist in the capture of bowheads during spring and fall when Baffin Island was normally blocked by ice (see figure 4).  

Subsidization of Traditional Northern Bowhead Whaling

The Admiralty’s decision to fit-out a two-vessel naval expedition to explore Baffin Bay at the end of the Napoleonic wars helped open the region to Northern whalers. The last protective resort of the Davis Strait bowhead stock had thus been breached, and by the late 1830s unregulated and indiscriminate hunting had reduced stocks to dangerously low levels. Declining catches not only led to consolidation but also forced an increasing focus on harp seals rather than bowhead whales.

There is general agreement, however, that the first people credited with whaling on an organized, commercial basis were the French and Spanish inhabitants of the Biscay coast who had developed a sophisticated, large-scale enterprise by the twelfth century. For a full discussion of how this industry likely evolved, see Sanger, “Origins,” 47-59.


The lead in this initiative had been taken by two Scottish whaling masters who in 1817 sailed northward around the eastern edge of the mid-ice pack (figure 4) to discover what would become known as the “Northwater.” Sanger, “Scottish Northern Whaling,” 27-28. For details of the naval expedition, including references to Northern whaling, see William E. Parry, Journal of a Voyage of Discovery to the Arctic Regions: Performed Between the 4th of April and the 18th of November, 1818, in His Majesty’s Ship Alexander (London, 1820). The importance of the discovery of the Northwater to the Arctic trade is noted by William Scoresby, Jr., perhaps the most famous British whaling master, in An Account of the Arctic Regions with a History and Description of the Northern Whale-Fishery (2 vols., Edinburgh, 1820), II, 184-185.

See, for example, Jackson, British Whaling Trade, 125-130; and Sanger, “Scottish Northern Whaling,” 24-36.

Prior to the start of the 1852 season, for example, a Dundee newspaper reported that “the seal fishery is being more fully developed year by year.” Dundee Ad-
Figure 4: Sea Ice Normals: Mean Limits, 4/10 concentration, End of Month, March 1966-February 1974

Figure 5: Price of Greenland Right Whale Oil and Bone at Dundee, 1841-1861

Source: Tay Whale Fishing Company Minute Books; and various newspapers.

Figure 6: Scottish Sealing Catches at East Greenland and Newfoundland, 1840-1900

Source: See figure 1.
# Over-Winter Whaling at Cumberland Gulf

<table>
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**Catch Totals:**

- 71,047
- 235,395
- 156,275
- 241,447
- 75,728
- 111,801
- 532
- 48,897
- 100
- 214
- 100
- 3,959
- 1,158,039

**Voyages Totals:**

- 0
- 21
- 12
- 17
- 7
- 2
- 1
- 3
- 1
- 92
- 100
- 16,449
- 16,517
- 3,595
- 12,436

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**Source:** See figure 1.
Nevertheless, Scottish "whaling" companies still perceived sealing primarily as a way to earn the huge profits that the capture of even a single Greenland right whale could yield (see figure 5). These combined sealing-whaling voyages meant that severely depleted bowhead stocks were reduced even further. As with Arctic whaling, the bumper catches of the initial phase of the harp seal fishery could not be sustained, and by the late 1850s, the Scottish Northern trade was again in crisis (see figure 6). The introduction of new technologies and techniques, primarily steam propulsion, ushered in a final era of growth. While a lengthy period of experimentation was necessary before companies and masters were able to develop strategies to realize the full potential of their ice-strengthened, composite steamers, within less than two decades east Greenland harp seal stocks had been reduced to non-commercial levels.

Two Dundee companies, Alexander Stephen and Sons and the Dundee Seal and Whale Fishing Co., then turned to the last remaining haunt of the harp seal. Between 1874 and 1899, eighteen Scottish vessels captured more than one million seals off Newfoundland (see figures 6 and 7). As sealing profits continued to subsidize Arctic whaling, bowhead stocks were pushed to

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11See, for example, Dundee Courier, 12 August 1857.

12The first steam-powered whalers were Inuit of Peterhead and Diana from Hull. With improved technology, increased competition and declining resources, the use of steamers in the Northern trade was widely discussed in the 1850s. See, for example, Aberdeen Journal, 30 October 1855; and Peterhead Sentinel, 6 February 1857.


the edge of extinction by the end of the century. Several Scottish ports turned to less profitable alternatives to support the traditional whale fishery, including over-winter whaling at Cumberland Gulf.

Aberdeen Over-Winter Whaling at Cumberland Gulf

Although a Peterhead company was among the first to introduce steamers, a number of factors made it likely that Dundee would be the leader among British Northern whaling ports in the transition from sail to steam. Unable to mount a successful challenge to Dundee’s lead, Aberdeen and Peterhead turned to a less expensive option: over-wintering voyages and land stations.  

Aberdeen was in the forefront in the development of Scottish shore-based whaling at Cumberland Gulf. Leadership was provided by William Penny, a Peterhead native and one of Scotland’s most successful Northern whalers. He first sailed as a twelve-year-old apprentice with his father, an experienced Northern master, in 1821. Just fourteen years later he was given command of the Aberdeen whaler, *Neptune*, and moved to that vessel’s home port where he met and married Margaret Irvine. His productivity over the

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15 One factor was that around 1860 Peterhead concentrated on the herring fishery, for which its location was superior; see *Aberdeen Journal*, 28 January 1846; and James R. Coull, *The Fisheries of Europe: An Economic Geography* (London, 1972). A second element that favoured Dundee was the presence of an innovative shipbuilding company, Alexander Stephan and Sons, which was committed to the design and construction of wooden composite whaling and sealing steamers rather than following the lead of those which had selected iron which “was not suitable for the rough work of boring into the Greenland pack;” Basil Lubbock, *The Arctic Whalers* (Glasgow, 1937; reprint, Glasgow, 1968), 372; Jackson, *British Whaling Trade*, 147-151; and Sanger, “Scottish Northern Whaling,” 43-46. A third was the provision of investment capital by local Scottish textile manufacturers concentrated in Dundee who were at that time converting to jute processing, a procedure requiring large quantities of whale and seal oil of which they wanted a secure supply; see Bruce Lenman, Charlotte Lythe and Enid Gauldie, *Dundee and Its Textile Industry, 1850-1914* (Dundee, 1969). Finally, there was the presence of sagacious entrepreneurs, already experienced in whaling and sealing ventures, who were anxious to take advantage of the opportunities available.

next decade and a half when failing voyages increasingly became the norm was unmatched. Not unexpectedly, by mid-century many within the industry felt that declining catches were simply the result of hunters driving the bowheads away from their traditional grounds. Penny quickly became known as a fierce competitor in the race to discover the elusive haunts "where the whales hunted from the other fishing grounds find refuge." Along with three other whaling masters, he rediscovered Cumberland Sound at the end of the 1840 season.

The data used in this paper are based upon annual whale oil and bone manufacturer lists giving details of British whaling voyages for 1790-1793 and 1814-1911 in the possession of Robert Kinnes and Sons, Dundee. Although incomplete and often inaccurate, the data represent the best single collection of summary statistics for the British Arctic whale and seal fisheries. Each list is organized by individual port and provides for each ship the name of the master; whale and/or sealing grounds visited; and catch and quantity of oil and bone obtained. They have been verified where possible, and the period covered extended back more than a half-century to 1750, by reference to logbooks; diaries and related material; newspapers, magazines and pamphlets; manuscripts; unpublished papers; port records; bounty documentation; public and private petitions; other oil and bone manufacturer lists; company letter books; copartnership contracts, charters, minutes, subscription lists and statistical data; government acts, documents, records, reports, correspondence and petitions. Unless otherwise specified, however, this information is referred to simply as Kinnes Lists.

The perception that human activity can initiate large-scale migration modification appears to have originated to explain reduced catches. Rather than identifying or acknowledging the detrimental effects of unregulated killing practices, whaling masters often blamed declining results on whales vacating their usual migratory paths. For example, George W. Manby, *Journal of a Voyage to Greenland in the Year 1821* (London, 1822; 2nd ed., London, 1823), 198, explained that the increasingly poor results were primarily due to continuous hunting which had caused the whales "to abandon their former favourite haunts, for places of greater security. Whales are naturally timid, and they have from repeated attacks, also become more shy." Similarly, Kirkaldy shipowners two decades later noted, in a petition to the Admiralty in which they described the declining state of Northern whaling, that "the cause which has mainly conduced to the ruin of this valuable branch of our Fisheries appears to your Petitioners to be a change in the haunt of the Fish [whales]." Holland, "William Penny," 30-31.

*Aberdeen Journal*, 23 February 1853.

*Dundee Advertiser*, 26 November 1852. Francis, *Arctic Chase*, 37-38, primarily using Holland, "William Penny," provides a useful, but abridged, account of how Penny, with three other masters, rediscovered Cumberland Sound in 1840. Soon after Baffin Bay had been opened up it became common for captains who had not obtained full cargoes on the Northern grounds to follow the whales migrating south along the east coast of Baffin Island en route to their winter range prior to leaving for home in late fall as ice and whales permitted. This became known as the "Fall Fishery."
This drive was also manifested in his attempts while whaling in 1847 to find traces of the Franklin expedition that had sailed two years earlier in search of the Northwest Passage and to leave supplies for it in Lancaster Sound in 1849.21 His actions and growing reputation gathered so much attention that in 1850 Lady Franklin turned to him for assistance when official and public support for mounting a search for her missing husband was lagging.22

Although there would be no rescue, his 1850-1851 over-wintering experience and earlier Eskimo accounts led Penny to report optimistically that Franklin could still be found alive.23 On his return voyage he revisited Cumberland Gulf ("discovered by me on the west side of Davis Strait") and found "twelve American seamen, who [had] left their ship and wintered." According to Penny, Franklin and his men "might have subsisted during the whole time he has been absent" on the produce of the thirteen whales the Americans had captured.24 Penny not only kindled interest in the missing party but also sparked a surge of national pride. The London Daily News, for instance, demanded: "With these valuable facts before us, and such inducements, is England to lag behind?"25


22See, for example, Dundee Advertiser, 30 October and 23 November 1849 and 15 February 1850.

23Penny’s attempt to find Franklin is well documented. Besides a formal report to government (Dundee Advertiser, 30 December 1851), he also made a presentation to the Geographical Society in London; Daily News (London), reported in Dundee Advertiser, 26 November 1852. See also Holland, “William Penny,” 34-35; Tillotson, Adventures, 225-232; and Woodward, “William Penny,” 809-811. On the Eskimo accounts, see Dundee Advertiser, 23 November 1849. The influence Eskimos had on Penny’s involvement in Northern whaling after 1833, including his decision to fit out over-wintering expeditions and establish land stations in Cumberland Gulf, is best described by Holland, “William Penny.” Especially influential was Eenoolooapik, a native of Cumberland Gulf whom Penny brought to Aberdeen in 1839 and who continued to provide information and assistance upon his return until he died in 1847. For details, see Alexander McDonald, A Narrative of Some Passages in the History of Eenoolooapik, a Young Eskimau, Who Was Brought to Britain in 1839, in the Ship “Neptune” of Aberdeen: An Account of the Discovery of Hogarth’s Sound, Remarks on the Northern Whale Fishery, and Suggestions for Its Improvements (Edinburgh, 1841).

24Dundee Advertiser, 26 November 1852. The American whaler was McLellan of New London, CT.

Unable to obtain command of a whaling vessel in 1852, and not wanting to miss an opportunity, Penny claimed priority rights to Cumberland Gulf and, taking advantage of the national mood, sought public support for a new enterprise, thus setting in motion the penultimate phase of Scottish Northern whaling. On 23 February 1853 he established the Royal Arctic Company "for the extensive development, on sound principles, of Arctic resources." An editorial in the *Aberdeen Journal* enthusiastically proclaimed that "reflective men cannot fail to conclude that these countries and seas [Eastern Canadian Arctic] are capable of yielding to energetic but beneficial applications of an enlightened scheme of commercial enterprise a rich harvest of reward." The company's two new vessels, according to Penny, would take advantage "of steam power, on the auxiliary screw principal" during the fall and spring "when the ice in Davis Straits effectively prevents any vessel from approaching the coasts." This could only be achieved by over-wintering, and Penny agreed to lead the first expedition. But not all the stated goals were economic. Measures were to be put in place, for instance, to ensure that indigenous populations "will receive at least an impulse to civilization and religion." It was also the correspondent's belief that Captain Penny "will reap the honour of inaugurating a new era in the history of trading enterprise with the Arctic Regions." 

Fundamental to the success of the new enterprise was Penny's knowledge of the nature and seasonal migration patterns of the dramatically reduced

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26Kinnes Lists. The final phase of Scottish Northern whaling continued, albeit on a severely reduced basis, until the beginning of WWII and consisted primarily of bartering expeditions which hunted the few remaining bowheads. In 1913, only two whalers were fitted-out for Northern whaling, for example, and both returned empty; Lubbock, *Arctic Whalers*, 451. Land stations continued to operate on a reduced basis into the 1920s. Following the war, a number of small concerns, according to Nutaraq, a native employed by Scottish whalers called "free traders," came "to the Sound hoping to harvest furs, oil, and a variety of Arctic products, and life at the stations continued for a few more years." By 1924, however, they "had sold out to the powerful Hudson Bay Company, which in 1921 had established a fur-trading post...on Pangnirtung Fjord;" Eber, *When the Whalers Were Up North*, 18. See also Francis, *Arctic Chase*, 107; and Holland, "William Penny," 41. That same year, a St. John's newspaper reported that "many of the whalers employ Eskimos to hunt them, and many of these dwellers of the North speak English fairly well," but rather than relying primarily upon the pursuit of bowhead whales "the natives wait for the summer months, which bring the Scottish walrus hunters." *Evening Herald* (St. John's), 14 January 1913.

27*Aberdeen Journal*, 23 February 1853. See also Holland, "William Penny," 36-38, quoting primarily from the *Literary Gazette*, 19 February 1853. Unable to secure a royal charter, the venture subsequently became the Aberdeen Arctic Company.
Eastern Canadian Arctic stock of bowheads. Of even greater importance was his determination to forge a close working relationship with local indigenous populations and to learn their “habits and manners.”

Underpinning the complicated and reciprocal partnership that evolved, however, was the fact that native participation was essential to the success of Scottish over-winter whaling at Cumberland Gulf and elsewhere throughout the Eastern Canadian Arctic.

It soon became clear that Penny would be unable to persuade his Aberdeen backers to support his ambitious scheme fully. Rather than newly constructed and well-equipped steamers, experienced personnel and substantial land-based infrastructure, it was decided instead to fit-out older sailing vessels, manned by relatively small over-wintering crews who would be highly dependent on natives for whaling and, in many instances, survival. The company purchased Lady Franklin and Sophia which, though specifically built for ice navigation, were significantly smaller than traditional Northern whalers and thus less expensive to purchase, crew and provision.

On 13 August 1853 Lady Franklin, “commanded by Capt. Penny, the intrepid Arctic navigator,” and Sophia (Capt. Brown) sailed for Cumberland Gulf. As reported in the local press, “the work was to be carried on...by establishing a little colony, prosecuting the fishing when practical, and sending the vessels – which were fully provisioned for three years – home, only when full.” Penny's return just twelve months later was hailed as a great success. As the Aberdeen Journal proclaimed, “[t]he success of the scheme...is a homage to the sagacity as well as practical ability of Captain Penny.”

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28 William Penny, “Deposition” (1856), quoted in Ross, Distant and Unsurveyed Country, xxxiv. Penny, according to McDonald, Narrative, who had visited Cumberland Gulf with him more than two decades earlier, immediately recognized that it would be necessary to over-winter if the spring ice-edge fishery was to be successful. It was also his opinion that this could only be accomplished with the help of natives.

29 See, for example, Boas, Central Eskimo; Boas, “Eskimo of Baffin Land;” Eber, When the Whalers Were Up North, 7-20; Francis, Arctic Chase; and Ross, Distant and Unsurveyed Country. Within five years native labour had become a crucial underpinning of Penny’s Cumberland Gulf whaling operation. In 1857, for example, he left two officers in charge of a satellite station. Local Eskimos were expected “to provide at least ten men to complete the whaleboat crews;” Ross, Distant and Unsurveyed Country, 35. Similarly, Boas, Central Eskimo, 425, while attempting to illustrate the impact station whaling was having on native numbers, recorded that shortly after Penny’s initial over-wintering “the Kingnaitmuit of Qegerten [Kerkerten] were able to man eighteen whaleboats.”

30 Aberdeen Journal, 23 February 1853.

31 Kinnes Lists. Lady Franklin and Sophia were 199 and 113 tons, respectively, while the other three Aberdeen whalers in 1854 averaged 290.6 tons.
heads were taken before winter set in and an additional fourteen were captured in May. It was also a matter of some pride that "not one casualty occurred during the whole year, and the men enjoyed uninterrupted good health." Significantly, though, it was viewed as being "very remarkable...that among the poor natives cholera raged during the winter with fatal severity." Of the thirty-two Eskimos engaged by Penny, nine died. Neither did their souls fare any better; company directors had decided not to pick up a Moravian missionary at Greenland, as originally intended, due to the "lateness" of the season. The return of Sophia, crewed by just ten men, less than three months later brought even better news. Whales had been so plentiful that twelve were captured by 13 October when it was decided to sail for home rather than spend another winter. Conditions were such, in fact, that had they "not been short of hands" they "could have doubled her cargo with ease."33

Not unexpectedly, the continued presence of Americans who, to make matters worse, had been assisted by "a deserter" from the Aberdeen expedition, brought a further cry of public outrage: "It becomes a question whether the Americans have any right to land and take up their quarters on British ter-

32Ibid.; and Aberdeen Journal, 30 August 1854. When two subsequent attempts also failed, Penny invited the Moravian Church to have a missionary join him in Aberdeen prior to his next whaling expedition. Matthaus Warmow thus over-wintered at Cumberland Gulf in 1857-1858 as part of Penny's party. Despite making a positive recommendation upon his return, the church elected not to establish a permanent mission. Among the reasons offered was "the difficulties created by the presence of whalers;" Holland, "William Penny," 40. The best evidence of Penny's genuine and long-standing concern for the welfare of Cumberland Gulf natives is provided by Boas, Central Eskimo, 425-440; Holland, "William Penny," 28-33 and 38-40; and Ross, Distant and Unsurveyed Country, xxxiv-xxxvii. The conflicting influence brought to bear upon the natives by whalers and missionaries continued until the end of the industry. As A.P. Low, leader of a Canadian government expedition to the North reported in 1907, "[i]hat the missionaries have done much to raise the standard of civilization among the Eskimo cannot be denied...but it is an open question whether the advantages accruing from these sources have not been more than nullified by the annual visit of the American whalers, whose influence and examples have had the worst possible effect upon these people [with whaling in decline]...In the absence of the whalers, and with the untrammeled influence of the missionaries, the Eskimo may yet be brought to a reasonably high pitch of civilization." Evening Herald (St. John's), 20 June 1907.

33For the initial voyage, the two ships "were fully provisioned for three years" and would return "home only when full;" Aberdeen Journal, 30 August 1854. With both vessels back, the company did not have an over-wintering crew in 1854-1855. Given the success of the new venture, plans were set in motion to purchase a third ship, thus ensuring a continuous presence at Cumberland Gulf; Dundee Advertiser, 14 November 1854. Additional details of the Arctic Company's first over-winter expedition at Cumberland Gulf are provided by Holland, "William Penny," 38-39.
ritory.” Apart from “the annoyance occasioned by such proceedings,” however, Aberdeen’s first over-wintering venture at Cumberland Gulf had been, from a purely economic perspective, an unqualified success. The profits from what a local newspaper called this “novel expedition” were such that there was an immediate rush to follow Penny’s lead. Entrepreneurs in both Aberdeen and Peterhead quickly began fitting-out expeditions, primarily to over-winter in Cumberland Gulf.³⁴

Overview, 1853-1870

Unfortunately, the full promise of Penny’s initial over-wintering experiment was not realized. The 1853-1854 catch remained unequalled, while annual averages were matched only in 1858-1859 (see figure 8). Early kill rates, however, were still sufficiently large to inflict another blow on an already severely depleted stock. As can also be seen, the apprenticeship period during which the Scots learned how best to use native labour was remarkably short, as indicated by increasing total and average catches between 1855 and 1860.

The Aberdeen Arctic Company’s success quickly encouraged expanded Peterhead participation (see figure 9). Increased competition, however, brought additional pressure to bear on the resource, and catches during the 1860s fell off dramatically (figure 8 and table 1). The pace of decline was especially significant because summary data after 1862 often include the results of multiple over-wintering voyages rather than just one as had been the case earlier.³⁵ Unable or unwilling to compete against better-funded Peterhead ventures, direct Aberdeen involvement in over-winter whaling ended in 1870.³⁶

³⁴*Aberdeen Journal*, 30 August 1854. Americans and a few Scots also engaged in over-wintering and land-based whaling using native labour in Frobisher Bay, Pond Inlet, Hudson Strait and Hudson Bay. See, for example, Eber, *When the Whalers Were Up North*; Francis, *Arctic Chase*; Ross, *Whaling and Eskimos*; and Ross, *Distant and Unsurveyed Country*.

³⁵Kinnes Lists. Manufacturer lists and other sources prior to this date record tons of oil actually rendered from blubber brought home by Northern whalers. Although Cumberland Gulf returns followed the same convention, henceforth blubber and oil produced by land station personnel were transported back to Scotland. Unfortunately, different quantities were seldom identified. Cumberland Gulf oil was often considered inferior because of rendering practices and the length of time it took to reach market. As the *Dundee Advertiser*, 6 October 1868, reported, “[i]t had in consequence lost some of those qualities which are so essential for manufacturing purposes.”

³⁶Peterhead was still well-established in Northern whaling and sealing.
Figure 8: Annual Returns of Aberdeen Over-wintering Voyages and Land Stations at Cumberland Gulf (Total and Average Catches of Bowhead Whales)

Sources: Kinnes Lists; and various newspapers.
Table 1
Aberdeen Over-wintering Whaling Results at Cumberland Gulf, 1853-1870

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>VESSEL</th>
<th>MASTER</th>
<th>COMPANY</th>
<th>WHALES</th>
<th>OIL (tons)</th>
<th>BONE (cwt.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1853-54</td>
<td>Lady Franklin</td>
<td>W. Penny</td>
<td>A. A. Co. 2</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>174.25</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sophia</td>
<td>?. Brown</td>
<td>A. A. Co.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>53.75</td>
<td>17.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1854-55</td>
<td>Lady Franklin</td>
<td>W. Penny</td>
<td>A. A. Co.</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>91.0</td>
<td>110.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sophia</td>
<td>?. Loggie</td>
<td>A. A. Co.</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Alibi 3</td>
<td>A. Stewart</td>
<td>A. A. Co.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>72.0</td>
<td>112.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1855-56</td>
<td>Lady Franklin</td>
<td>W. Penny</td>
<td>A. A. Co.</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>160.0</td>
<td>200.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sophia</td>
<td>J. Cheyne</td>
<td>A. A. Co.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>58.0</td>
<td>120.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1856-57</td>
<td>Alibi 5</td>
<td>?. Coulldrey</td>
<td>A. A. Co.</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>143.0</td>
<td>180.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1857-58</td>
<td>Lady Franklin</td>
<td>W. Penny</td>
<td>A. A. Co.</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>73.0</td>
<td>140.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1858-59</td>
<td>Sophia</td>
<td>J. Cheyne / ?. Fraser 4</td>
<td>A. A. Co.</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>73.0</td>
<td>140.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1859-60</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1860-61</td>
<td>Arctic 6</td>
<td>?. Reid</td>
<td>G. Thompson</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sophia 7</td>
<td>?. Fraser</td>
<td>A. A. Co.</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>108.0</td>
<td>116.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1861-62</td>
<td>Lady Franklin</td>
<td>?. Fraser</td>
<td>A. A. Co.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>80.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sophia 8</td>
<td>?. Lucus</td>
<td>G. Thompson</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>60.0</td>
<td>70.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Alibi</td>
<td>?. Reid</td>
<td>G. Thompson</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>80.0</td>
<td>70.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1863-64</td>
<td>Sophia</td>
<td>?. Fraser</td>
<td>T. Darling, Jr.</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>120.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1864-65</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1865-66</td>
<td>Sophia</td>
<td>?. Fraser</td>
<td>T. Darling, Jr.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>80.0</td>
<td>108.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1866-67</td>
<td>Kate</td>
<td>?. Fraser</td>
<td>T. Darling, Jr.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>80.0</td>
<td>108.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1867-68</td>
<td>Kate</td>
<td>?. Leportier</td>
<td>T. Darling, Jr.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1868-69</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
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<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1869-70</td>
<td>Kate</td>
<td>?. Leportier</td>
<td>T. Darling, Jr.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: **TOTALS**

186 1,313.0 1,471.5

Notes:
1. Results not always easily determined, i.e. opportunistic shipping on different vessels (produce not differentiated).
2. Aberdeen Arctic Company.
3. Unable to reach Cumberland Gulf due to Fall ice/not prepared to risk oil and bone obtained in traditional fishery.
4. J. Cheyne dies at Cumberland Gulf.
5. First to include produce of previous season’s over-wintering crew.

* Lady Franklin and Sophia both “full”: all credited to Lady Franklin.
** Arctic “full”, but lost in ice. Produce and crew brought home by New England whaling vessel.
? Given name/initial not known.

Sources: See figure 8.
Figure 9: Scottish Over-winter Whaling at Cumberland Gulf, 1853-1892

Sources: See figure 8.
Over-Winter Whaling at Cumberland Gulf

Figure 10: Cumberland Gulf, Davis Strait and Baffin Bay

Source: See figure 1.
Having stayed out three winters at Cumberland Gulf, and unable to convince company directors to risk additional investment in upgrades such as screw propulsion as originally envisaged, Penny in 1861 accepted command of the newly constructed Dundee steamer, _Polynia_, thus effectively bringing his association with the Aberdeen Arctic Company to a close. The Kekerten station was acquired by Crawford Noble, Jr. of Peterhead. The company subsequently fitted out two additional over-wintering voyages before _Sophia_ and _Alibi_ were sold to G. Thompson in 1863 (table 1). That year the company’s one remaining vessel, _Lady Franklin_, was forced to over-winter when trapped by ice at Cumberland Gulf. Not properly provisioned, three of the twenty-man crew died despite mostly “mild” weather. The Aberdeen Arctic Company was wound up prior to the safe arrival of _Lady Franklin_, with shareholders only agreeing to charter a relief vessel, _Xanthus_, to bring out provisions when forced to do so by a public outcry, indicating just how marginalized shore-based whaling at Cumberland Gulf had become by the mid-1860s.

Both of Thompson’s vessels captured just twelve whales in 1863-1864, and he severed his ties with the trade at the end of the season. J. Darling, Jr., the last Aberdeen adventurer prepared to risk fitting-out a vessel to winter at Cumberland Gulf, did so only on a significantly reduced scale. Having purchased _Sophia_ from Thompson’s group, he and his backers deployed only ten men at Cumberland Gulf in 1865-1866. With particularly favourable conditions, his decision to rely almost exclusively upon natives paid a rich dividend when _Sophia_ returned “full.” In 1867, looking to reduce expenses even further, he replaced the larger and more expensive to operate _Sophia_ with

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37 _Aberdeen Journal_, 23 February 1853. His association with the company came to an end officially on 30 September 1862. For full details, see Ross, _Distant and Unsurveyed Country_, 211-213.

38 _Peterhead Sentinel_, 11 January 1889. Noble, a mining engineer, although a native of Aberdeen, operated his whaling enterprise through Peterhead.

39 Kinnes Lists. Thompson had fitted out _Arctic_ for an over-wintering voyage in 1861, but it was crushed by ice on 14 July 1862. Crew and produce were transported safely to Aberdeen by the New Bedford whaling master D. Webster. For full details, see _Dundee Advertiser_, 12 September 1862; and _Aberdeen Journal_, 17 September 1862.

40 As the _Peterhead Sentinel_, 3 June 1864, reported, “the unfortunate crew” of _Lady Franklin_ were compelled to survive “upon hardly any provisions at all.” See also _Aberdeen Journal_, 17 August 1864.

41 For full details of _Lady Franklin_’s forced over-wintering, the relief charter of _Xanthus_ and closure of the Aberdeen Arctic Company, see _Peterhead Sentinel_, 3 and 10 June 1864; and _Aberdeen Journal_, 17 August 1864.
Kate, a thirty-year-old, 104-ton sailing vessel. Lack of success, however, also forced him to withdraw in 1870 after the vessel arrived home “clean.” 42

Over seventeen seasons, five Aberdeen vessels – Lady Franklin, Sophia, Alibi, Arctic and Kate – commanded by eleven different masters, participated in fall and early spring whaling at Cumberland Gulf. 43 Altogether, sixteen expeditions brought back at least 1313 tons of oil and 1471.5 hundredweight (cwt.) of baleen (bone), the output from 168 bowheads (table 1). 44

Cumberland Gulf Whaling Template: Practices and Equipment

Penny had identified virtually all of the ingredients needed to make the new venture profitable during his first over-winter expedition. By his third voyage in 1857-1858 most had been implemented. He immediately saw that local Eskimos, with their knowledge and expertise, offered the best chance for success and they proved willing and effective partners. Indeed, from the beginning it was apparent that over-winter whaling at Cumberland Gulf would require significantly different practices and equipment than had been used on traditional Northern offshore hunting grounds. 45 With the rush of new investors and the increasing number of vessels visiting Cumberland Gulf Penny, seeing the need for continuity, moved quickly to forge long-term alliances with individual Eskimo groups. When Lady Franklin and Sophia both returned in the fall of

42 Like Aberdeen Arctic Company shareholders, Thompson and Darling were part of larger investment groups. Among Darling’s backers in 1865-1866, for example, were “John Smith, shipbuilder, and Charles M’Griger, manufacturer;” Aberdeen Journal, 19 September 1866; and Peterhead Sentinel, 16 November 1866. Also contributing to Aberdeen’s decline, and indicating just how weak its commitment to Northern whaling had become by the mid-1860s, was its decaying infrastructure. In 1866, for example, Sophia had to offload blubber at Peterhead because there were “no suitable boil yards in Aberdeen.” Peterhead Sentinel, 28 September 1866.

43 The captains were Penny and Fraser (four voyages each); Stewart, Cheyne and Reid (two voyages); and Brown, Loggie, Couldrey, Lucus and Leportier (one).

44 Two additional attempts to over-winter failed when Alibi (Stewart, 1855) and Lady Franklin (Penny, 1859) were forced by ice in Cumberland Bay to return. Produce conveyed home by non-company or chartered vessels was seldom recorded.

45 Cumberland Gulf whaling was largely based initially on traditional technology and techniques developed in the early stages of land-based whaling in the Bay of Biscay and at Labrador and Spitsbergen rather than employing the radically different methods used offshore in the Greenland Sea, Davis Strait and Baffin Bay. The former would eventually characterize the spring operations at Cumberland Gulf, while the latter would be utilized primarily during the fall fishery.
1854, for example, the Aberdeen Arctic Company was unable to prosecute the following season's fishery. Penny and his backers consequently purchased a third vessel, *Alibi*, to ensure a continuous presence (figures 8-9 and table 1). He was also the first to establish a self-contained land station when "two boats' crews were left out" in 1860-1861, thus eliminating a significant proportion of the expenses required to mount full-fledged expeditions; this became increasingly common by the mid-1860s.46 This practice evolved from Penny's early determination to take full advantage of the different temporal and spatial whaling opportunities Cumberland Gulf seemed to offer. On his third voyage in 1857-1858, for instance, he erected pre-fabricated buildings at Niatilik on the southwestern side of the Sound (figure 10). Andrew Lindsay, a cooper, and John Falconer, harpooner, were given provisions and two fully-equipped whaleboats to prosecute the spring fishery with the aid of natives, while Penny hunted from Kekerten on the northeastern coast of the Gulf. As competition increased and the local grounds became better known, particularly productive sites were often shared.47 Moreover, following much the same pattern established by Penny, over-winter voyages at Cumberland Gulf lasted approximately fourteen or fifteen months and typically had five distinct phases: the outward voyage; fall whaling; over-wintering; the spring fishery; and the homeward journey.48 In terms of profits, the two discrete whale fisheries were by far the most important components, and Penny quickly developed practices that enabled him to take full advantage of both.

As he soon discovered, fall and spring whaling offered significantly different opportunities and dangers. The former was essentially an open-water hunt conducted by boats operating from larger vessels or strategically located land sites prior to the annual freeze. The spring fishery, on the other hand, occurred as ice began to clear from the Gulf. The disintegration of the pack- and land-fast ice made it necessary to endure long and often dangerous treks in severe weather before the boats could be used to hunt bowheads in the open-water leads. An indication of just how difficult and hazardous spring whaling at Cumberland Gulf could be is indicated by the first-hand account provided by Capt. Simpson of *Isobel*, who had over-wintered in 1859-1860:

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46*Aberdeen Journal*, 27 June 1855; and *Dundee Advertiser*, 11 October 1861.

47For full details of Penny’s third over-wintering voyage, see Ross, *Distant and Unsurveyed Country*. On the evolution of favoured whaling sites, see, for example, Boas, *Central Eskimo*, 466; and Holland, "William Penny," 39.

48Kinnes Lists; and various newspapers.
Here is a sample of Davis' Straits difficulties – On the 1st April, we commenced to prepare for fishing, and on the 14th we launched two boats...about seven miles from the ship. The ice was very bad but we got one small fish that day. It took us, however, five days to take her to the ship, and she only yielded 2 ½ tuns. We had 60 men including natives. So you may judge what the Hoe [floe] Edge fishing is at that rate.49

While Eskimos were useful in the fall fishery, Penny immediately recognized that they would be absolutely essential if spring whaling were to be mastered.50 They became even more valuable as competition increased and bowhead numbers continued to decline.

The early experiences of the Aberdeen Arctic Company clearly demonstrated that an incomplete understanding of the nature, scope and timing of the annual freeze and break-up at Cumberland Gulf could have dire consequences. In 1855, for example, Alibi did not sail until August, almost two months later than Sophia and Lady Franklin, and encountered “boisterous gales prevailing from the northward, accompanied by frost and snow showers, and from the close packed state of the ice...was prevented reaching her destination, viz., the fishing grounds in Cumberland Sound, whether she had been preceded by Captain Penny.”51 On the other hand, staying out too late brought the risk of being forced to over-winter, which occurred to Lady Franklin in the fall of 1863. “It was not the intention of the master to winter in the Straits,” according to a newspaper report, “but in attempting to come down the Sound

49*Peterhead Sentinel*, 28 September 1860. Additional first-hand accounts of fall and spring whaling may be found in *Aberdeen Journal*, 25 August 1858 and 7 September 1859; *Dundee Advertiser*, 14 November 1854; *Dundee Courier*, 24 July 1878; and *Peterhead Sentinel*, 22 May 1857, 14 October 1864, 16 October 1868, 26 November 1869, 5 October 1870, 9 October 1871 and 21 August 1872. See also Boas, *Central Eskimo*; Holland, “William Penny;” and Ross, *Distant and Unsurveyed Country*.

50It appears that spring whaling may have been introduced by Europeans. As Boas, *Central Eskimo*, 440, noted in 1888 after spending a winter at the Kekerten station, “I do not know with certainty whether the natives used to bring their boats to the floe in the spring in order to await the arrival of the animals, as the Scottish and American whalers nowadays, or whether the animals were caught only in summer.”

51*Kinnes Lists*; and *Aberdeen Journal*, 14 November 1855. For additional information on the importance of early sailing, see *Dundee Advertiser*, 24 August 1858 and 21 and 22 August 1871; *Dundee Courier*, 29 October 1861, 29 October 1868 and 28 August 1880; and *Peterhead Sentinel*, 12 June and 3 July 1857, 27 August 1858 and 1 April 1880.
he found the ice so far formed as to prevent his finding egress."  

Penny and his cohorts were thus forced to adjust their departures and returns to reflect more realistically the environment at Cumberland Gulf.  

Penny’s willingness to adopt Eskimo hunting methods brought about an early clash with traditional Northern whalers. Over the course of more than two centuries it had become accepted practice that a whale belonged to the crew that actually killed it, even if it had been harpooned first by another ship’s boat. Natives at Cumberland Gulf, however, commonly used “dregs” rather than the whaleboat itself to tire a struck bowhead so that it could be killed with lances.  

As early as 1855, natives engaged by Clara, a traditional whaler attempting to salvage a paying voyage at Cumberland Gulf before returning home at the end of the season, attached dregs to a bowhead they had harpooned. But the whale was then “seized on by the men of [Penny’s] Alibi, and retained by them” because it was deemed to be “free.” Paradoxically, Capt. Sutter of Clara, even though the new venture was just three years’ old, claimed that it was “a fast fish...according to the custom prevalent at Cumberland Sound.” With an estimated value of £1000, it is not surprising that the dispute dragged on through the courts until the House of Lords finally declared in 1862 that the “rule [that]...has become the subject of various decisions in the English Courts, under the name of fast and loose would prevail.”  

Although Aberdeen’s involvement in Cumberland Gulf whaling was relatively short-lived, Penny and the Aberdeen Arctic Company quickly identified all the essential elements and immediately set about to develop methods and modified equipment to permit the new venture to succeed. Subsequent changes were relatively minor and most often intended to help cope with deteriorating conditions as the industry became increasingly marginalized.  

Peterhead’s Initial Involvement in Cumberland Gulf Over-Winter Whaling  

News of Penny’s 1853-1854 initiative and the profits earned by the Aberdeen Arctic Company did not go unnoticed in Peterhead, then “the principal Seal and Whale fishing port in the United Kingdom.” Entrepreneurs such as John  

52Aberdeen Journal, 17 August 1864. A similar fate befell Queen of Peterhead in 1865-1866; Peterhead Sentinel, 19 October 1866.  

53Aberdeen Journal, 2 April 1862. For a full description of hunting methods used by traditional Northern whalers, see Boas, Central Eskimo, 499-501.  

54Peterhead Sentinel, 21 November 1856; Aberdeen Journal, 2 April 1862; Dundee Advertiser, 8 April 1862; and Ross, Distant and Unsurveyed Country, 124-127.  

55Peterhead was often called “Little Liverpool;” see Peterhead Sentinel, 30 January 1857. On 5 June 1857 an editorial referred to Peterhead as “the Seal Fishing
Hutchison and the three Robertson brothers were quick to embrace the new opportunities Cumberland Gulf whaling appeared to offer. For example, Clara, having taken 1294 harp seals at East Greenland, sailed on 7 July 1856 for Davis Strait, returning on 14 November with the blubber and bone of two whales. Capt. Sutter, having had no success on the traditional hunting grounds, visited Cumberland Gulf where he secured two bowheads, thus enabling him to make a paying voyage. Thereafter it became common to add these new whaling grounds to the traditional “fall fishing” itinerary, a pattern that would be followed until the end of Northern whaling half a century later.

That same year, G. Brown, master of Traveler, followed Penny’s example in all essential details and returned with seventeen whales which yielded 174 tons of oil and 221 cwt. of bone. This had a profound impact on the direction over-winter whaling at Cumberland Gulf would take. The dividends Hutchison and his backers earned encouraged them to make the financial commitment that shareholders in the Aberdeen Arctic Company did not.

Two additional ships were acquired immediately to join Traveler at Cumberland Gulf in 1857-1858. Gem, a small vessel of just 121 tons and thus more maneuverable and less expensive to fit-out and provision, was purchased primarily for the “ice-free” fall fishery. This strategy gained popularity when the industry began to decline less than a decade later. Jackal, the precursor to an even more important reality of future Cumberland Gulf endeavours, was bought from Glasgow owners. While only eight tons, the vessel was equipped with a twenty-horsepower engine and screw propeller. Fulfilling Penny’s early ambitions, Jackal was intended to offset “Johnny Frost” who “will sometimes metropolis.”

For a contemporary report of the importance of the industry to local investors, see ibid., 6 February 1857. A detailed account of Peterhead’s rise in Northern whaling and sealing is provided by Sanger, “Scottish Northern Whaling,” 35-41.


Kinnes Lists; and Peterhead Sentinel, 21 November 1856. As the Dundee Advertiser, 25 September 1856, noted, the characteristics of the Fall fishery were well known: “After this date [late August] it frequently happens that fine fishings are made along the west side of Davis Straits – viz. at Scott’s Inlet, River Clyde, Cape Raper, Cape Kater, Home Bay, Cape Hooper, Cape Searle, and Exiter and Cumberland Sounds – as these places include the general route the fish follow southward from Pond’s Bay. Cumberland Straits are always made the last place of call.”

Kinnes Lists; and Aberdeen Journal, 5 November 1856.
Chesley W. Sanger

impose his grip.” This addition, the investors hoped, would enable them to take advantage “of any opening in the ice” during spring operations.59

The three-vessel expedition seemed poised to enable Peterhead to wrest control of the new enterprise from Aberdeen. As frequently occurred in the Northern industry, however, chance intervened.60 The results of this endeavour, and those of the following two seasons, clearly illustrate the wide degree of variability associated with Cumberland Gulf whaling and provide a good indication of the influence individual voyages could have on subsequent participation. As William Wilberforce, an eighteenth-century politician whose constituency included an English whaling port, noted in 1786, “[t]he sending out of ships to Greenland was rather to be regarded as a species of gambling than any sort of regular trade: the risk was great, and the gain sometimes proportionally lucrative; but it was almost entirely a matter of chance.”61

Problems plagued the 1857-1858 expedition from the outset. The grounding of Traveler while being towed out of Peterhead by Jackal caused a three-week delay which, in turn, contributed to its loss when caught in ice while attempting to reach the winter quarters. Although Gem returned with seven whales, the loss of Traveler, valued at £200,000, proved disastrous. Along with the destruction of Union in 1859-1860, this severely dampened Peterhead’s initial rush to invest in the new venture.62

Compounding these early difficulties, Peterhead’s “spirited owners” soon faced the same problems investors in all previous phases of Northern whaling confronted when initial catches began to decline. As R. Birnie, the captain of Sir Colin Campbell,63 complained following his return to Peterhead in 1860, having over-wintered at Cumberland Gulf:

59Kinnes Lists; Peterhead Sentinel, 22 May and 5 June 1857; and Aberdeen Journal, 23 February 1853.

60For a full discussion of the influence chance – success or failure in any given season – had on the changing scale and scope of subsequent phases of Northern whaling, see Sanger, “Origins,” 448-451.


62For full details of this expedition, see Peterhead Sentinel, 22 May, 5 and 12 June and 3 July 1857 and 27 August 1858; Aberdeen Journal, 25 August 1858; Dundee Advertiser, 24 August 1858; and Kinnes Lists.

63Peterhead Sentinel, 8 July 1859; and Kinnes Lists.
A good many fish...were seen, but owing to the large number of boats out every day – there being upwards of eighty – the whales all went to the offing whenever the fleet of boats went out. In this single locality – not a very large one either – there were no fewer than fifteen ships; only three whales were caught, and five struck. If the state of matters continue, our fishing in Cumberland Straits will soon be at an end.  

If this were not bad enough, Birnie also noted that “ten Americans are to winter there this year, and, if they are successful, it is reported that there will be a much larger number next year.”

Unregulated over-hunting again forced many participants to withdraw and others to cut back on costs. In 1861, for example, _Alert_ returned after seventeen months during which it was forced to over-winter when trapped by ice at the end of the previous season. “Not provisioned for a lengthened stay,” eleven of the twenty-two-man crew died. Also resurrected was the “old practice” of falling back on insurance underwriters to minimize losses. A year earlier, for instance, _Enterprise_ of Fraserburgh was purposely set on fire after grounding near Penny’s station at Cumberland Gulf when a survey conducted by Capt. Burnett, and the master and mate of the nearby _Union_, “decided that she was unseaworthy.” The insurance company, however, disputed this, citing conflict of interest and the particular circumstances surrounding its loss:

The underwriters are aware a practice is said to exist for masters of whaling vessels to burn their ships, when they are so beset by ice and so far from land as to render their rescue hopeless, still such practice cannot excuse such destruction by fire when stranding takes place in a harbour, and as, in the present instance, close to the winter station of Captain Penny’s people, where they would be as safe as in a harbour at home; that the master is a part owner, and fully insured; and that, although deemed unseaworthy by himself and his crew, and abandoned as such, it appears by the documents produced by the master himself, there was nothing in the state of the vessel, or the place where she was lying, to render it impossible to have preserved her during the winter, or even with her proper exertions to have got her floated off and safely moored.

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64 _Peterhead Sentinel_, 23 November 1860.

65 _Ibid._, 15 February and 4 October 1861; and Kinnes Lists.
Less than a decade after Penny's first voyage, the enterprise was in decline. Increased Scottish involvement would require new incentives. By the early 1860s, increasing oil and bone prices, reduced competition, a series of favourable seasons and new initiatives combined to revitalize Peterhead participation in over-wintering at Cumberland Gulf (figures 9 and 11).

Figure 11: Annual Returns of Scottish Over-wintering Voyages and Land Stations at Cumberland Gulf (Total and Average Catches of Bowheads, 1854-1890)

Source: See figure 8.

Resurgence, 1862-1867

Much of the resurgence in Scottish over-winter whaling during the 1860s can be attributed to an Aberdeen engineer who sought Peterhead backing for "a small mining expedition, to search for copper ore, which is believed to exist on the British side of the Sound in some quantity."\(^{66}\) Although no copper was found, Crawford Noble, Jr.'s exposure to Cumberland Gulf whaling in 1862...

\(^{66}\)Peterhead Sentinel, 23 May 1862.
convinced him that the relatively new operation, although experiencing difficulties, could still be profitable.

Noble acquired Penny’s station at Kekerten and immediately took direct control of all aspects of the operation. Included in his hands-on approach was a determination to strengthen ties with local native groups by involving them more heavily. In the process, dependence upon Scottish workers was reduced and the pursuit of other produce, such as seal oil and skins, became increasingly important. Eskimos, for the first time, would for all intent and purposes be considered essential employees.67

Of almost equal importance was Noble’s decision to have the new eighty-seven-ton schooner, *Ballygar*, originally built to bring “home their specimens,” permanently stationed in the Gulf. With the enhanced manoeuvrability provided by its size and rigging, it was valuable until it was lost five years later. The exact number of whales captured by *Ballygar* is unfortunately unknown. As part of the original reorganization, Noble implemented another procedure that would quickly become common. Personnel, provisions and equipment were brought out to the Gulf by charter or on other whaling vessels on an opportunistic basis. As produce was transported back to Peterhead in the same fashion, bowhead kills and oil and bone quantities were thus not recorded separately. Profits were sufficiently large, however, to encourage another group of Peterhead investors to follow Noble’s lead, purchasing the next year “a small vessel,” *Favourite*, which operated continuously from a land-station until lost five years later when “in charge of natives.”68

While Crawford Noble dramatically improved the over-winter whaling model first developed by Penny, his early success, and that of his imitators, was also the result of significantly improved hunting conditions and rising oil and bone prices due primarily to “the destruction of so many of the American whalers” during the US Civil War. A sale of oil at Dundee in July 1863, for instance, “was a brisk one,” with a ton, including cask, selling for £43 5s. Two years later, the *Dundee Advertiser* reported that whale oil had “taken a rapid stride since [the] last public sale...having reached £52.” Bone prices also soared. A ton of baleen at Dundee in 1865 brought £600, for example, and “the probability is it may reach £650 to £700.”69

Although the American Civil War had a significant impact on oil and bone prices, these increases also reflect the fact that all traditional whale fish-

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69 *Ibid.*, 3 July 1863; and *Dundee Advertiser*, 10 October 1865.
eries were failing by this date. An increasing number of owners consequently sought alternative employment for their vessels, thus reducing supplies of oil and bone and increasing prices. In 1864, for instance, three whalers were taken out of the Peterhead fleet: Victor was sold to Dundee, Agostina was laid-up and Kate was fitted-out for the Baltic trade. The number declined further the following year when Perservance, Agostina and Sir Colin Campbell were chartered for use in the West Greenland cryolite trade where ships often had “to smack through fields of ice before they... [could] arrive at their loading stations.” Particularly telling is a report in the Peterhead Sentinel: “It is fortunate in these days of depression in the whaling interest, that another trade should have arisen, for which our heavy ships are so peculiarly suited.” At Cumberland Gulf, reduced competition, improving prices and a series of favourable environmental seasons actually encouraged modest expansion during the 1860s.

The losses of Ballygar and Favourite, however, and the demise of Dublin on its first over-wintering voyage in 1866, combined with mostly poor ice conditions and stormy weather throughout much of the second half of the decade, led to another reduction in Peterhead involvement in Cumberland Gulf whaling. Of the four Peterhead vessels that over-wintered in 1865-1866, only Alert, after reporting “a bad season,” brought back a paying cargo. It is clear that more than a century of Scottish participation in all phases of Northern whaling and sealing was at risk by the late 1860s. As an editorial in the Peterhead Sentinel explained:

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70 For a full account of the decline of the traditional fishery and the beginning of “modern” whaling, see Sanger, “Origins,” 131-156.

71 Peterhead Sentinel, 12 February 1864. It should be noted, as well, that the rate at which older, wooden sailing vessels were withdrawn was enhanced by the pace at which steamers were introduced.

72 Ibid., 17 March 1865. The expansion was also encouraged by the successes enjoyed by Noble and the owners of Favourite. For details of the 1862-1865 seasons, see Kinnes Lists; Dundee Advertiser, 12 September 1862; and Peterhead Sentinel, 29 April and 23 September 1864; and 22 February and 10 November 1865. The Cumberland Gulf enterprise was also viewed by some as an alternative option for older sailing vessels unable to compete with the new steamers on the traditional whaling grounds.

73 For details of Dublin’s fitting-out costs, fall whaling and its destruction by fire on 3 November 1866, see Peterhead Sentinel, 27 April and 13 November 1866; and 20 September 1867.

74 Dundee Advertiser, 25 September 1866.
Such a total failure of the fishery has not been experienced for many years past, and the loss to the owners will be very heavy...[W]e must also take into account that the men will suffer severely by the ill-fortune which has attacked them, and this is all the more to be regretted at the present time, when trade is so dull and provisions so dear.75

Only the changes implemented by entrepreneurs such as Noble during the early 1860s would ensure a continued Scottish whaling presence at Cumberland Gulf through into the 1870s and 1880s.

**Low-Level Stability, 1868-1880**

The number of Peterhead vessels over-wintering in the 1870s was limited to only one or two per season. Although average catches continued to decline as bowhead stocks were forced to the edge of extinction, higher prices continued to attract a small group of more adventurous investors.76 In 1870, for example, the *Peterhead Sentinel* reported that *Jan Mayen* had “been bought by Captain Salmon for £4500...[and he] deserves the best wishes of the community for his enterprising spirit in preventing such a nice hardy vessel from lying unemployed for a whole season.” He and his backers then took on the additional expense of installing an engine and screw propeller. Increased prices, reduced competition and generally favourable environmental conditions during the first part of the decade combined to reward many of those still prepared to take the risk of investing in Cumberland Gulf whaling. In 1870, for instance, *Perseverance* “had twelve whales in all – yielding 100 tons of oil; and this being all...[the vessel] could carry.”77 Catches of this magnitude, however, became increasingly elusive as bowhead numbers continued to decline, especially after 1875.

Cumberland Gulf whalers were thus forced to seek additional sources of income to offset losses if the traditional fishery, as was increasingly likely,

75*Peterhead Sentinel*, 25 October 1865.

76In 1876, for example, whalebone from *Eclipse* of Peterhead sold for “the astonishing price of £850 per ton;” *Peterhead Sentinel*, 20 September 1876. The following year *Jan Mayen* brought back two tons which “at the present condition of the market for that article, will be worth a great amount of money.” *Ibid.*, 21 November 1877.

77*Ibid.*, 9 February and 5 October 1870; and 9 August 1871.
failed. As early as the fall of 1868, for example, the crew of Perseverance recorded, for the first time, the capture of 640 white whales, which yielded 100 tons of oil, thus enabling them to return home rather than having to overwinter as originally intended. Although profitable, the “drive” required “the men to go into the water in order to kill the fish.” Conditions were so disagreeable that while the crew of Xanthus, quick to follow Perseverance’s success, obtained a bumper load the following year, the men of Lord Salton, according to a letter in the Peterhead Sentinel signed “Harpooner,” preferred “to look on and watch the profitable amusement the other ships’ crews were engaged in.” Although the pursuit of white whales and bottle-nosed dolphins became more important, the profits that the capture of even a single bowhead could yield continued to drive the traditional whaling industry. Within less than a decade, special equipment and practices had been adopted. In 1877, for instance, Jan Mayen was “well provided with nets, casks, etc.” The new bottle-nosed and white whale fisheries, however, as had been the case earlier with East Greenland and Newfoundland sealing, were intended primarily to subsidize traditional bowhead whaling.

An indication of how marginal and speculative Cumberland Gulf whaling had become by the late 1870s is reflected in the growing number of disputes between owners and employees. In an attempt to reduce labour

78See, for example, Boas, Central Eskimo, 467, who reported that “since the whale fishery has become unprofitable the stations have followed the business of collecting seal blubber and skins, which they buy from the natives.”

79Kinnes Lists. The “white whale” was Delphinapterus leucas, also called the beluga. For information on the variable resource base of Scottish Northern whaling, see Sanger, “Origins,” 183-271.

80Peterhead Sentinel, 26 November 1869. “They refused, although ordered to do so, to assist in the capture of white whales.”

81The bottle-nosed dolphin is Hyperoodon ampullatus, also commonly called the pothead. For additional information on the development of pothead whaling, see Kinnes Lists; and Peterhead Sentinel, 31 May 1876; 6 June 1877; and 11 June 1879.

82Peterhead Sentinel, 20 April 1877.

83For details of Scottish involvement in East Greenland and Newfoundland sealing, see Sanger, “Nineteenth-Century Newfoundland Seal Fishery; and Sanger “Dundee-St. John’s Connection.”

84The “lottery effect” had become so powerful by 1878 that the managing owner of Xanthus, John Duthie, was not only prepared to sail to the Gulf to become “conversant with the Country and the whale fishery” but also to take on the expense of
costs, it became common to hire a larger proportion of young and less experienced men. In 1875, for instance, a seventeen-year-old on Xanthus was lost in a snow storm on 8 December, while “another boy” was shot “in both legs.” This trend, when combined with attempts to reduce fitting-out and provisioning expenses, led to a growing number of conflicts, primarily between crew and officers. Jan Mayen, for example, became entrapped in the fall of 1871. The crew, “in consequence of not being provisioned for a winter campaign...were put on short rations.” Despite their ordeal, the men were still forced to turn to the courts to get “provisioning money.” Jan Mayen’s arrival also brought news that “one of the crew...named Mitchell, [had] been killed by the strike of a hand spike aimed at him by the mate.” That same year there was “a disagreeable scene” between the master and men on Triumph, and a seaman on Xanthus was imprisoned for one month because he had given the mate “a great deal of abuse.”

Peterhead’s involvement in purely speculative, single-vessel, over-winter bowhead whaling at Cumberland Gulf ended with the fitting-out of Xanthus for the 1879-1880 season. Although the importance of early departure to secure a safe anchorage before the fall freeze-up had been clearly demonstrated, the vessel did not sail until 28 August. The voyage, unfortunately, was a total failure. As the Peterhead Sentinel reported, the trip was “a chapter of accidents.” Caught in the ice just twelve miles from its intended winter berth, Xanthus spent the next six months “beating and drifting about” before being freed off the coast of Labrador.

Following repairs in St. John’s, Newfoundland, Xanthus un成功fully prosecuted the local harp seal fishery before heading north to hunt for bowheads on the traditional whaling grounds in Davis Strait and Baffin Bay. Deemed unseaworthy by its officers when again nipped by ice off the west coast of Greenland, the vessel was run aground on 28 June 1880, purposely set on fire and towed by the Dundee whaler Aurora into deeper water where the

having it “converted into a screw steamer of 18 horse power...which will enable her to prosecute the industry in which she has been hitherto engaged with the best means of success.” Peterhead Sentinel, 15 May 1878.

Ibid., 9 August, 4 October and 22 November 1871; and 1 September 1975.

Kinnes Lists. Xanthus had not returned to Peterhead until early August, having spent 1878-1879 at Cumberland Gulf. Peterhead Sentinel, 13 August 1879.

Peterhead Sentinel, 7 April 1880, reported that “Xanthus has had a very hard time of it, and has been many times in great danger from the pressure of the ice, once being so squeezed that water was up to the hold beams, and the ship was literally frozen up both inside and outside.”
sea cocks were opened "in order to sink her." The details of the trial were reported widely and offer valuable insights into aspects of the Northern trade, including over-winter whaling at Cumberland Gulf.90

The active fitting-out of Scottish vessels for over-winter whaling independent of land-based operations ended in 1880. Throughout the turbulent 1870s, only Noble and a small number of imitators had been able to adapt to the rapidly deteriorating conditions. The last phase of Cumberland Gulf whaling consequently revolved around land stations.

The Last Phase

Subsequent Peterhead involvement in whaling at Cumberland Gulf was restricted to shore-based hunting. To continue in the trade, Noble, "Mr. Williams, and others, at Kirkerton, Worm's Island, and elsewhere in Cumberland Gulf" began to rely even more heavily on native labour. In 1888, for example, letters from Germanica brought back to Peterhead by the Dundee vessel Active indicated that there were "good prospects of a fall fishing, and it was intended to stay another winter in the Gulf. With the exception of four or five men the crew...are to be sent home...and natives engaged for the work."91

The principal investors also expanded on Noble's earlier attempts to reduce costs by using company vessels rather than paying for charters or visiting whalers. As early as 1883, for instance, they took collective action by purchasing the 135-ton, German-built schooner Germanica.92 Two years later,
Over-Winter Whaling at Cumberland Gulf

according to the *Peterhead Sentinel*, the vessel sailed for Cumberland Gulf in early August “for the purpose of bringing home the skins and other produce gathered at the stations...She takes out six men to join those stations, and will probably bring home some of the men already there.” *Germanica* and *Perseverance* acted as station tenders and occasionally over-wintered when prospects for a successful fall fishery looked especially promising. 93

Depleted stocks and severely reduced prices forced station owners increasingly to rely on trade with local Eskimos. 94 In 1885, for example, Noble “acquired, by bartering with the natives, 3000 seals and 100 tons of oil.” Besides greater quantities of white whale and bottled-nosed dolphin products, annual returns throughout the remainder of the decade and beyond indicate that seals, walruses, bears and foxes were also becoming important trade items. 95 Despite their best efforts, however, declining profits began to signal the end of Peterhead land-station whaling at Cumberland Gulf. As a local newspaper reported in 1888, “[t]he whale and seal fishing at Peterhead seems to be within measurable distance of being played out altogether; and in Dundee the industry [traditional bowhead whaling] is in the same condition.” 96 By the end of the decade, Peterhead investment in vessel over-wintering and land-station whaling at Cumberland Gulf had, for all intent and purposes, ended. Besides adversely affecting Aberdeen, Peterhead and Dundee, the negative impact that the closure of the trade had on indigenous populations at Cumberland Gulf was also

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93 *Peterhead Sentinel*, 9 August 1885 and 30 October 1888. For operating details of *Germanica* and *Perseverance* during the 1880s, see *Dundee Advertiser*, 8 September 1880; 24 March 1884; 15 November 1887; and 5 November 1888; and *Peterhead Sentinel*, 8 September 1880; 28 November 1883; 9 January 1884; 9 August 1885; 30 October 1888; and 24 September 1889.

94 At Dundee, for example, the price of oil and seal skins in 1887 remained “low, and whalebone is quoted at a nominal figure.” *Peterhead Sentinel*, 19 January 1887.

95 Kinnes Lists; *Dundee Advertiser*, 26 October 1897; and *Peterhead Sentinel*, 21 October 1885; 8 and 21 November, and 2 December 1887; and 24 September 1889.

96 *Peterhead Sentinel*, 13 January 1888. See also *ibid.*, 17 January and 8 May 1888. A year earlier, the same newspaper reported that “the price of oil and seal skins continue low, and whalebone is quoted at a nominal figure, no transactions having taken place for some time...The report of the Dundee Polar Whaling Company, just issued to the shareholders, shows a net loss of £3133 3s 6d on the year’s work.” *Ibid.*, 19 January 1887. *Jan Mayen* was lost at Davis Strait on 18 June 1886 (insured), and the Company’s other vessel, *Nova Zembla*, brought back two bowheads; Kinnes Lists.
recognized, albeit belatedly and only half-heartedly. In 1887 there was a movement “to start a mission station,” but this, and other efforts were too small and too late to address significantly the readjustments native employees and their families were forced to make.97

Conclusion

Throughout the entire history of Scottish Northern whaling new practices were accepted only when it became clear that disastrously reduced bowhead stocks could no longer support the traditional hunt. The development of over-winter whaling at Cumberland Gulf not only prolonged Aberdeen and Peterhead participation in the Arctic trade but also led to an expansion of killing capacity, thus contributing significantly to the near elimination of bowhead stocks in both regions. Interestingly, a small number of the more enterprising Scots still committed to traditional whaling and unprepared to take on the additional expenses associated with modern whaling fitted out an Antarctic expedition (1892-1893) as an alternative to competing directly with Svend Foyn’s new Norwegian land-based stations. Although 20,000 seals were killed, no whales were taken as “none of the valuable...[bowheads and Southern rights] were discovered.”98 Numerous rorquals were observed, however.99 This news helped encourage the diffusion of modern whaling into the southern hemisphere “in response to the sudden rise in demand for edible oils at the end of the century.”100

Whalers in all phases of the Arctic industry needed a thorough understanding of both the resource base and the physical environment. This was especially true for those Scots involved in the early Cumberland Gulf fishery. Severely reduced stocks, uncharted coasts, harsh weather and tempestuous seas and ice created a volatile and potentially hazardous hunting environment that imposed strenuous demands upon masters, crews and vessels. Adventurers

97Dundee Advertiser, 29 November 1887. See also Peterhead Sentinel, 2 December 1887.

98Dundee Courier, 31 May 1893.

99As the Dundee Advertiser, 31 May 1893, reported, “[j]n all directions whales could be seen, but unfortunately each whale was tipped with a fin, showing that it was not the species of which the Dundee men were in quest.”

100Jackson, “Why Did the British Not Catch Rorquals?” 118. A full account of the 1892-1893 Dundee South Sea expedition is provided by W.G. Burn-Murdoch, From Edinburgh to the Antarctic. An Artist’s Notes and Sketches during the Dundee Antarctic Expedition of 1892-93 (London, 1894; reprint, Bungay, 1984).
such as William Penny, however, were prepared to meet these challenges and, in the process, take on the additional risks of a sixteen-month over-wintering voyage during most of which their men would be completely isolated. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, Scottish masters and their native “partners” forged an industry that, although increasingly forced to rely upon bartering, large enterprises such as the Hudson Bay Company, sportsmen-adventurers and small-scale speculators, continued at a reduced and fluctuating level until the outbreak of World War I and beyond.101

Twenty-four vessels from Aberdeen and Peterhead were fitted-out for whaling at Cumberland Gulf between 1853 and 1890. Over that period there were at least sixty-eight over-winterings, while thirteen returned early because they had either been successful in the fall fishery or had not been able to reach their winter anchorage. In total, they brought back the produce of more than 346 bowheads. This initiative, however, only served to slow rather than reverse the pace at which Scottish Northern whaling declined during the last half of the nineteenth century.

101 For details of the final phase of Scottish Arctic whaling, see Lubbock, Arctic Whalers, 410-453.