

A “Nantucket Camel Ride”

In the 1800s, Nantucket Island was the most famous whaling port in the world. Nantucket crews often criss-crossed the seas for years at a time harvesting whale oil for America.

But most of those extended voyages came up short of their final destination. The whalers couldn't get home because Nantucket harbor was too shallow to receive ships so weighted down with their oily cargo. Captains were forced to end their voyage in the deeper water just outside Nantucket harbor. The ship was lying at anchor—precious whale oil languishing in the hold—the crew within site of their homes and their waiting families.

Some anxious returning captains would offload the barrels of whale oil onto smaller boats or barges to be floated across the shallow harbor entrance. This required extra time and lots of labor.

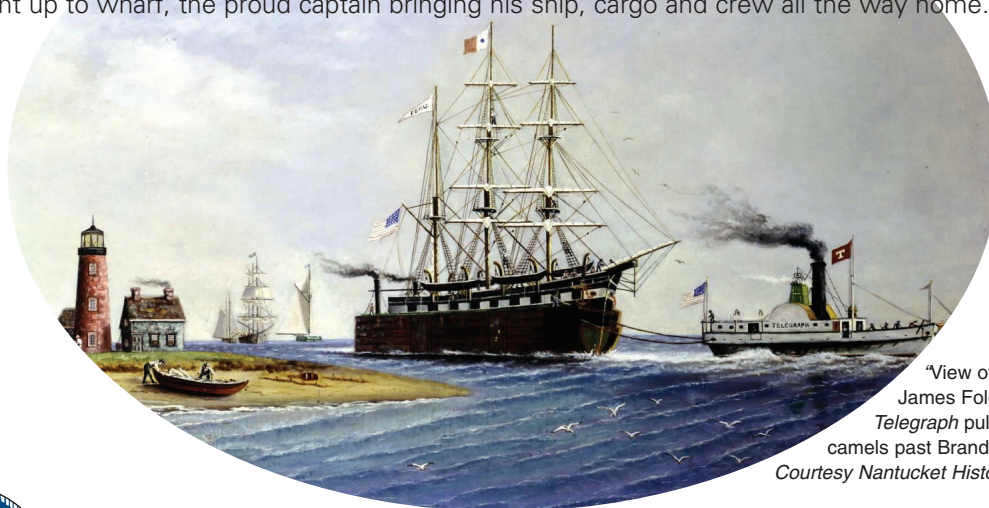
So, fifty Nantucket residents—those ingenious Yankees—brought their heads and money together to develop a more creative solution.

The “Nantucket camel” was a pair of hollow barges connected together by a set of chains. The barges were partially filled with seawater and positioned on either side of a returning whale ship. Chains, between the barges and running under the ship, were tightened and the seawater was pumped out of the “camels”. Now, “whaler, camel and all did not draw more than five feet of water.” This raised the ship high enough to get her into the harbor and up to the pier to offload the cargo, as well as her homesick sailors.

The first ship to ride “over the bar” on the camels was the 257-ton whaler, *Peru*, returning in 1839, from a successful, 3-1/2 year, voyage in the Pacific. Nantucket's own Joshua Coffin commanded the ship right up to wharf, the proud captain bringing his ship, cargo and crew all the way home.



The *Minmaneuth* aground off Nantucket
Courtesy of the Nantucket Historical Association



“View of Brandt Point” by
James Folger, Steamship
Telegraph pulling ship in
camels past Brandt Point
Courtesy Nantucket Historical Association



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