

TROUBLE



Museum staff encounter one obstacle after another in a two-year effort to acquire a skeleton of a sperm whale washed ashore at Wrightsville Beach in 1928.



This narrative is based on original documents and photographs in the archives of the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences.

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WASHED ASHORE

Standing in the exhibit hall at the State Museum in Raleigh, H. H. Brimley looked up with satisfaction at the skeleton of the sperm whale on exhibit. He and his assistant, Harry Davis, had spent the past six weeks putting together the 54-foot specimen. It had been a two-year struggle just to get the specimen to the Museum.

But, like the right whale skeleton hanging nearby, Brimley knew the sperm whale was a scientifically valuable specimen and would be a treat for Museum visitors. Although Mr. Davis conferred the name ‘Wrightsville’ on the whale, the skeleton was a never-ending source of trouble and that’s the name that stuck.

On Wednesday, April 5, 1928 Mr. Riley, a resident of Wrightsville Beach, stepped outside his beach-front home to get the morning paper. He returned to the house and told his wife there was a whale in their front yard. Mrs. Riley dismissed the notion and told her husband to stop drinking. Whaling used to be an important industry in that area, but whale bone and whale oil were no longer in demand and whales were a rare sight these days. However, there was a whale on the beach and the smell of the rotting body could not be ignored. Soon talk of a “sea monster” brought swarms of spectators to the Riley’s yard.

The mayor of Wrightsville Beach, at first pleased with the attention it brought to his little town, soon realized he had a problem on his hands. The county health officials demanded the whale be removed immediately. But how do you get rid of a 55-ton body, something as big as 26 large cars? Since a steam engine wouldn’t be able to budge it and the local fertilizer



10003698_twokids_MCPCL09.jpg



t10002636_MCPCL34_fence.jpg

factory didn’t want it, maybe, he thought, the State Museum in Raleigh would take it? Indeed, the director of the museum H. H. Brimley, was excited about the whale—only five skeletons of any whale species were hanging in American museums at that time. Yes, the specimen would be a valuable addition to the Museum. He and his assistant, Mr. Davis, would arrive at Wrightsville Beach first thing in the morning.

After spending most of the day Friday photographing and measuring the whale, Mr. Brimley determined it would take a week to remove the flesh and bury the bones on the beach (to allow nature to continue the process of flesh removal). This time-frame was unacceptable to the mayor and the health officials. The whale had been



10003703_whale_boy_MCPC114.jpg

dead four days when it washed up and had now been three days on shore. The carcass was oozing oil and blood creating a health risk. Furthermore it smelled, according to Brimley, like a “factory for unexpurgated skunks.” It must be removed immediately—tow it out to sea at least 20 miles, the health officials directed. The mayor immediately made arrangements with a local marine towing company to haul the whale out to sea no later than high tide Sunday evening.

Despite the directive to the towing company, Mr. Brimley was determined to acquire some part of this valuable specimen. He sent Mr. Davis back to Wrightsville Beach to obtain a part of the lower jaw bone. Mr. Davis arrived at Wrightsville on Sunday, April 8, a day of record-breaking numbers of spectators. Fifteen thousand people milled around the dead whale throughout the day. “Moving picture machines” and cameras whirled and clicked as Davis labored to saw through the bone of the whale’s lower jaw. When he completed the task, the 600-lb. jaw was left on the beach in the care of the chief of police.



10003684_sixmen_MCPC43.jpg



People on whale

Wrightsville Beach, N. C. April 1928
(10004332_peopleonwhale.jpg. Photographic print)



Approximately 50,000 people from at least six states came to see the dead whale.



Spectators view whale

Wrightsville Beach, N. C. April 1928.
(10002637_spectators2boys_2.jpg. Photographic print)



Whale in front of cottage

Wrightsville Beach, N. C. April 1928.
(10002639_BeachedVentral_MCPC27.jpg. Photographic print)





Spectators view whale

Wrightsville Beach, N. C. April 1928.
(10003699_BeachTailOn_MCP110.jpg. Photographic print)



Whale in front of houses

Wrightsville Beach, N. C. April 1928.
(10002640_MCPC30_Ventral_B.jpg. Photographic print)





Children and whale

Wrightsville Beach, N. C. April 1928.
(10003697_beachkids_MCPC106.jpg. Photographic print)

REMOVAL EFFORTS

The towing company arrived as scheduled on Sunday evening. A shoal prevented them from getting close to shore. They had to run a 1200-foot cable from the boats to the whale. On shore the towing crew wrapped cables around the base of the whale's tail. The boats began pulling. Several attempts at full throttle managed only to lift the tail. The sucking sands held the whale fast. The decision was made to try again the next day. More problems and storms delayed their efforts for three additional days.



The delay in removing the whale allowed Brimley, still intent on acquiring this valuable specimen, time to contact a fishing buddy who owned a mile of uninhabited property on Topsail Beach. His friend, Mr. Empie, agreed to loan his property for the whale project. The Museum would get the entire whale. Brimley hastily contacted the Mayor who agreed to the plan—20 miles out to sea or 20 miles north made no difference to him.

On Friday the 13th, nine days after the whale washed ashore, the towing crew tried again, this time digging a tunnel under the whale and wrapping the cable several times around the circumference of the whale. In this way, the whale would be rolled off the beach instead of dragged. Mid-morning, the cables were attached to the tugboats. The boats strained for an hour before the body was finally dislodged from the sands. After several more hours the whale was slowly rolled into the water. At 2:30 the whale was on its way to Topsail Island--all except for the lower jaw.

Mr. Davis had returned to Wrightsville on Wednesday the 11th (two days prior) with a large truck to cart off the lower jaw. Davis could not find the jaw bone. The previous night, a storm so strong it had washed the whale 60 feet further up the beach may have taken the jaw out to sea or buried it in the sand. However a sperm whale's teeth are made of ivory and some speculate foul play.

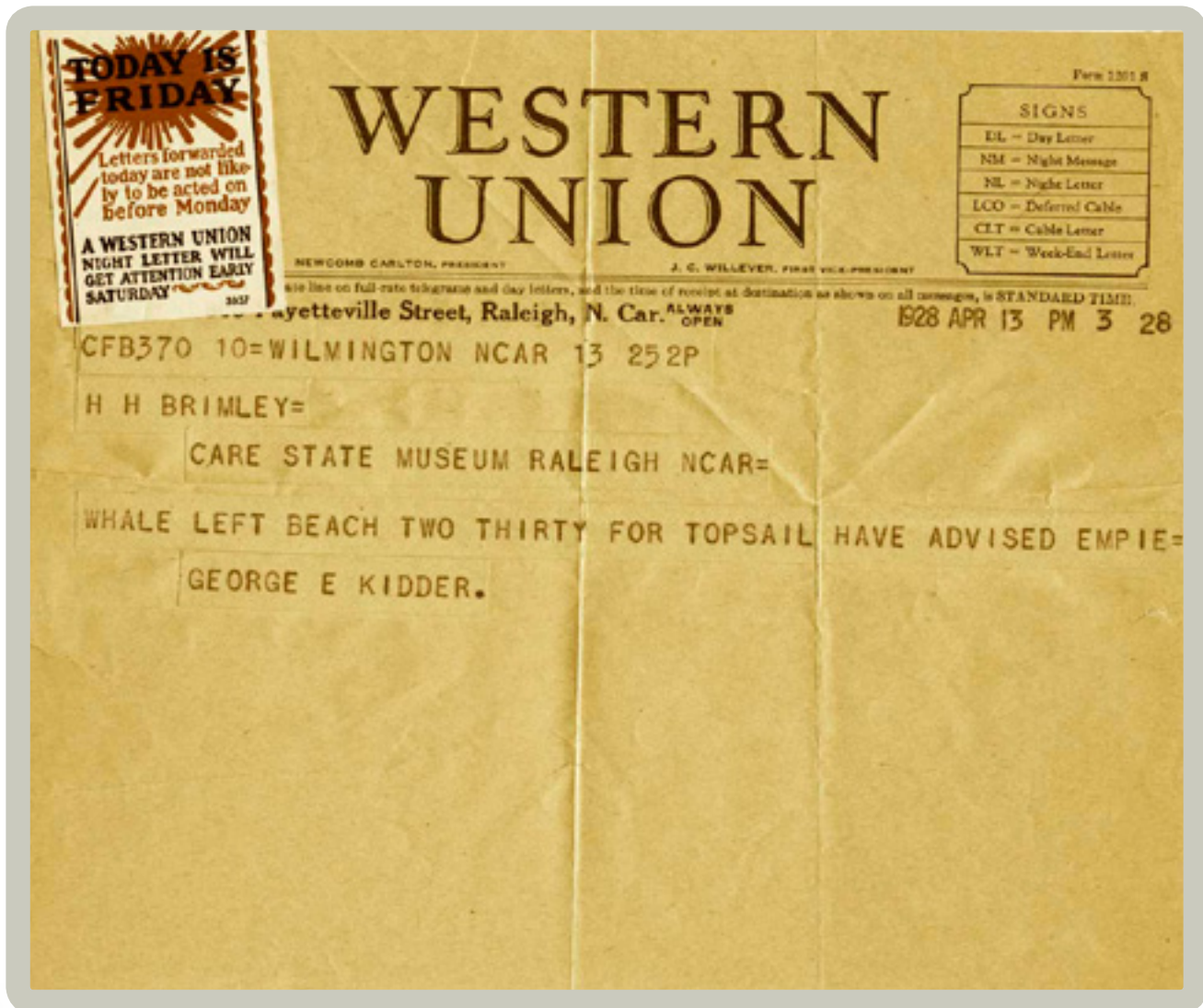
Members of the Stone Towing company wrap cables around the dead sperm whale. The cables were attached to tugboats “No.6” and “Southport” waiting offshore.



Wrapping tow ropes around
the whale

Wrightsville Beach, N. C. April 1928.
(10003661_MCPC46_towing.jpg. Photographic print)

The mayor of Wrightsville Beach informs H. H. Brimley that the whale is on its way to Mr. Empie's property on Topsail Island.



Telegram from Mayor George Kidder to H. H. Brimley

April 13, 1928.
(10002618_telegram_L01.jpg. Telegram)

The lower jaw of a sperm whale has 50-60 conical teeth. When the whale's mouth is closed, the teeth fit into sockets in the upper jaw (there are no teeth in the upper jaw).



Sperm whale lower jaw,
showing teeth

Wrightsville Beach, N. C. April 1928
(10003680_MCPC39_jawteeth.jpg. Photographic print)



Whale on beach

Wrightsville Beach, N. C. April 1928
(10003700_openmouth_MCPC111.jpg. Photographic print)



AT TOPSAIL ISLAND

Because the tugboats were commissioned only to take the whale to sea, Mr. Brimley hired a Topsail resident, Cpt. Ramp Smith, to transfer the whale from the tugboats to shore. The whale would prove to be trouble once again. The towing company set the whale loose a mile beyond the point indicated. By the time Cpt. Smith reached the whale, the weather had changed. Strong winds and rough seas tossed his little gasoline boat



about, nearly drowning its occupant. As Cpt. Smith struggled to attach a rope to the whale, a 110-foot Coast Guard ‘rum-chaser’ spotted the strange doings and rushed in thinking Smith was dragging for a cache of illegally stored rum. However, the cutter ended up providing valuable assistance. The men struggled together for five hours before finally securing the whale to shore.

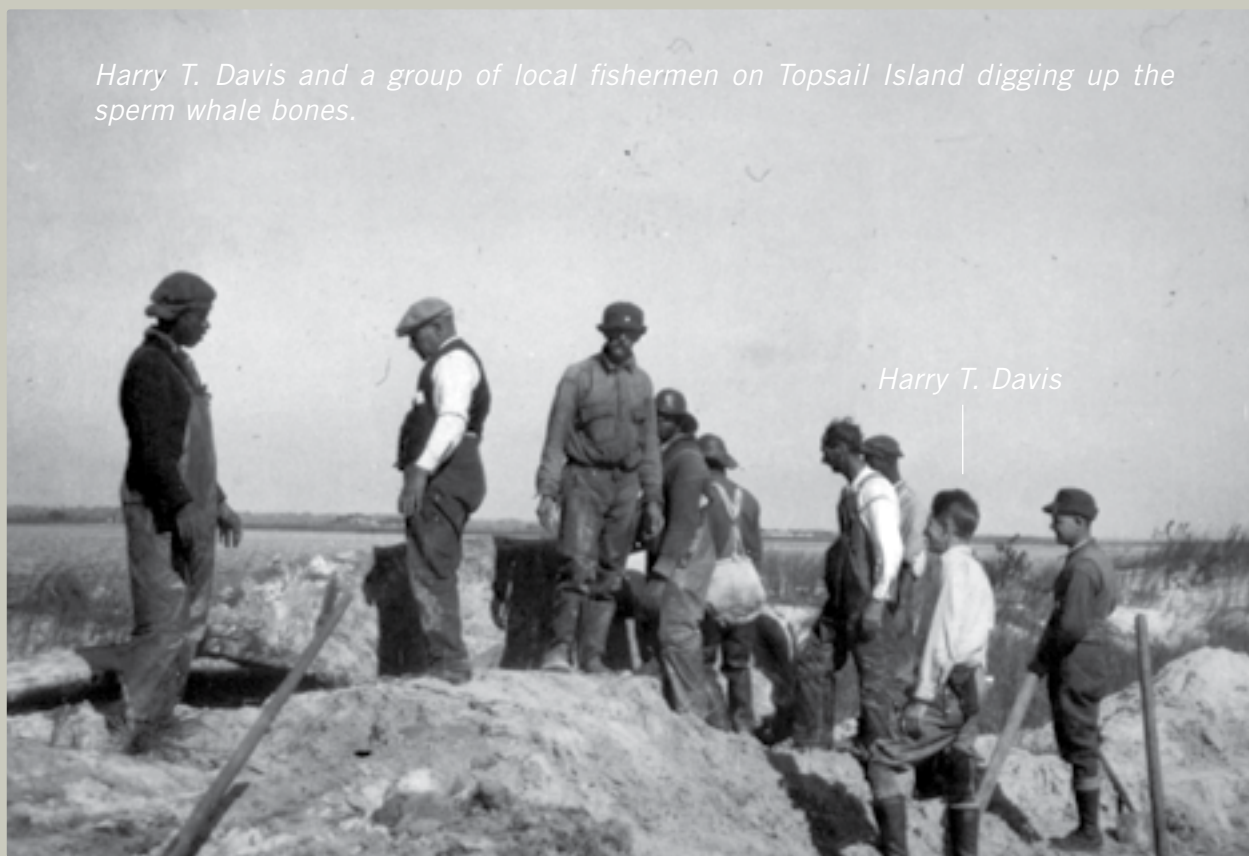
A few days later Mr. Davis arrived at Topsail to begin the ‘cutting-in’ process, but he did not see the whale on shore. He spotted it a half-mile out in the inlet, stuck on a shoal. Someone had cut the holding line during the night in an effort to send the whale out to sea. Davis thought perhaps someone needed some rope or just maybe someone had a grudge against the project. Fortunately for the museum, the whale was secure on the shoal. With no means of dragging the whale back to land, Davis had to process the whale while standing hip deep in water. With the help of several local fishermen Davis built a platform nine feet high next to the whale. Working only at low tide, the crew used broad axes and spades to cut off the flesh. The bones were carried to shore a few at a time in small boats and buried in the sand. The work was completed on April 27th, two weeks after the whale was beached at Topsail.

During the cutting-in process, Davis searched approximately a half-mile of intestine looking for ambergris, sometimes called “floating gold”. Ambergris is a rare substance which was worth \$80 an ounce in the perfume industry. Davis also saved 80 gallons of spermaceti oil from the head of the whale, a valuable material used in the making of quality candles. Unfortunately there was no ambergris and the oil was rancid and not worth selling. Davis also searched for the cause of death of the whale but found only a 6-inch slit in the back of the whale presumably from a whaler’s lance.

TOPSAIL RESIDENTS REACT TO WHALE IN AN UNNEIGHBORLY FASHION:

Cutting the whale loose was one of many attempts by Topsail residents to cause trouble. During the two weeks it took to process and bury the whale bones residents devised ways to profit from the whale. Some complained the chunks of whale meat thrown in the water caused poor fishing and they wanted restitution from the State. Some sought to get money by offering to produce the missing jaw if a reward was offered. Residents also wrote to the health department and their congressman to complain. An unsigned letter given to the press expressed strong resentment of “the parking of a uzed [sic] whale”. Residents, the letter further explained, “would suffer if the intent of beaching the Jonah at Topsail is carried out. It's poor policy to throw your trash in your neighbor's backyard.” The complaints were passed on to Mr. Brimley who did not give in to these threats. He did not offer a reward for the jaw and furthermore he claimed that if anything the whale flesh in the water would enhance fishing.

Harry T. Davis and a group of local fishermen on Topsail Island digging up the sperm whale bones.



Excavating whale bones

Topsail Island, N. C. April 1928
(10003725_digging up.jpg. Photographic print)



Excavating whale bones

Topsail Island, N. C. April 1928
(10004327_digging up whale.jpg. Photographic print)

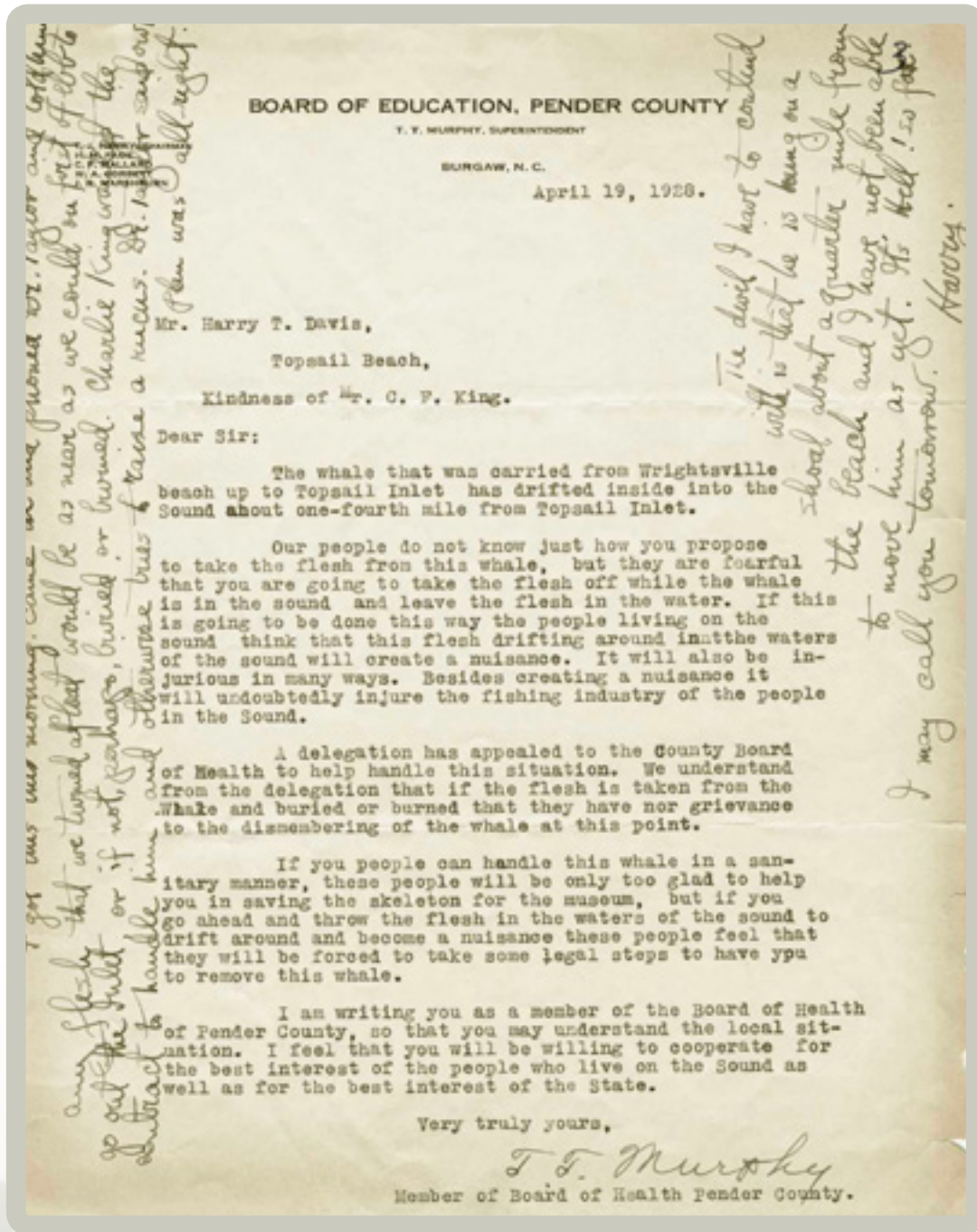




Excavating whale bones

Topsail Island, N. C. April 1928
(10003662_MCPC119_excavate.jpg. Photographic print)

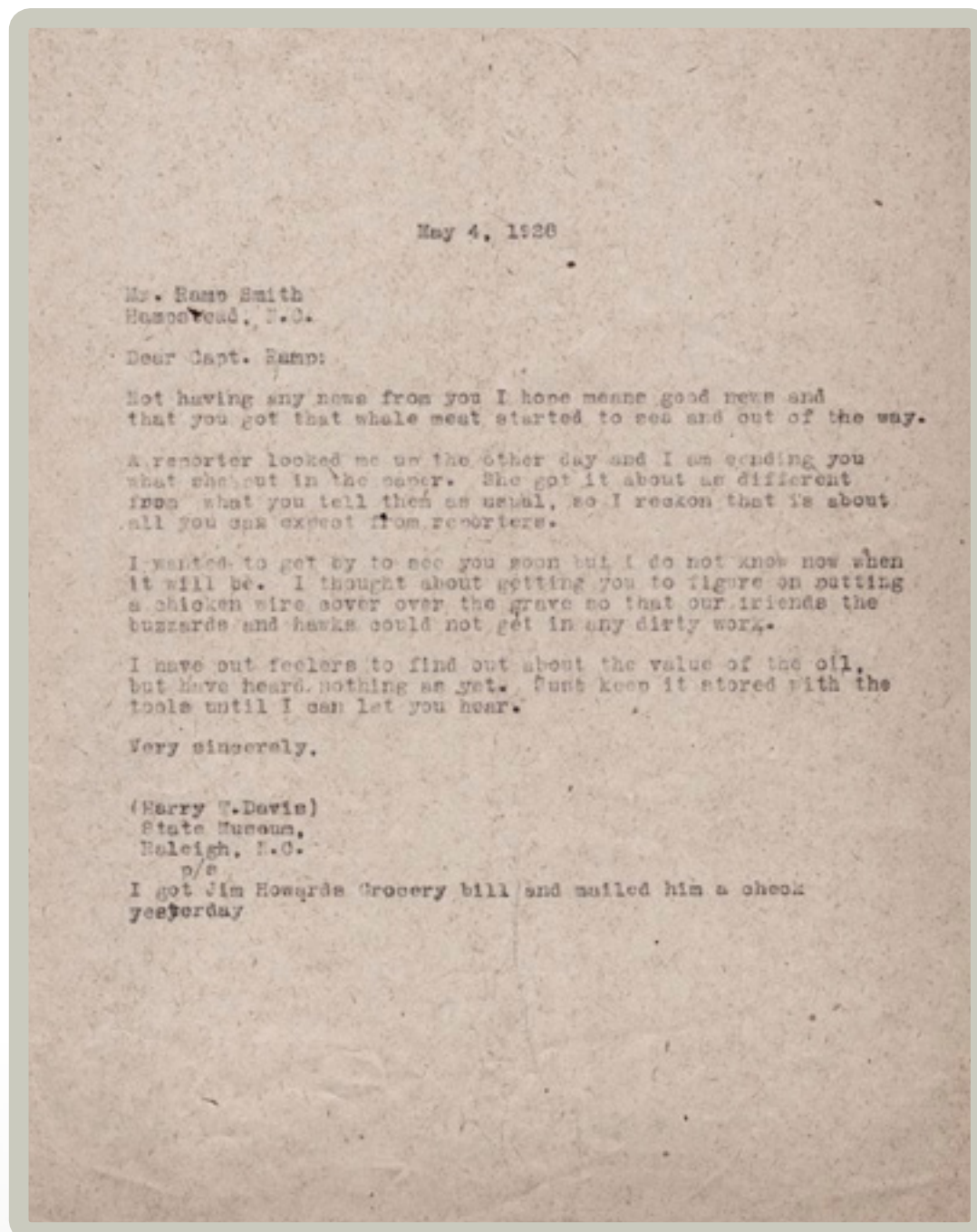
The Board of health informs Harry Davis that the residents of Topsail Beach are complaining about the whale flesh being dumped in the inlet. Davis handwrites a note to Brimley on the letter explaining that Charlie King wanted the contract to handle the whale but didn't get it and is now trying to cause trouble. He further describes the difficulty of dealing with the whale and ends with an exasperated comment: "It's Hell! So far". Davis assures Brimley he plans to throw out the flesh only at high tide so it will float out to sea.



Letter from T. T. Murphy to Mr. Davis

April 19, 1928
(10002620_Letter3_Murphy.jpg. Letter)

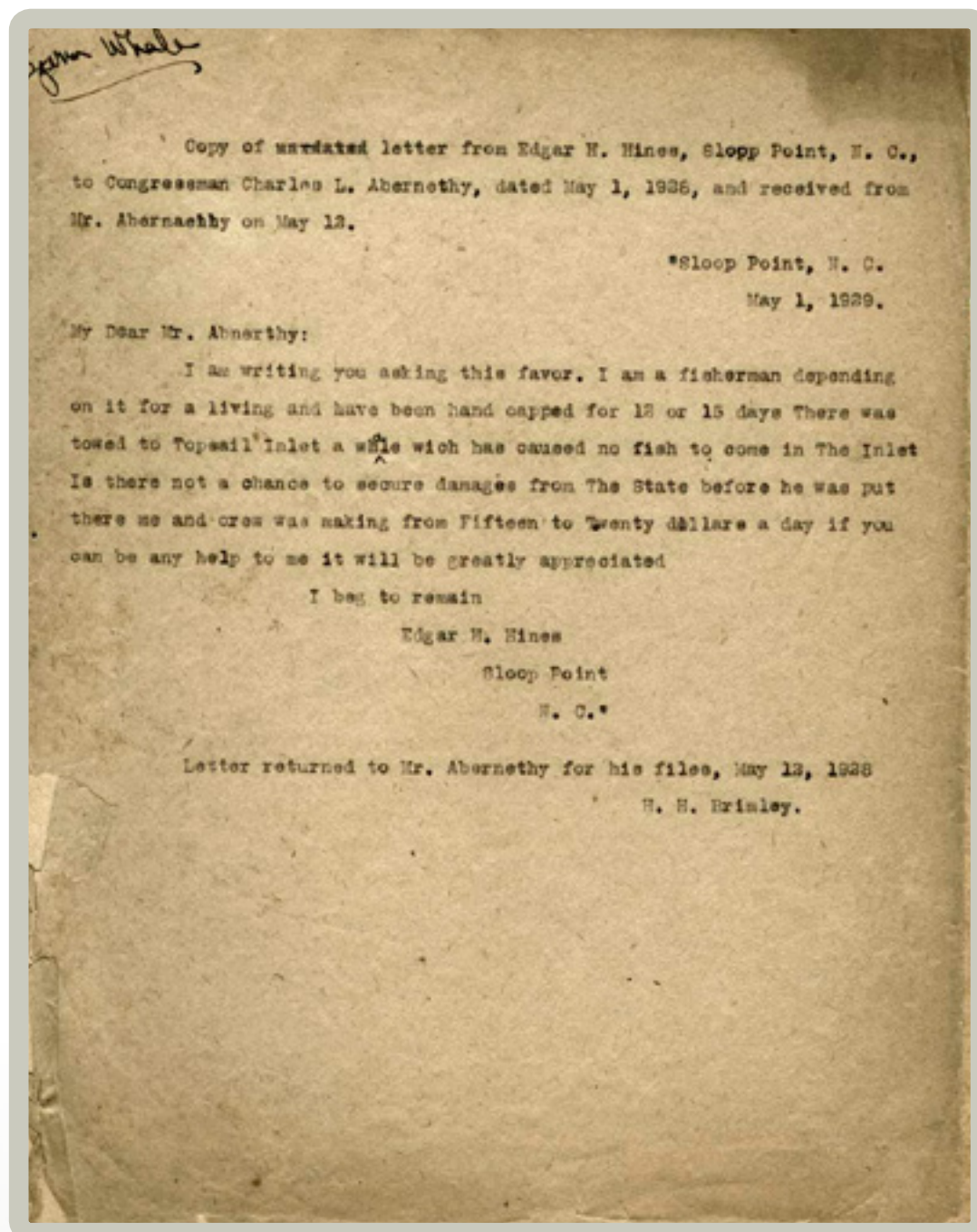
Mr. Davis asks Cpt. Smith to cover the grave with chicken wire so the hawks and buzzards can't get to it.



Letter from Mr. Davis to Mr.
Ramp Smith

May 4, 1928
(10002619_Letter7_Smith.jpg. Letter)

Mr. Brimley has copied (by typing) a letter from a fisherman, Edgar Hines, who is seeking damages from the state of \$15 to \$20 because the whale has caused "no fish to come in the inlet".

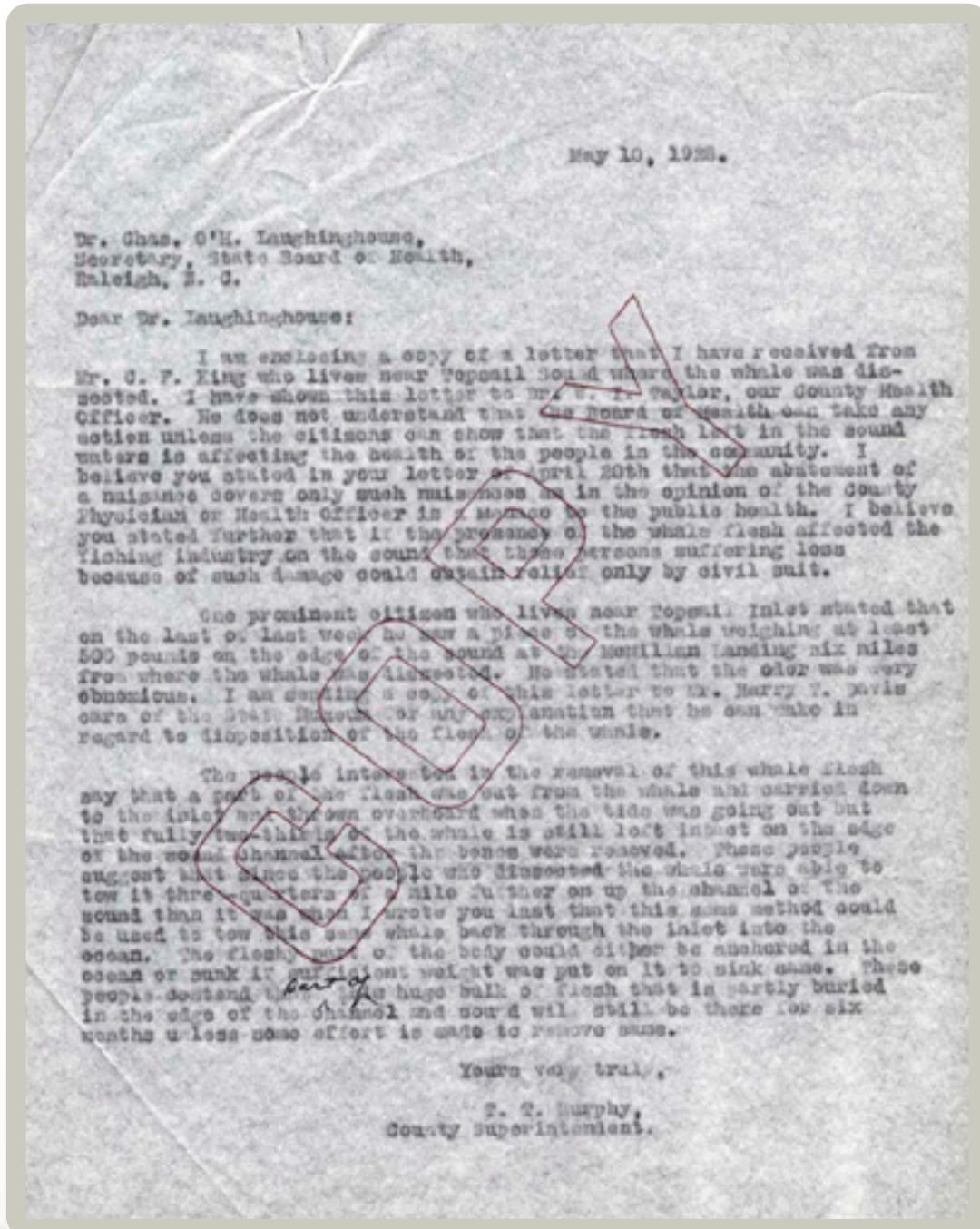


Letter from Edgar H. Hines
to Mr. Abnerthy

May 1, 1929

(10002624_Letter47_Hines.jpg. Letter)

The superintendent of Pender County, T. T. Murphy, is writing to a member of the State Board of Health, Charles Laughinghouse. He writes that C. F. King does not understand that the Board can only take action when the citizens can prove that the whale flesh left in the sound is affecting the health of the residents and, that persons complaining of the loss of fishing can only obtain damages through a civil suit.

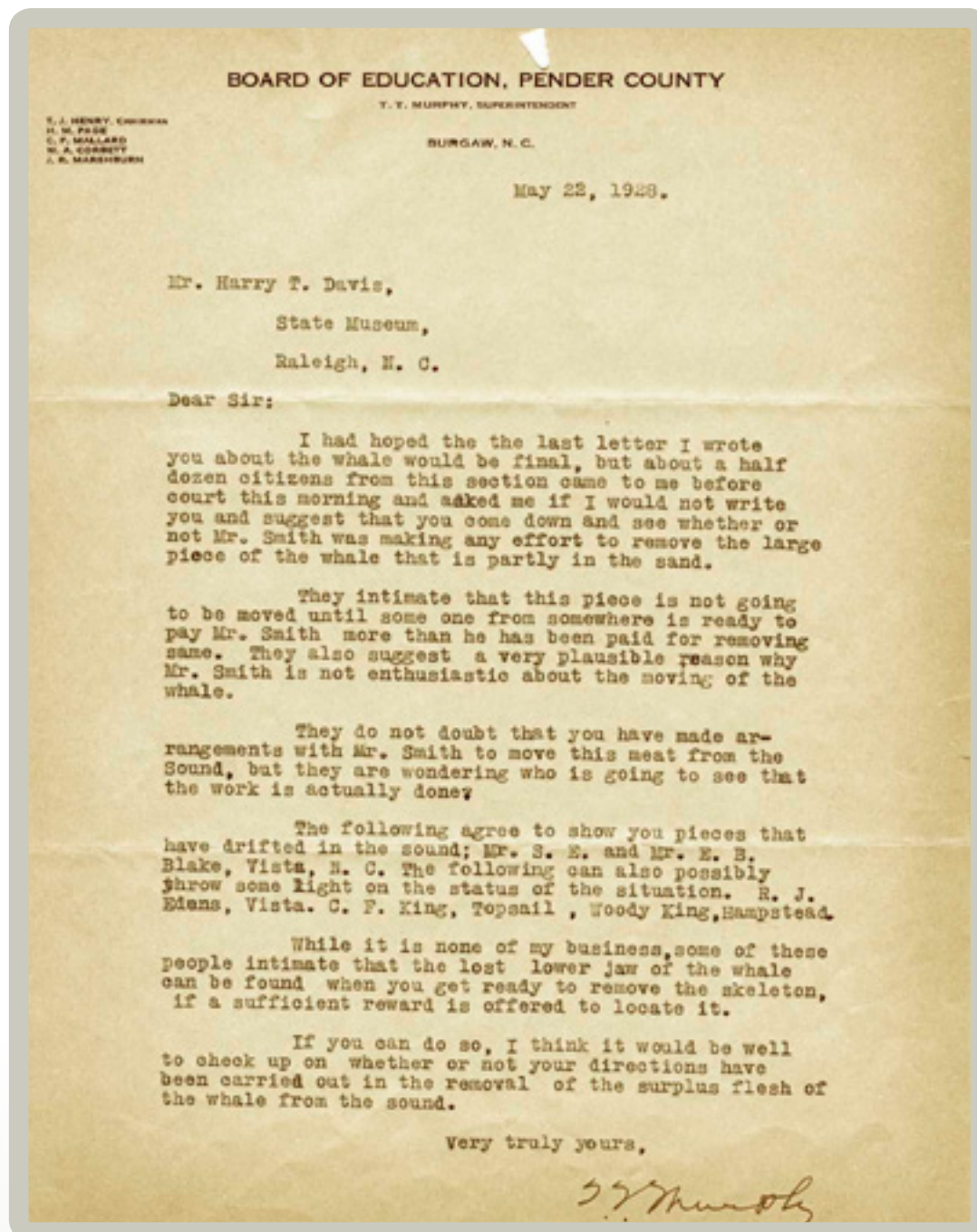


Letter from T. T. Murphy to
Charles Laughinghouse

May 10, 1928

(100002621_Letter11_Murphy.jpg. Letter)

Mr. Murphy informs Mr. Davis he hears rumors that people can produce the whale's jaw if a sufficient reward is offered.

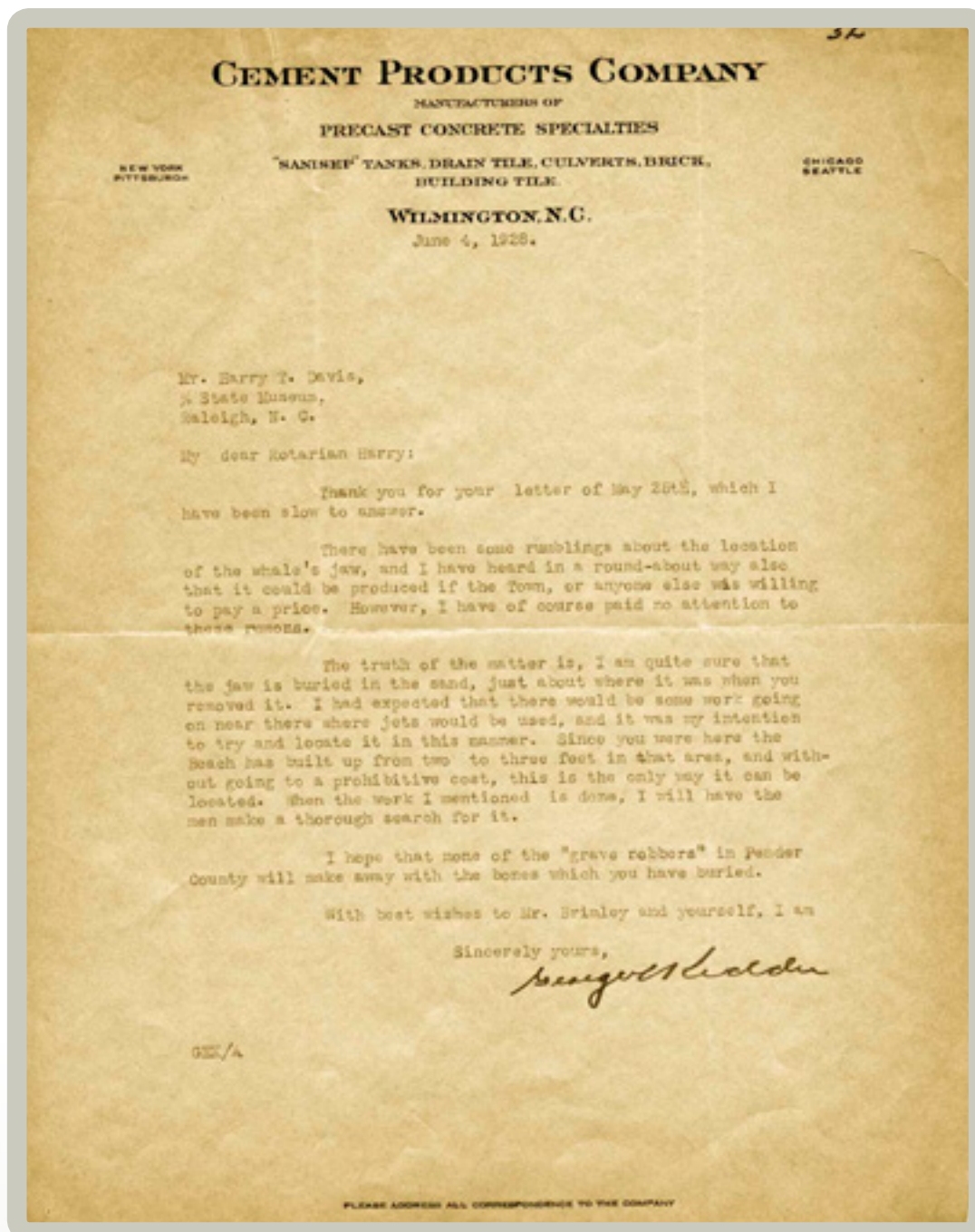


Letter from T. T. Murphy to
Harry Davis

May 22, 1929

(10002622_Letter22_BoardEd.jpg. Letter)

Mr. Kidder hears rumors that people can produce the whale's lower jaw, but the mayor strongly believes the jaw is buried in the sand.

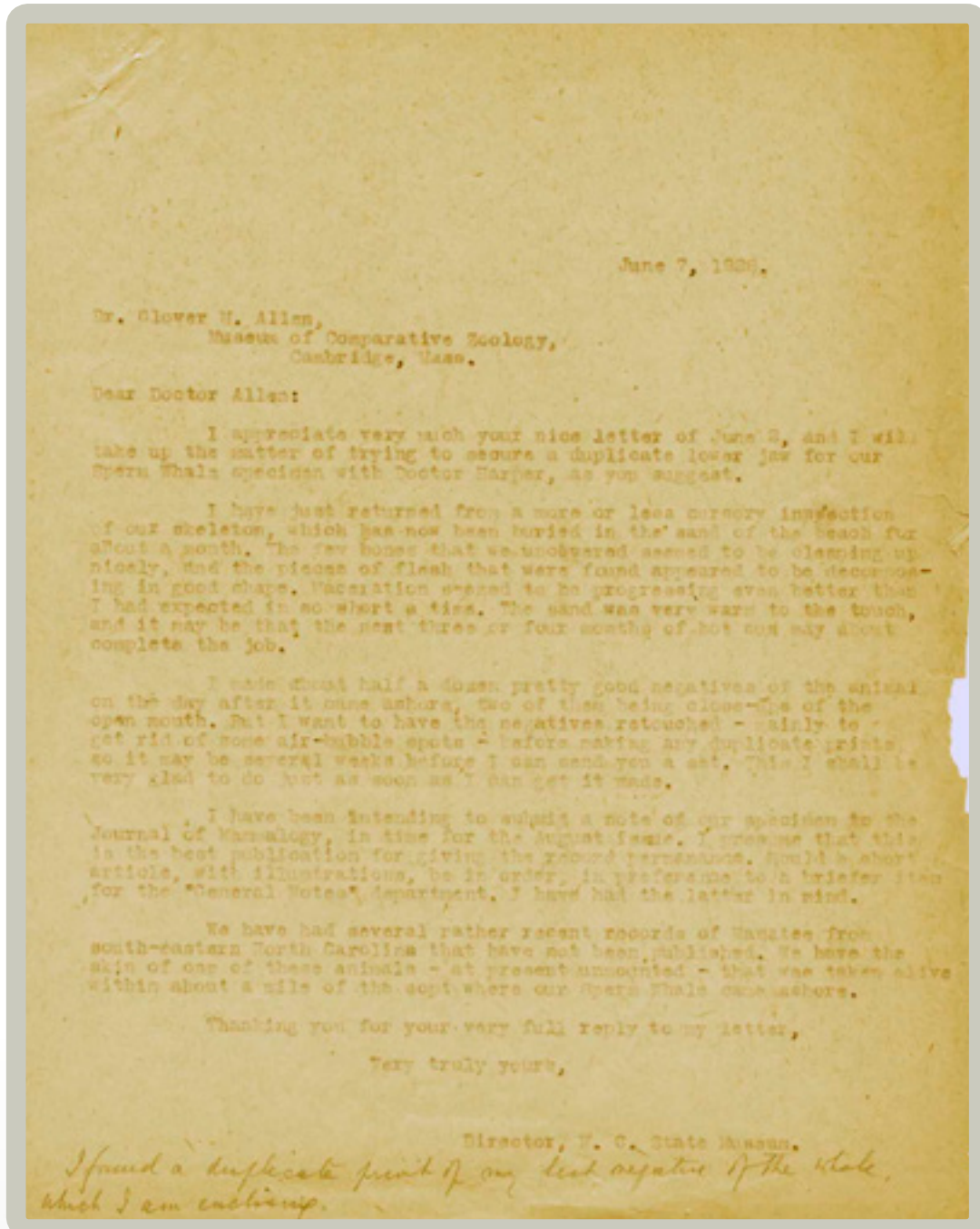


Letter from George Kidder to Harry Davis

June 4, 1928

(10002625_Letter32_cement.jpg. Letter)

H. H. Brimley describes the condition of the bones that have been buried in the sand to Glover M. Allen of the Museum of Comparative Zoology in Cambridge, Massachusetts.



Letter from H. H. Brimley to
Glover M. Allen

June 7, 1928

(10002628_Letter33_Allen.jpg. Letter)

W. R. Smith was hired to make sure the whale flesh went out to sea. He is upset about the complaints of the whale flesh still in the Sound. He writes to Mr. Davis that he is returning the payment for his work because he doesn't have "a name of being a thief" and "if your friends at Topsail have made a mistake at any time, and I justly earned the fourteen dollars, you can return it."

Hampstead, N.C.
Oct. 1, 1928.
Mr. Harry T. Davis,
Raleigh, N.C.
Dear Sir,
Your letter of today.
Will say, that I did
tow the head of the
whale in the inlet
and turned it adrift
as I told you, and
that is the last I have
heard of it until now.
If it is near King's
Landing or has been
at any time it certainly
came back from sea.
I don't know who
gave you this report,

-2-
but would thank you
for the information.
So far as the fourteen
dollars is concerned,
I made enough trips
down there to amount
to lots more, which you
know, as you made
one of them with
me. And furthermore
you will find your
check enclosed. And
if you feel like your
friends at Topsail
have made a mistake
at any time, and I
justly earned the
fourteen dollars, you
can return it. But

-3-
I would thank you
very much for a copy
of this report. Because
I haven't got a name
of being a thief.
And Oblige,
W. R. Smith.

Transcription of Letter

Hampstead, N.C.
Oct. 1, 1928.
Mr. Harry T. Davis,
Raleigh, N.C.

Dear Sir,-

Your letter of today. Will say, that I did tow the head of the whale in the inlet and turned it adrift as I told you, and that is the last I have heard of it until now. If it is near King's Landing or has been at any time it certainly came back from sea.

I don't know who gave you this report, but would thank you for the information. So far as the fourteen dollars is con-cerned, I make enough trips down there to amount to lots more, which you know, as you made one of them with me. And further-more you will find your check enclosed. And if you feel like your friends at Topsail have made a mistake at any time, and I justly earned the fourteen dollars, you can return it. But I would thank you very much for a copy of this report. Because I haven't got a name of being a thief [sic].

And oblige,
W.R. Smith.

Letter from W. R. Smith to
Harry Davis

October 1, 1928
(10002623_Letter40_Smith.jpg. Letter)

This letter was written a year after the whale washed ashore. Mr. Marine says he can find the whale jaw because he measured and marked the spot where the whale lay.

Marines N.C.
April 16 1929
Mr. Brimley
Dear frind
I have bin thinking
I would rite you for
sum time. and ask
you if you could
find the whales under
jaw that was cut off
at wrightsville beach
it was left there when
the whale was carried
off if it has not bin
carried off buy you or
sum of your men

I m right the spot
where it was burried
under this whale
for I measured and
marked the spot
be fore the whale left
the beach and I can
find it just as soon as
I go there. now if you
are going to want this
to go with the ballance
of the frame let me
hear from you and
I will go with you for
it if you will pay me
for my time while I go

if I was there I would
sho you where it was
left but I am at home
and will not be over
there this Spring like
I was last Spring.
hoping to hear from you
soon I am your truly
Capt W W Marine

Transcription of Letter

Marines N. C.
April 16 1929
Mr. Brimley

Dear frind [friend] I have bin thinking I would rite you for sum time and ask you if you ever did find the whales under jaw that was cut off at wrightsville beach N.C. it was left there when the whale was carried off. if it has not bin carried off buy you or sum of your men I [know] right the spot where it was burried under this whale for I measured and marked the spot be fore the whale left the beach and I can find it just as soon as I go there. now if you are going to want this to go with the ballance of the frame let me hear from you and I will go with you for it. if you will pay me for my time while I go. if I was there I would sho you where it was left but I am at home and will not be over there this Spring like I was last Spring.
hoping to hear from you soon. I am your truly
Capt W W Marine

Letter from W. W. Marine to
H. H. Brimley

April 16, 1929
(10002626_Letter42_Marine.jpg. Letter)

TO THE MUSEUM

Six and a half months after burying the whale bones, Mr. Davis returned to Topsail with two of the biggest trucks he could find at the highway department. He arrived at the burial site at 5 a.m., where he hired seven local fishermen to help him dig up the three tons of bones. After several hours of digging, they ferried the bones across the sound and loaded them into the trucks. When they tried to leave, one of the trucks got stuck in the sand. Davis needed a chain to pull the truck out but the local highway department office did not have any, so Davis drove an hour south to Wilmington. On his return, he attached the chain to the trucks, but the chain broke, necessitating a second trip to Wilmington. The new chain worked; the trucks were pulled out of the sand and eventually the bones were on their way. Mr. Davis drove straight to the State Fairgrounds in west Raleigh where Mr. Brimley had built a box to house the bones. The 8 x 25 foot box was filled with four inches of clean sand. The upper jaw bones, which required six able-bodied men to lift, were put in first followed by the skull. More sand was poured in and the remaining bones were placed in the box. The sand was kept wet during the next ten months until the bones had to be removed before the State Fair in October.

Although not completely cleaned the bones were dug up and taken to the museum. The large bones were placed on the ground in the alley next to the museum and the smaller ones were put on the rooftop of the boiler building where the air, rain, and sunshine would help remove the remaining grease from the bones.

Only two months later, the threat of freezing temperatures caused museum staff to hurriedly bring the bones inside the museum. Because the bones were still greasy, they were scrubbed with a weak solution of lye and ammonia, hosed down and left to dry for six weeks.





Taking the bones across
the sound

Near Topsail, N. C. 1928
(10004335_skull rowboat.jpg. Photographic print)

The whale bones were placed in a large box (foreground object). The box was filled with sand and kept wet to clean the bones of remaining flesh and grease.



Wooden crate at fairgrounds

H. H. Brimley, Raleigh, N. C. 1928
(10003663_BoxGrave_p9.jpg. Photographic print)

This small building in the alley off Salisbury Street currently houses the HVAC for the Agriculture building. It was formerly a storage building and then a taxidermy shop for the State Museum. The bones of the sperm whale were placed next to and on top of this building.



HVAC building in alley

Margaret Cotrufo, 2007

(D1000196c_alley building_C68m.jpg. Digital photograph)

Mr. Davis asks a dealer whether the spermaceti oil from the whale has any value and where could it be sold. (Spermaceti oil is found in the huge cavity of the “nose” of the whale. The oil was highly prized for candles. It burned cleanly, brightly and without odor. The oil from Trouble was too rancid to be of value. Davis also searched unsuccessfully through a half a mile of the whale’s intestines looking for ambergris, a secretion that is used as a fixative in high grade perfumes and sold for \$80 a pound.)

May 26, 1928

H.J.Baker & Bro.,
271 Madison Ave.,
New York.

Dear Sirs:

In recently skeletonizing a 45 foot sperm whale for the Museum here I dipped about 80 gallons of spermaceti from his head case.

I have been referred to you as a dealer who may be able to tell me whether this spermaceti has any value, where it can be sold, etc.

I shall appreciate any information you can supply me on this subject.

Yours very truly,

(Harry T. Davis)
State Museum,
Raleigh, N.C.

Letter from Harry Davis to
H. J. Baker & Bro

May 26, 1928

(10002627_Letter27_spermaceti.jpg. Letter)

PUTTING THE BONES TOGETHER

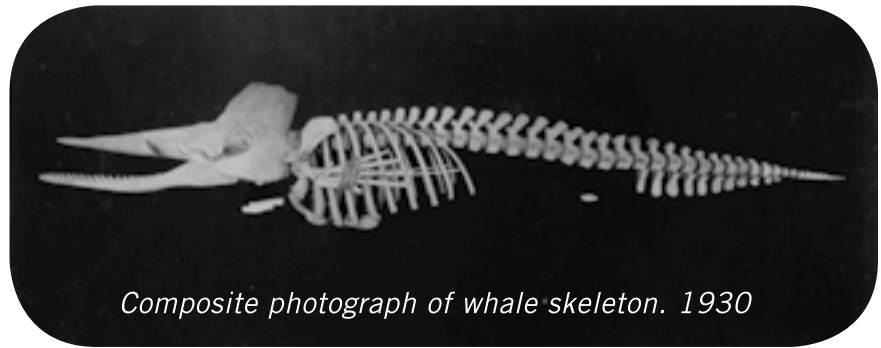
It was now December 1929, a year and 9 months since the whale washed ashore. The bones—more than 100—were clean and dry and ready to be articulated. Mr. Brimley hired a carpenter/blacksmith to assist him. Brimley ordered

carriage bolts ranging from 2 inches to 20 inches long and drill bits up to one inch in diameter. He already had an anvil for fashioning iron straps and a 2-ton chain hoist, along with several sets of block and tackle.

The most complex part of the skeleton was the skull, which was in pieces and presented problems due to warping and shrinkage. To assemble the skull, the pieces were loosely joined together with bolts. Every few days Mr. Brimley would tighten the bolts a little bit until the bones assumed an approximately correct relationship with each other. With the skull complete, the next step was to add the maxillaries, or upper jawbones. The holes drilled to attach the bones to the skull were the longest and most difficult to drill. The bones were so hard the drill bits bent in the effort and in some cases the hole had to be started with a chisel. The fitting of the two upper jawbones was finished in four days.

Next, Brimley cut and shaped blocks of white pine to place between the vertebrae as a substitute for cartilage. The long column of vertebrae was attached to the skull and reinforced with steel rods and wire meshing which was covered with papier mâché to hide the metal. Finally, the ribs, scapula (shoulder blades), sternum (breastbone), and flipper bones were added.

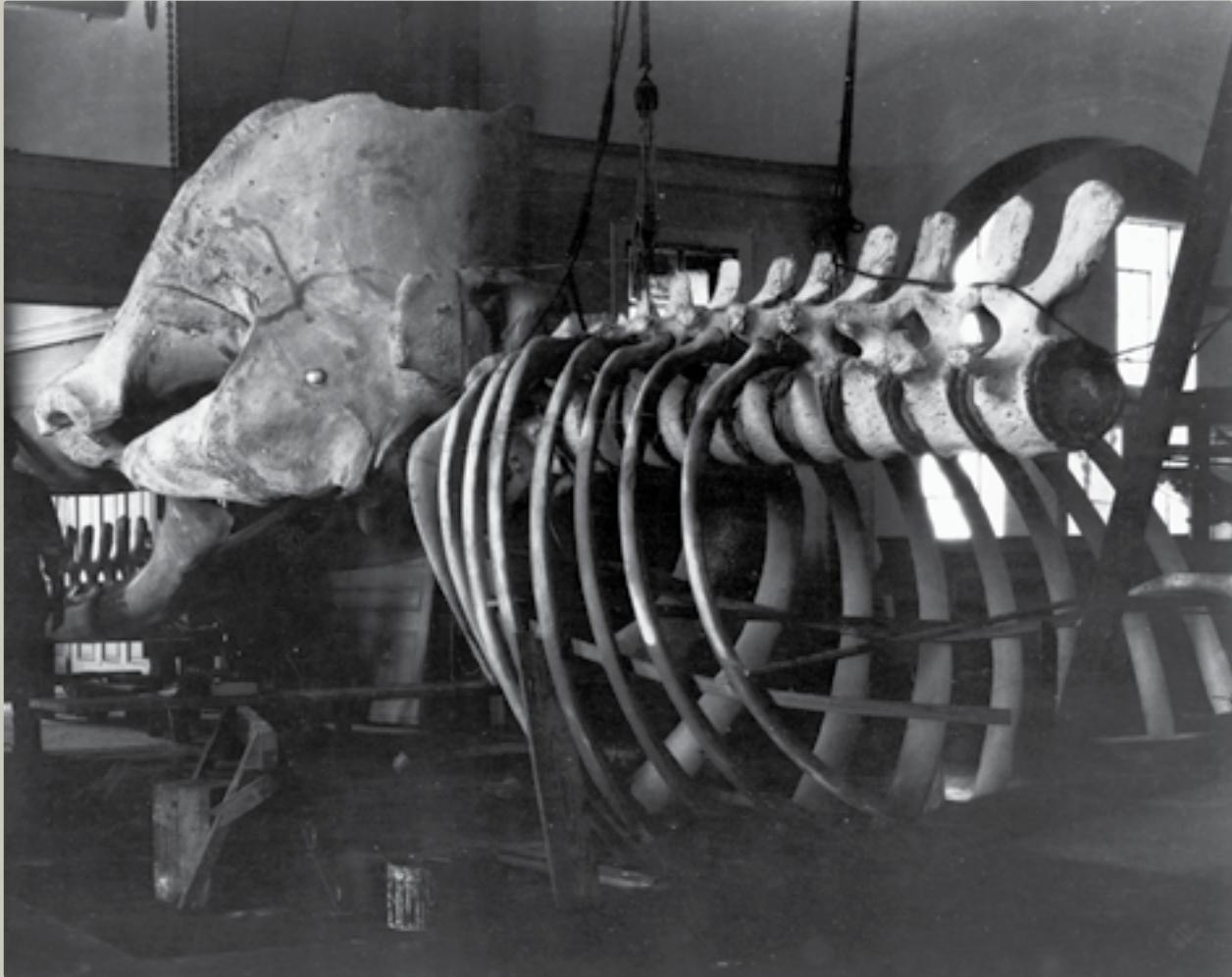
The mounting of the skeleton took about six weeks; half that time devoted to the skull. The finishing touch was to make new teeth for the lower jaw. The lost lower jaw had been replaced by one purchased from Dr. Robert Cushman Murphy, a curator at the American Museum of Natural History, who happened to own a jaw of just the right size. Since the new jaw came with only two teeth, Mr. Brimley fashioned 42 fake teeth out of dental plaster mixed with yellow ochre and reinforced with burlap. After soaking the fake teeth in boiled linseed oil, he coated them with a thin paste of turpentine and beeswax.



Composite photograph of whale skeleton. 1930

(10003669_p18_wholeskeleton.jpg)

The bones of the atlas (first vertebra) were bolted in place; the other six cervical (neck) vertebrae were naturally fused. The dorsal and lumbar (back) sections have two rods running through the center of the vertebrae and the caudal (tail) section has one rod. Each section is doweled and tied to its neighbor. Blocks of white pine of various thickness were cut to fill the spaces originally occupied by the cushions of fibrous tissue.



Whale skeleton at the museum

H. H. Brimley, 1930

(10003668_halfskeleton_p17.jpg. Photographic print)

Sperm whales routinely dive more than two miles below the ocean surface to hunt for giant squid. If they were like humans, the water pressure would crush the rib cage. But the rib cage of the sperm whale is flexible, having fewer ribs joined directly to the sternum and more “floating” ribs, which are united only to the preceding rib by cartilage. The costal cartilages are not ossified, hence they are flexible and fold under pressure, instead of breaking.



Whale rib cage

H. H. Brimley, 1930
(10003667_p15_ribs.jpg. Photographic print)



Skull of the whale on sawhorses

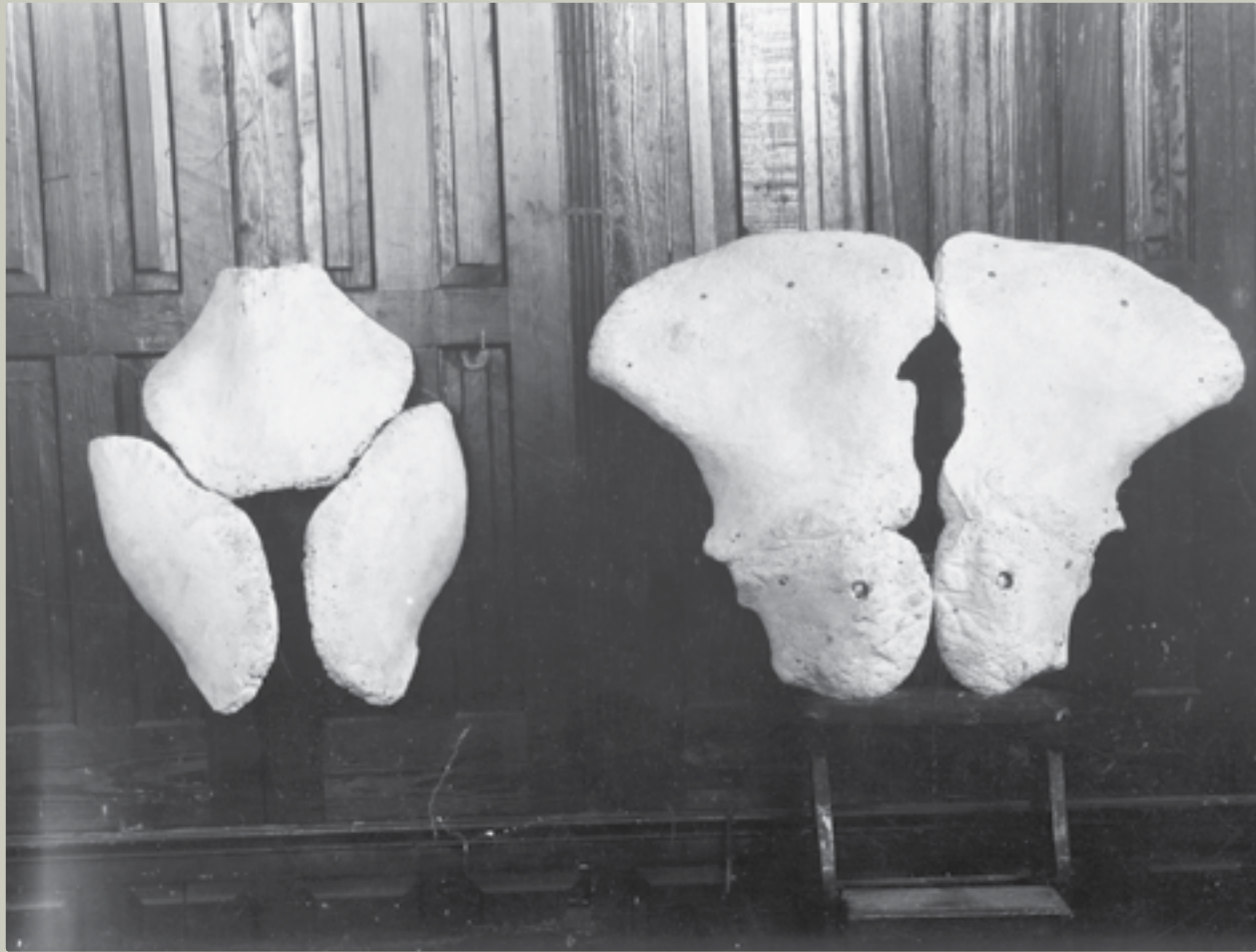
H. H. Brimley, 1930
(10003665_p14.jpg. Photographic print)



Skull attached to hoist, ready to be lifted to the ceiling.

H. H. Brimley, 1930
(10003666_skullhoist_p16.jpg. Photographic print)

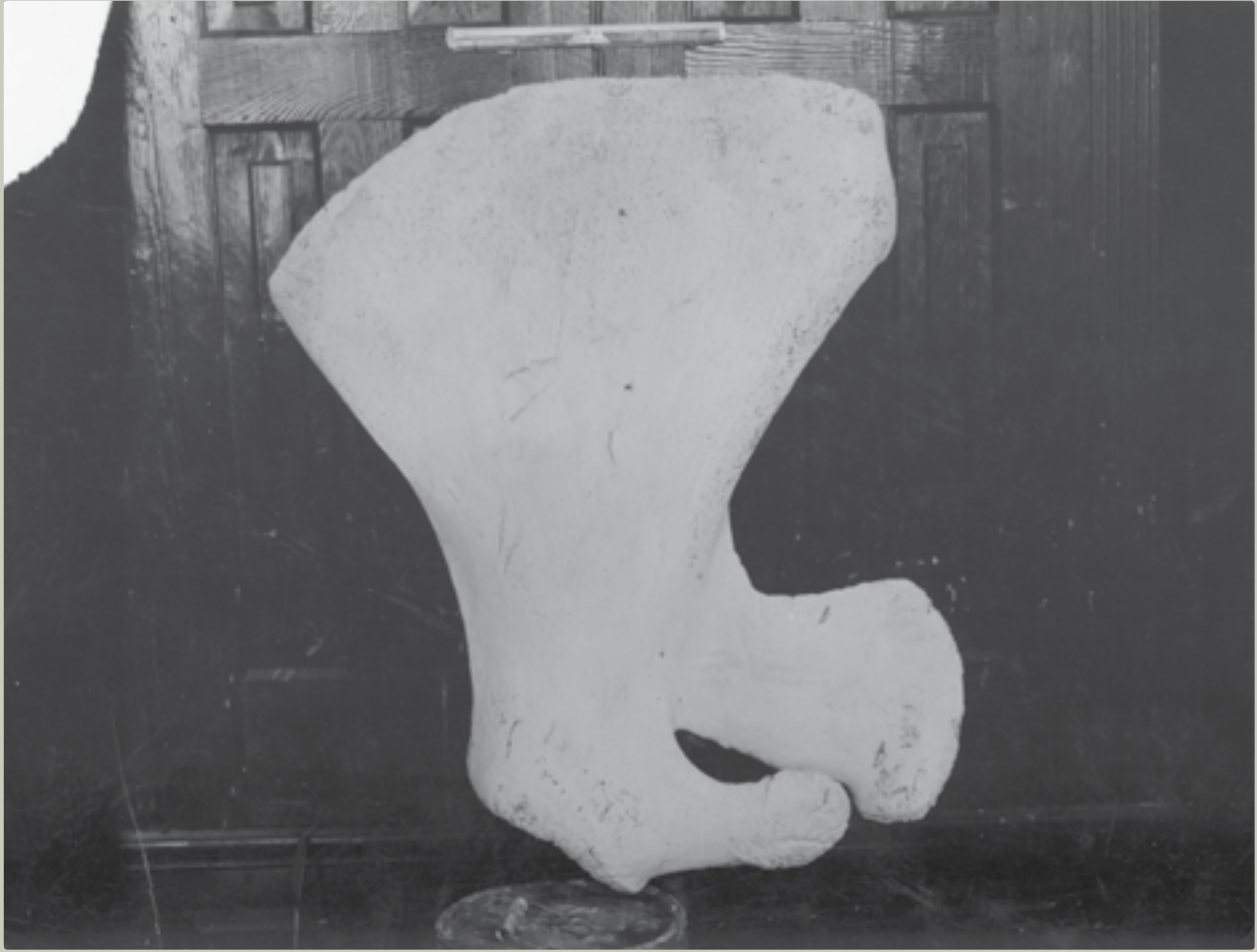
The sternum, picture on the right, is a large flat bone on the underside of the whale where the ribs are connected. It is equivalent to our sternum which is the flat bone of the chest that covers the heart. The whale's hyoid bones are situated between the base of the tongue and the larynx. They support the tongue and the larynx. Humans also have a hyoid bone.



Three hyoid bones and two sternum bones.

H. H. Brimley, 1930
(10003688_MCPC70_sternum.jpg. Photographic print)

The scapula is the shoulder blade. Humans also have this bone.



Scapula

H. H. Brimley, 1929
(10003687_MCPC69_scapula.jpg. Photographic print)

H.H. Brimley, director of the museum, on a ladder installing fake teeth in the lower jaw of the sperm whale



Brimley installs fake teeth

1930

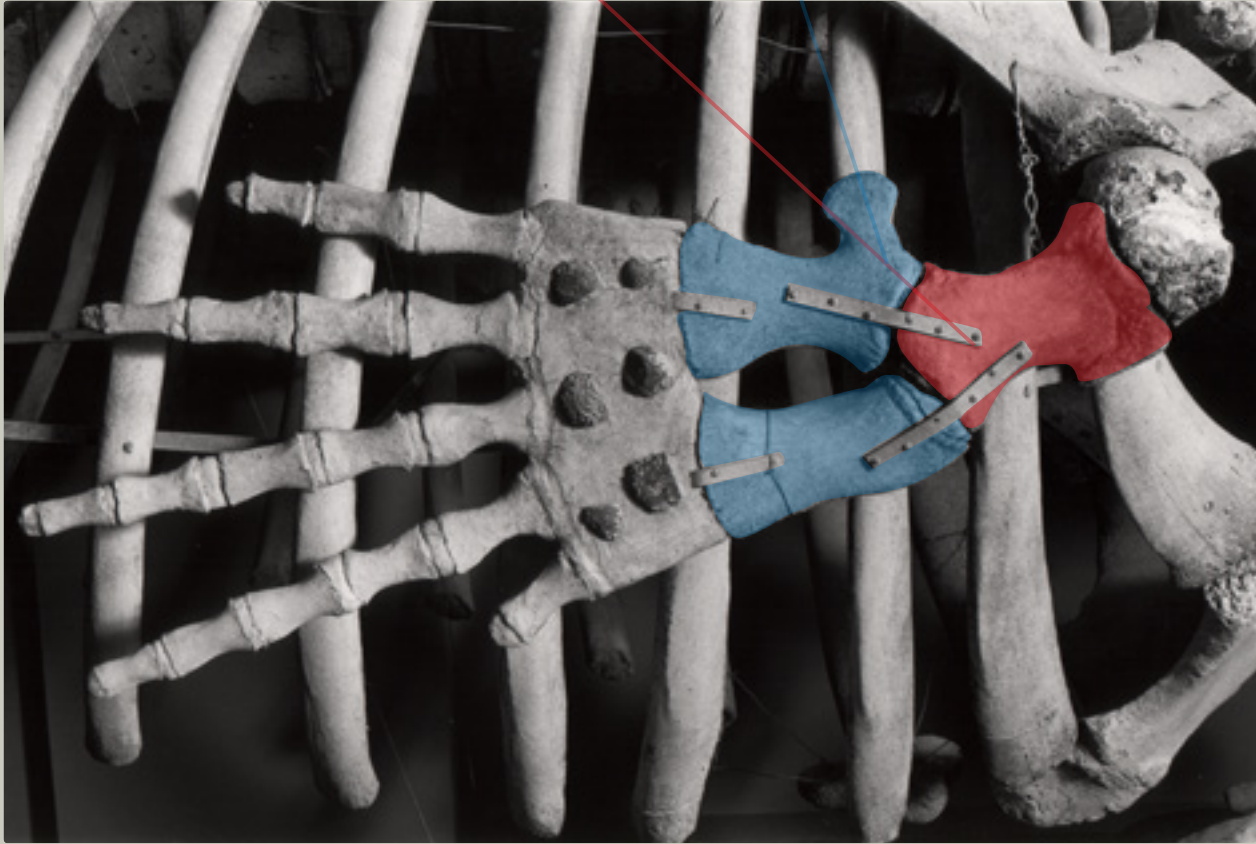
(10003679_BrimleyTeeth_MCPC38.jpg. Photographic print)



Children touching Trouble's teeth

1970s (?)
(1003664_kidsteeth_p12.jpg. Photographic print)

In a living whale, the radius and ulna (two short fat bones) are fused to the humerus (single short fat bone), providing a strong, immobile joint, for increased efficiency and stability.

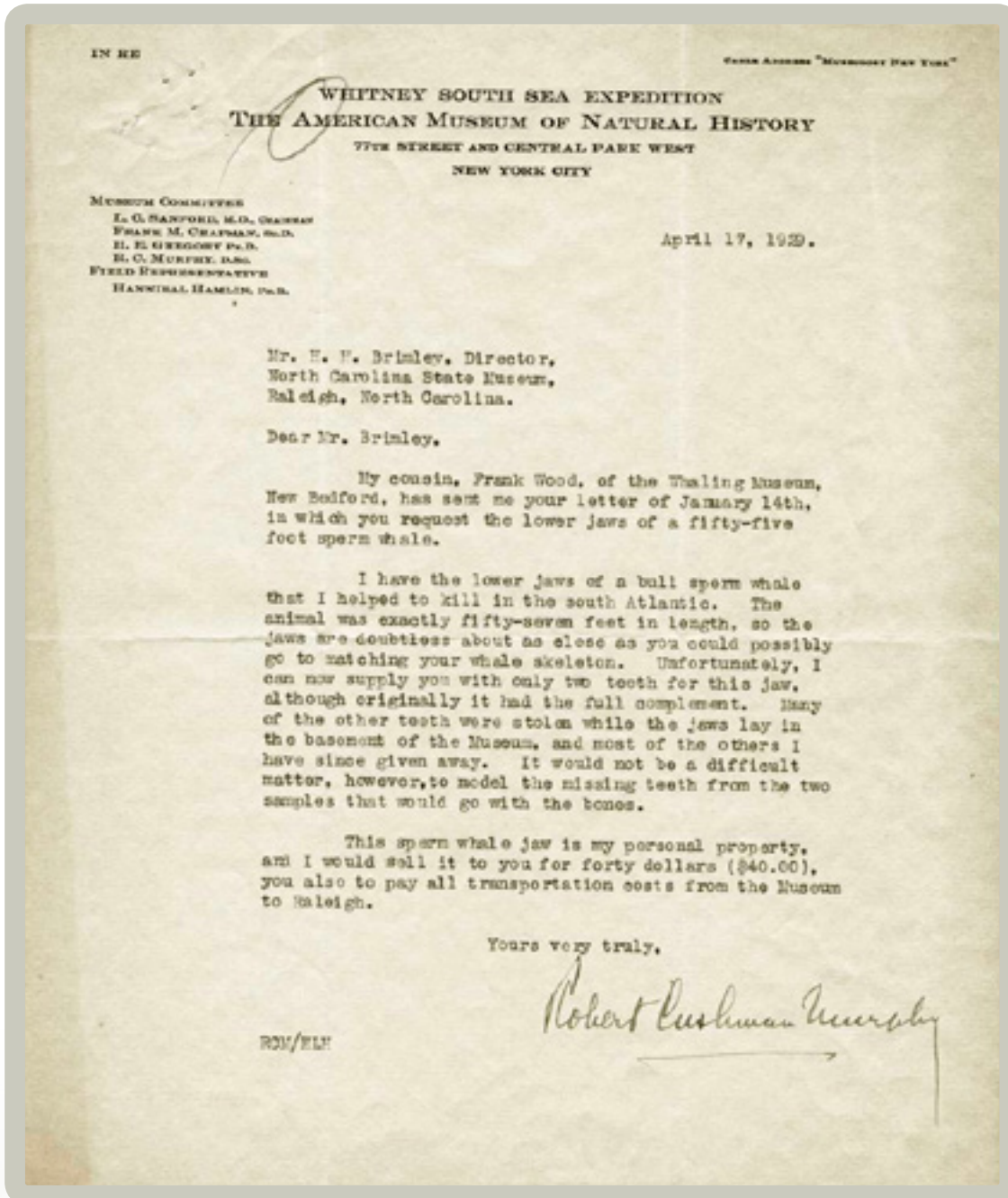


Flipper bones of sperm whale

ca. 1980s

(10003673_FlipperBones_p22.jpg. Photographic print)

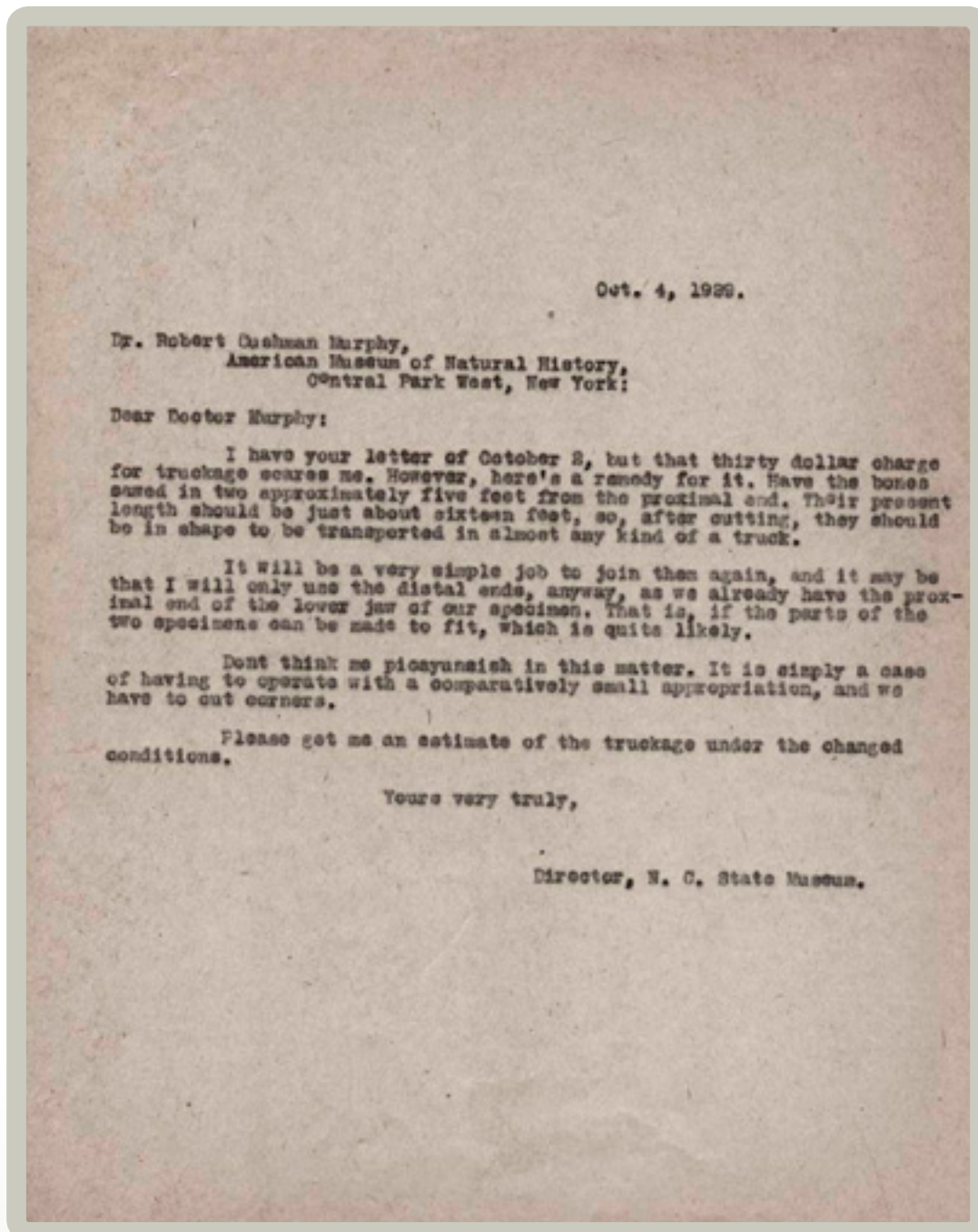
Mr. Murphy has a sperm whale jaw



Letter from Robert Cushman
Murphy to H. H. Brimley

April 17, 1929
(10002629.jpg. Letter)

Mr. Brimley can not afford the shipping charges for the jaw, he asks Mr. Murphy to saw the jaw in half so it will fit on a truck.



Letter from H. H. Brimley to
Robert Cushman Murphy

October 4, 1929

(10002630_Letter55_Brimley.jpg Letter)

This bill of lading states the whale jawbones weighed 650 pounds and were shipped by the Pennsylvania Railway.(The jaw bone did not have to be cut in half.)

UNIFORM STRAIGHT BILL OF LADING
(Prescribed by the Interstate Commerce Commission)
ORIGINAL—NOT NEGOTIABLE
THE PENNSYLVANIA RAILROAD COMPANY
WEST JERSEY & SEASHORE RAILROAD COMPANY

RECEIVED, subject to the classification and tariffs in effect on the date of the issue of this Bill of Lading.

to American Museum of Natural History DEC 9 1929

from 77th Street & Central Park West

the property described below, in apparent good order, except as noted hereunder and condition of contents of packages unknown, marked, resealed, and destined as indicated below, which said company (the word company being understood throughout this contract as meaning any person or corporation in possession of the property under the contract) agrees to carry to the usual place of delivery at said destination, if on its own road or its own water line, otherwise to deliver to another carrier on the route to said destination. It is mutually agreed, as to each carrier of all or any of said property over all or any portion of said route to destination, and as to each party at any time involved in all or any of said property, that every service to be performed hereunder shall be subject to all the conditions not prohibited by law, whether printed or written, herein contained, including the conditions on back hereof, which are hereby agreed to by the shipper and accepted for himself and his assigns.

Consigned to Dr. H. H. Brimley, Director, (N. C. State Museum)

Destination RALEIGH, N. C. State of N. C. County of Dept. of Agriculture

Route Seaboard Air-Line

No. Packages	DESCRIPTION OF ARTICLES, SPECIAL MARKS AND EXCEPTIONS	WEIGHT (Subject to Computation)	CLASS OR RATE	CHARGE COLUMN
	<u>Two Bull's Whalebone</u>	<u>650</u>		

If this shipment is to be delivered to the consignee without receipt on the consignee, the consignor shall sign the following statement:
The carrier shall not make delivery of this shipment without payment of freight and all other lawful charges. (See Section 7 of conditions.)

(Signature of Consignor)

If charges are to be prepaid, write or stamp here, "To be prepaid."

Approved by [Signature] to apply in payment of the charges on the property described hereon.

Agent or Clerk

Per [Signature] (The shipper here acknowledges only the amount prepaid.)

Charges Advanced:

American Museum of Natural History
For 77th Street & Central Park West
Per C. J. Schrott

Agent

1

Bill of lading for shipping
whale jaw

Dec. 9, 1929
(10002631_Letter64_lading.jpg. Correspondence)

A student requests statistics on the whale for a school project.

1930

217 S. Main St.
Salisbury, N.C.
Nov. 16, 1930

Dear Sirs,

I am a member of the Salisbury Junior High School. I wish to write a composition using for my subject "A Tale of a Whale". I have seen the whale that washed up on "St. rightsville Beach." I have forgotten the details and would appreciate it very much if you would send me the following details:

- Size
- Length
- Breadth
- Weight
- The amount of fertilizer made from the flesh.
- How long it took to prepare the bones for exhibit in the museum.

You will find inclosed a stamped envelope for answer.

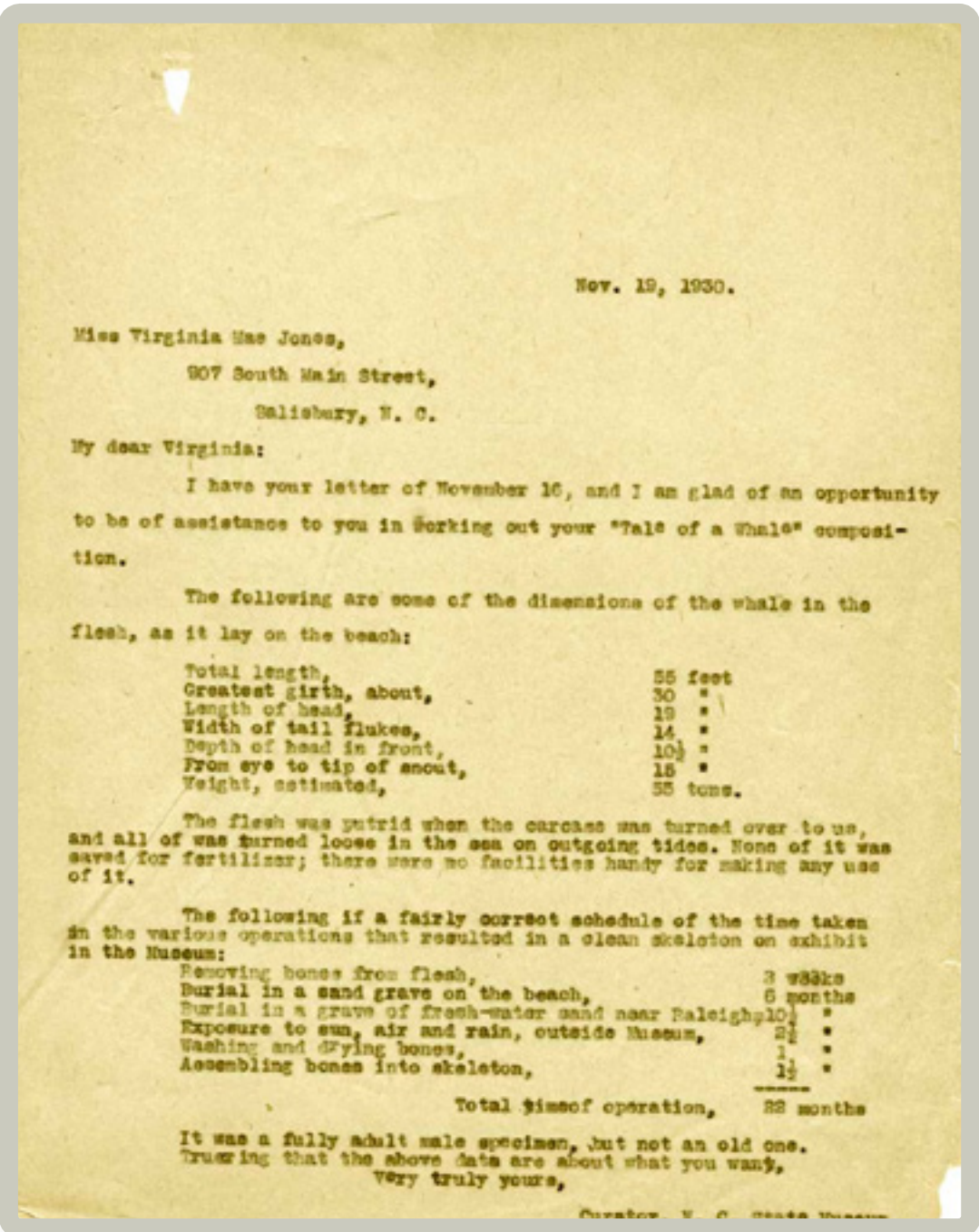
Thanking you in advance

Letter from Virginia Mae Jones to H. H. Brimley

Nov. 16, 1930

(10002533_Letter71_Virginia.jpg. Letter)

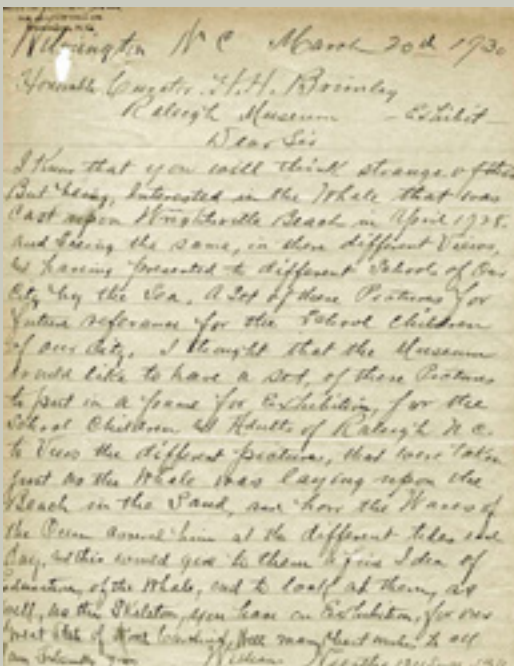
Brimley lists the measurements of the whale and the length of time for each stage of processing the whale.



Letter from H. H. Brimley to
Virginia Mae Jones

Nov. 19, 1930
(10002634_Letter72_stats.jpg. Letter)

Mr. Niestlie made an exhibit with photographs for the local school children and now wishes to donate the photographs to the Museum



Transcription of Letter

Niestlie Medicine Co., Inc
Cor. Sixth and Nixon Street
Wilmington, N. C. Wilmington NC, March 20th, 1930
Honorable Curator, H.H. Brimley, Raleigh Museum
-Exhibit-

Dear Sir:

I know that you will think strange of this. But being interested in the Whale that was cast upon Wrightsville Beach in April 1928. And seeing the same, in these different views, and having presented to different schools of our city by the sea. A set of these pictures for future reference for the school children of our city. I thought that the Museum would like to have a set, of these pictures to put in a frame for Exhibition, for the School Children & Adults of Raleigh N. C. to view the different pictures, that were taken just as the Whale was laying upon the Beach in the sand, and how the Waves of the Ocean covered him at the different tides each day, and this would give to them a fine idea of Education, of the Whale, and to look at them, as well, as the Skeleton, you have on Exhibition, for our Great State of North Carolina.

With many best wishes to all. I am ?fraternally yours,
William Niestlie 1211South ? St

Letter from William Niestlie to H. H. Brimley

March 20, 1930
(10002632_Letter65_Niestlie.jpg. Letter)

ON EXHIBIT

The completed skeleton was placed on exhibit in February of 1930, two years after it had washed ashore. It was suspended from the trusses of the ceiling of the second floor of the state museum.

The whale remained on exhibit until it was taken down during renovations in the 1950s. Once rehung, it was too long for the new exhibit hall—the tail poked through a hole cut in the wall and the jaw hung over the railing much to the delight of the visitors who could now touch the teeth of the whale. There it remained until 1998 when it was necessary to take the fragile skeleton down in preparation for the move to the new museum building.

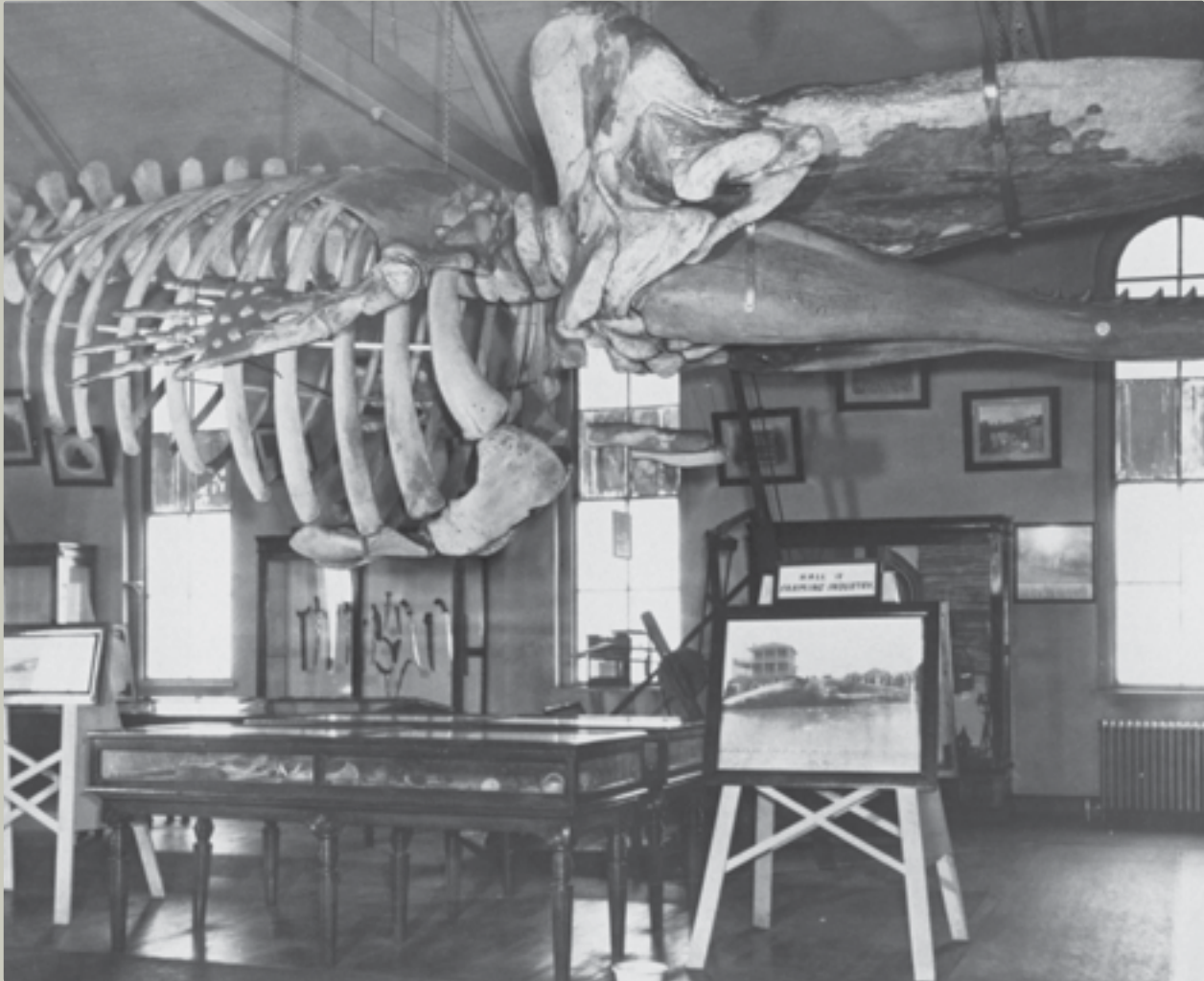
Although expensive and time-consuming, the old grayish bones were cleaned and refurbished to a pristine white under the expertise of Dr. Paul Nadar, a veterinarian and osteologist from Alaska. Again the effort was not without trouble. Dr. Nadar discovered asbestos in the bones and they had to be handled with caution. Then there was the problem of getting the giant skull out of the building. There was no door big enough for the skull to fit through, so it had to be ‘broken’. All the bones were transferred to a warehouse in north Raleigh along with the bones of several other whale skeletons.

After two years in the warehouse, where the bones were cleaned and bleached, Trouble’s skeleton was reassembled and trucked in sections to the new museum where it now hangs majestically in the Coastal North Carolina hall. But will it be his final resting place? There is talk of moving Trouble to a new building planned for 2010.....maybe one of the other skeletons will be less ‘trouble’. (Update October 2012: The new building opened in April 2012. A newly acquired right whale skeleton is displayed on the first floor near the entrance of the new building. Trouble remains in the Coastal North Carolina hall in the main building.)



(10003681_skeleton_exh_MCP40.jpg ca. 1930s. Photographic print)

The sperm whale skeleton on exhibit at the North Carolina State Museum of Natural Sciences in Raleigh, N. C. Photographs of the beached whale are on display under the whale.



Skeleton on exhibit

H. H. Brimley, 1930
(10003670_MCPC_skelhang.jpg. Photographic print)

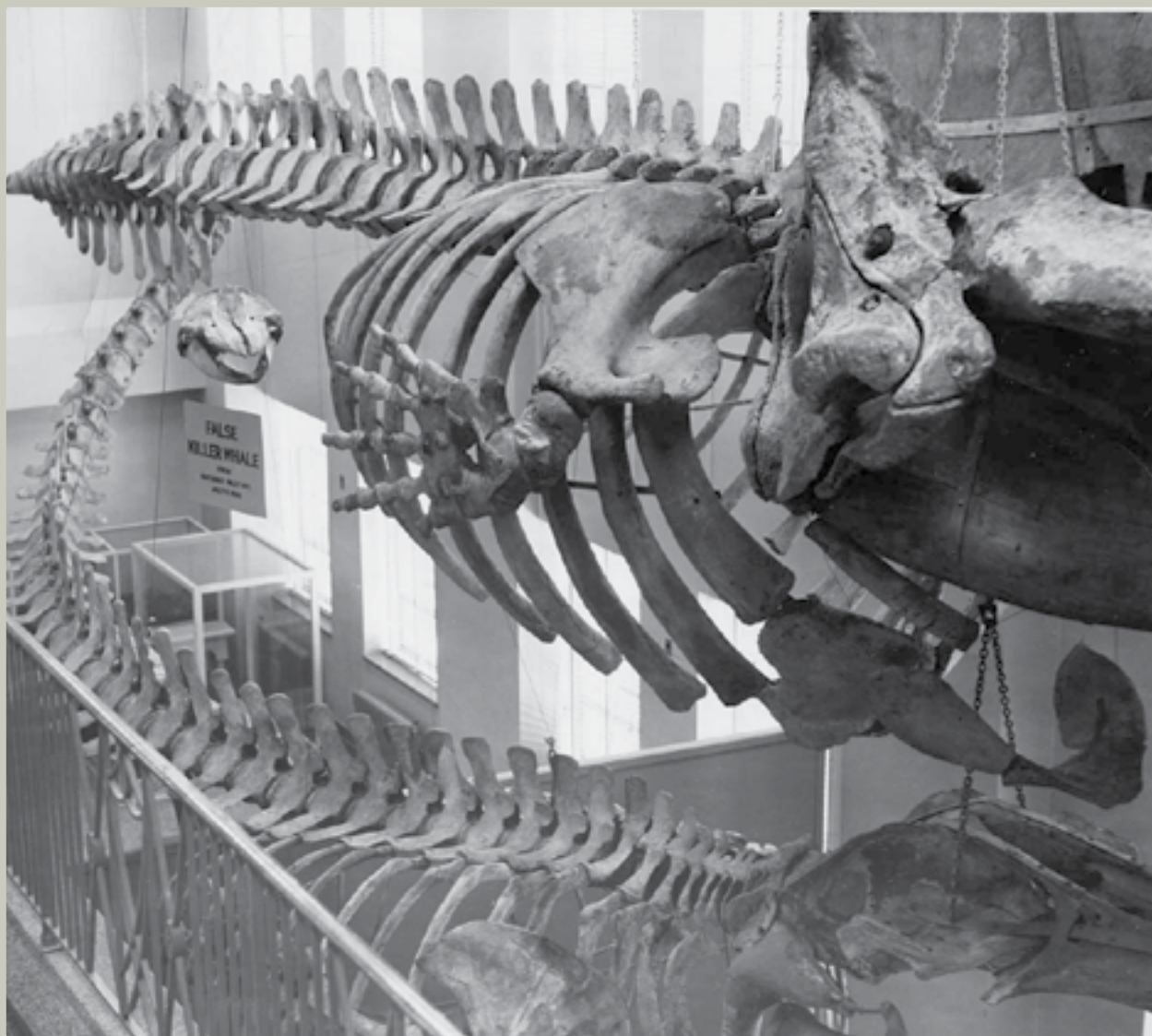
H. H. Brimley, the museum director, estimated the whale skeleton was worth about \$8,000 (equivalent to \$105,000 in 2010).



Tail of sperm whale on exhibit

H. H. Brimley, 1930
(10003706_MCPC69_tail_exh.jpg. Photographic print)

The sperm whale skeleton (upper) and finback (lower) whale skeletons on exhibit.



Whale skeletons on exhibit

Photo taken after 1950
(10003691_skeleton_MCPC77.jpg. Photographic print)

Mary Kay Clark, curator of mammals, examines sperm whale skeleton.

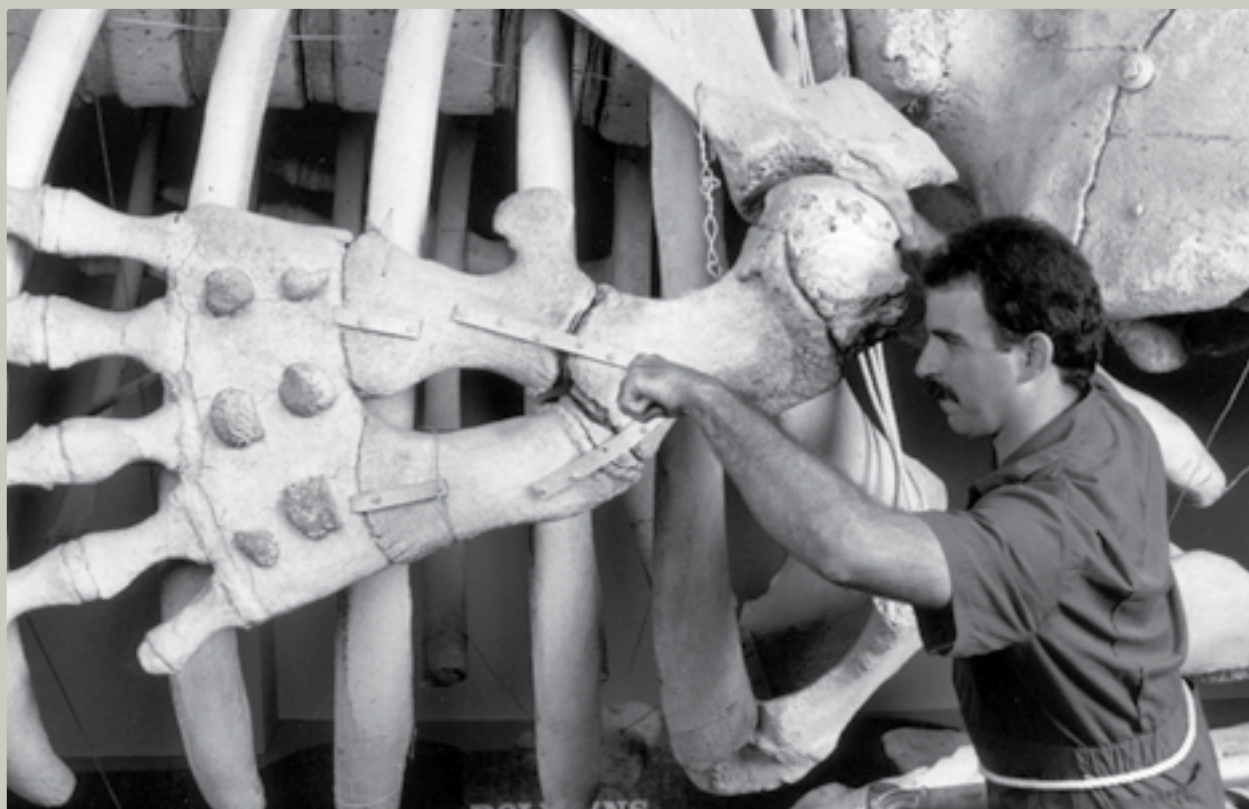


Examining sperm whale skeleton

ca. 1980s

(10003671_MKC_ladder_p20.jpg. Photographic print)

The skeleton hung almost two stories above ground, so Dr. Nadar worked with an expert on climbing gear who recommended the proper ropes and harnesses. The bones were disassembled and trucked to a warehouse in Raleigh, where they were stored in a surplus 29-ft military trailer.



**Dr. Paul Nadar prepares bones
for disassembly**

ca. late 1990s
(10003674_Nadar_p23.jpg. Photographic print)

The whale bones were decontaminated and refurbished at a warehouse in Raleigh, February 1998.



Asbestos decontamination chamber

(10003716 asbestos decontamination chamber.jpg. 35mm slide)



Removing occipital crest

(10003717 removing occipital crest.jpg. 35mm slide)



Vertebrae and rib bones
before decontamination

(10003719 vertebrae ribs before decontamination.jpg
35mm slide)



Teeth in lower jaw

(10003724 teeth.jpg. 35mm slide)



Sternum bones

(10003718 bones.jpg. 35mm slide)



Rib cage and tail bones

(10003723 skeleton.jpg. 35mm slide)



Skull and jaw

(10003722 skeleton.jpg. 35mm slide)

Robert Barbour (L) of Barbour Machine Works and Ricky Bryant, museum technician, load the whale skull on a tow truck.



Loading bones at the warehouse

Jim Page/NCDENR ca. 1998
(10003707_skullload_Slide1.jpg. 35mm slide)

Whale bones en route to the new Museum building in downtown Raleigh.



Whale rib cage on tow truck

Jim Page/NCDENR ca. 1998
(10003710_Slide4_ontheroad.jpg. 35 mm slide)



Whale skull on tow truck

Jim Page/NCDENR ca. 1998
(10003720 cranium on truck.jpg. 35mm slide)

The skeleton hangs in the Coastal North Carolina hall at the North Carolina State Museum of Natural Sciences. This is the view from the mezzanine on the second floor, above the Coastal hall.



Sperm whale skeleton on exhibit

Margaret Cotrufo/NCMSN, 2007
(D1000197i_TroubleSpermWhale_head_ph50.jpg. Digital photograph)



Sperm whale skeleton on exhibit

Margaret Cotrufo/NCDENR, 2007
(D1000197g_TroubleSpermWhale_ph49.jpg. Digital photograph)

Trouble was used as the model for the drawing of the sperm whale in the Museum's logo.



"Trouble" was not moved to the museum's new wing. Instead, "Stumpy", a right whale skeleton who died in 2004 is on display in the Museum's new wing, the Nature Research Center.



**"Stumpy" in the
Nature Research Center**

Margaret Cotrufo/NCDENR, 2012
(DSCN1749_Stumpy right whale.jpg. Digital photograph)

RESOURCES ON TROUBLE AND SPERM WHALES

The original letters and documents pertaining to Trouble are available to interested persons by appointment (Librarian, Janet Edgerton 919-707-9810 or Assistant Librarian Margaret Cotrufo 919-707-9831)

Fact sheet on sperm whales: NOAA Fisheries, Office of Protected Species.
<http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/species/mammals/cetaceans/spermwhale.htm>.

The American Cetacean Society fact sheet on the sperm whale.
<http://www.acsonline.org/factpack/spermwbl.htm>

A Whale Called Trouble, by Mary Ann Brittain. Graphic design by Lisa Yow. This small book is for sale in the museum gift shop. NOTE: the text of the book is different from the text in this pdf.

The book *Wrightsville Beach, a Luminous Island* has a chapter on Trouble. Written by Ray McAllister. John F. Blair Pub. (July 2, 2007). ISBN 0895873486

Bowden, Daniel. (2013, March). Whale Trouble. *Wrightsville Beach Magazine*, 14, 54–60.
www.wrightsvillebeachmagazine.com

Brimley, H.H. Do what you can now with what you have: mounting a whale skeleton. *Museum News* 8, no.10 (November 15, 1930): 8–12. Also in the Museum's Archives.

For more information on “Stumpy”, the right whale, visit
<http://www.capelookoutstudies.org/stumpy-the-right-whale-is-being-installed-in-the-nc-museum-of-science/>.