



NEW ENGLAND: CHARLES W. MORGAN WHALING SHIP, MYSTIC, CONNECTICUT.

Tukufu: We travel 130 miles south to the scene of our next investigation in Mystic Seaport, Connecticut.

Wes: In Atlantic coastal towns like this, you could be walking past history every day and not even know it. Local legends are passed from generation to generation. Call all hands to man the capstan the “Charles W. Morgan” is the only surviving wooden whaling ship in America. It’s permanently moored here in Mystic Seaport. But a local sea captain has heard a mysterious tale that links this ship, not with the whaling industry, but with escaping slaves. I’m Wes Cowan, and Tukufu Zuberi and I have come to Mystic Seaport to investigate the sea captain’s tale.

Alvin Mandley: Oh, she’s a fine ship.

Tukufu: The “Charles W. Morgan” inspired Captain Alvin Mandley to go to sea.

Alvin: My father, grandfather, and great-uncle were all master mariners. They were all whaling masters, and they made more whaling voyages out of New Bedford than any other family. And when I wanted to go to sea, I -- I had it in my blood.

Wes: So, Captain Mandley.

Alvin: Yes, sir.

Wes: Do you have a question?

Alvin: Well, I heard rumors that escaped slaves and so forth crewed up in a lot of these whalers during that period. Have you ever heard anything like that?

Tukufu: Well, I haven’t heard this particular rumor, but most African-Americans equate being on a ship as being that thing which brought them to enslavement. And here, the boat would be serving as a purpose of freedom, as part of the Underground Railroad.

Alvin: True. That’d be wonderful if it happened.

Wes: It sounds unlikely, but is it true? Did the “Charles W. Morgan” act as an extension of the Underground Railroad, the network of secret paths and safe houses that assisted fugitive slaves in their journey to freedom? Let’s start with what we know about the ship itself. The “Charles W. Morgan” first set sail on a whaling voyage from New Bedford, Massachusetts, in 1841. It was the golden age for whaling and nearly half of the world’s whaling fleet was based along the coast of New England. Until the discovery of petroleum in Pennsylvania in 1859, whales were primarily hunted for their oil, which was used for lighting and lubrication. It was said that oil from New Bedford lit the world, making the city one of the richest in the country. Whaling was a brutal maritime endeavor, to which the “Morgan” was no stranger. From her maiden voyage in 1841 to her final journey in 1921, the “Morgan” made over 37 trips through the Pacific, Indian and South Atlantic oceans. But how could those whaling voyages be linked to slavery? While Tukufu goes to check out crew lists for the ship, I’m going to do some local research.

Wes: The library here houses a collection of some of the private records of the ship’s owner and namesake, Charles W. Morgan. I’m interested in the ones from 1841 to 1863, the years when escaping slaves may have been onboard the ship. Wow, what a pile of stuff. Bills of sale. Let’s see. Who owns this here? I don’t think we’re going to find much there. Ah, what’s this? The captain’s log. Boy, it’s just hard to flip through these things. These are all old manuscripts. They’re letters, not labeled. What is this? Ah, now, this is better. It’s Charles W. Morgan’s personal diary from 1849. Ah, what’s this? “I heard a singular account of an escape of a slave, he hid himself, packed up in a box about three feet, two inches long; two feet, six inches wide; one foot, eleven inches deep, had only a bladder of water with him and kept himself alive by bathing his face.” Oh, boy, looks like he rode upside down for 18 miles, which almost killed him, “but he endured it all and was delivered to his anti-slavery friends.” Morgan obviously was very sympathetic to this guy. What a great story! It’s unbelievable! The fact that Charles W. Morgan was an abolitionist, a member of the anti-slavery movement, doesn’t prove anything. But it is strong circumstantial evidence. And it makes captain Mandley’s story about escaping slaves onboard the “Morgan” look more likely.

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Tukufu: I need hard evidence that fugitive slaves were onboard the "Charles W. Morgan". The first place to look is the crew list. Most ships' records from this time documented the name and skin color of each man onboard for identification purposes. So I'm checking crew lists for the "Charles W. Morgan" from 1841 to 1863, the year slavery ended. Here I'm looking at the whale -- "whalemen's shipping" paper, and what you get here is the time of entry, the name of each person, the quality of the individual -- basically, what it is that they do -- and then the witness to the signing. Still no information about the color or racial characteristics of the individuals. The ship made several voyages during this period. This is interesting. Not all the crew members have signed their names. These individuals would not have known how to write, so they couldn't have signed their own name. Someone would have had to sign for them, and you have several of them here. This one is "Michael Peese. John Riley. James Hamlin." Most former slaves would have been illiterate, which makes these "x" marks interesting, but we can't be sure they're escaped slaves because there's no indication of skin color anywhere in these records. We need to get harder evidence if we're to answer Captain Mandley's question.

Wes: I'm returning to the ship on the hunt for more clues. I'm meeting Daniel Rodricks, whose grandfather, John Gonzolves, was the last captain of the "Charles W. Morgan".

Daniel Rodricks: This is the room my grandfather spent so many years and hours.

Wes: Wow! Well, can you imagine that?

Daniel: I can't imagine that.

Wes: What a rugged life they had, so... how many years do you think he was in that room alone?

Daniel: Well, in this room alone, I don't know if you count the hours of all the trips in this particular ship. This here is one of the harpoons. It goes right down into the whale.

Wes: Gee, can I try this?

Daniel: Certainly.

Wes: So this is basically a fishhook for a whale.

Daniel: Basically, it is.

Wes: Daniel, you come from a long line of whaling folks, and you're more than qualified to answer just about any question that anybody might pose to you about whaling. Was the "Charles W. Morgan" ever used as a safe haven for escaped slaves or fugitive slaves?

Daniel: No, I've -- I've never come across that information. I haven't heard anything about it.

Wes: If Daniel, of all people, hasn't heard anything to support Captain Mandley's story, that's worrying. What we've got so far is circumstantial at best. We need some hard evidence.

Tukufu: I'm continuing my investigation in New Bedford, Massachusetts, the town from which the ship, the "Morgan" first set sail. I know that Charles W. Morgan, the man, was opposed to slavery, but what about the town itself? Was it a place where I would have felt safe in the mid-1800s with bounty hunters on my tail? To find out, I'm meeting local historian Carl Cruz. Abolitionists' Row, now why is it called Abolitionists' Row?

Carl Cruz: So many of the Quakers that lived on this street were involved in abolitionist activities here in New Bedford. Massachusetts was one of the first states in the United States to abolish slavery, so I believe it was a -- one of the destinations for runaway slaves. In fact, we can document many runaway slaves who left by the Underground Railroad and came to New Bedford as a destination.

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Tukufu: So an escaped slave might get to New Bedford via the Underground Railroad, but with the Fugitive Slave Act decreeing that slave owners could recapture their slaves in any state, no escaping slave was ever safe from bounty hunters. Maybe a whaling voyage lasting anything from three to five years would offer an even safer haven at sea, possibly onboard the "Charles W. Morgan" itself. But we'll need more evidence to prove that was the case. Of all the names I found on Abolitionists' Row, there's one that leaps out. It's Samuel Rodman. Not only was he an abolitionist, he was also Charles W. Morgan's business partner and co-owner of the "Morgan." so what kind of man was he? The New Bedford Whaling Museum has a personal diary that Rodman kept during this period. Could it hold the answer to Captain Mandley's question?

Tukufu: 1841, I want to read you a passage from August the 8th. "I went to friends meeting in the afternoon, and then the evening called at mother's and then went to an anti-slavery meeting and heard a good lecture on the subject."

Now listen to this passage from August the 9th. "After a hasty supper, went to the evening session of the Bristol cCounty anti-slavery society this was well-attended and there were a number of speakers, including W.L. Garrison." He's at a meeting with William Lloyd Garrison! This is fabulous! Not only was he an abolitionist, he was attending abolitionist meetings of the highest order. Charles Morgan's business partner, Samuel Rodman, may have known high-profile abolitionists, but was he going so far as to hire fugitive slaves? We haven't proved that slaves escaped aboard the "Charles W. Morgan" ship, but Morgan and Rodman co-owned another ship called the "Francis Henrietta." Maybe there'll be some clues in her crew list. The distinguishing thing about this list is that it has a column for the individual's race. And so I'm reading the list, reading the names on the list, and one just jumps off the page at me! It's John S. Jacobs. John S. Jacobs is the brother, the fugitive brother, of Harriet Jacobs, the woman who is the author of what is considered the first autobiography of a slave woman. And in that biography, she mentions that she's searching for John S. Jacobs? Jacobs, okay? Where is John S. Jacobs? John S. Jacobs is on the "Francis Henrietta!" This is fundamentally important. We have found an escaped slave working on a whaling ship. If Rodman and Morgan were hiring a fugitive slave to work on the "Francis Henrietta," they could definitely do it on the "Charles W. Morgan" and if there are crew lists containing racial descriptions for the "Francis Henrietta," then there must be some for the "Morgan," and I just missed them first time around.

Hey, man. Hey, how're you doing?

Wes: Once I heard about Tukufu's discovery, I had to get to the New Bedford Whaling Museum.

Tukufu: The people at the whaling museum have searched their archives and discovered records from the Seaman's Bethel, a benevolent society for sailors. They have got crew lists for the "Morgan," and they do contain racial descriptions. This could be the evidence we're looking for. So I have the "Charles Morgan" here. This is a voyage in 19 -- in 1845. Right. And we don't have any -- any black people on this. Okay. I've looked through here. I don't see anything here either. 1862. Yeah, what do you have there? I've got '53 here. I have '49 here. Yeah, nothing here for '53. Nothing there for '53. That's it, man. If it's not here, we're done.

Tukufu: This is it. It's the last crew list for the period of enslavement, so it's our final chance. So this is 1856, the "Charles Morgan" all right! All right! So what do we have? Well, we have here a black person with woolly hair, 34 years old, David Carrington, but he's from Newberg, New York.

Wes: Slavery was finally abolished in New York in 1841, so we need to find someone who came from one of the pro-slavery southern states. And then we have Henry Francis from Fishkill, New York. No, he still doesn't look like our man. Okay, what else we got? Here we go: jams Hamlin, Norfolk, Virginia, 28 years old, black woolly hair. Look! In the records I looked at earlier, I also came across James Hamlin's name. Wait a minute, on the "Morgan"? Same guy? Yes, same guy, same trip, same ship. The thing about it, though, is he had an "x" for his name. So now we have some information. He's from the south, from a slave state in 1856, okay, and he can't read and he can't write and he ends up in New Bedford getting ready to get on a whaling ship. Now, wait a minute. Plus a whaling ship that we know was owned by people that are sympathetic to the cause. That's a pretty strong suggestion that we've got something here.

Tukufu: So what have we discovered? James Hamlin was a black, illiterate male from Virginia, a slave state. In 1856,

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he embarked on a whaling voyage on the "Charles W. Morgan" a ship whose owners were both anti-slavery. It's highly likely that he was a fugitive slave, and that Morgan and his partner, Samuel Rodman, risked fines or even imprisonment to help him. So we've got some news to tell Alvin about the ship he's loved since childhood.

Tukufu: The evidence that this rumor is true is very, very compelling. We found references in Morgan's diary, Charles Morgan's diary, that show that he was very sympathetic to the cause of abolition. We found these records of the crew. And in 1856, there were three African-Americans onboard. One of them, James Hamlin, from Norfolk, Virginia, was 28 years old. We found that he was an illiterate, because when he signed on, he couldn't sign his name. All he could sign was "x". He could have been escaping slavery and using his employment on the "Charles W. Morgan" as a way of escaping capture.

Alvin: Wonderful, wonderful, that's good to hear. We know life on the whaling ships was extremely hard.

Tukufu: That's for sure, tough life. It's a tough life.

Alvin: It's a tough life, but it's very interesting that it wasn't so tough that it discouraged everybody. It's the better of two evils.

Wes: This investigation has turned up a little-known episode in the story of the Underground Railroad. These wonderful whaling ships really were a route to freedom for fugitive slaves.

Voiceover: The Underground Railroad was a lifeline for escaping slaves. The so-called "freedom train" was a complex network of places and people that led runaway slaves from captivity. Runaways would travel through the night to safe havens known as stations. conductors provided them with food and shelter until they could safely pass to the next station. the railroad's most famous conductor, Harriet Tubman, was dubbed "the Moses of her people" after her own escape, she returned to the south 19 times to help deliver over 200 men, women and children to freedom, including her own entire family. The Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 required northern states to return escaped slaves. To avoid recapture, runaways now had to go as far north as Canada. The number of people led to freedom is estimated in the tens of thousands, but the true number will never be known. In January, 1865, slavery was abolished, and with it this heroic effort to help escaping slaves came to an end.

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