

## Notes on Sources

Excerpts from original letters, logs, journals, newspaper articles, and other source material are italicized within this book. In rare cases, spelling of some words has been corrected for the ease of the reader.

### *Family Documents and Memories*

*Tales of the Sea* draws inspiration from letters, ship's logs and journals that have been handed down through the generations by the offspring of Ruth and James Jenkins. We are now fortunate to have in our possession James' original ship's log of his time aboard the *Vancouver* and most of the original letters and journals by Ruth Jenkins, James Jenkins and Josiah Fish included in this book. The handsome barometer which graced the captain's quarters on the *Hoogly* hangs in our home, and the handcrafted wooden implements Ruth refers to in her diary on March 3, 1868, remain with our family inside a wooden cabinet which once hung in the *Hoogly*. An oil painting of the *Hoogly* hangs above my husband's desk in his home office.

Many of the letters and journal entries in this collection were originally compiled in 1997 by Nancy Avery Armstrong Normen in a booklet entitled, *Letters From the Sea by Capt. James Hamblin Jenkins and A Journal from Home and "The Hoogly" by Ruth Jacques Fish Jenkins*, which can be found at the Sturgis Library in Barnstable, Massachusetts. Nancy lived in South Windsor, Connecticut, with her husband Roy, and devoted her career to nonprofit work for families in need. She died in 2021. Nancy was the great-granddaughter of James and Ruth Jenkins. Roy and his daughter, Mary Ellen Normen, graciously sent me a copy of her booklet, which I treasure.

Nancy noted that some of the early letters had originally been in the possession of Betty Porter, granddaughter of Ruth Jenkins. Letters from James Jenkins beginning January 18, 1852, were published in *The Barnstable Patriot* on January 13, 20, and 27, 1938. I'm grateful that Ruth and James' grandchildren and great-grandchildren had the wisdom to type and save them, so they were not lost to time.

I first came into contact with these letters and journals through my father-in-law, James Page Elder (1924-2012), the great-grandson of Ruth and James Jenkins. He provided an excerpt of James' letters for a collection of family history I produced in 1999. I was struck by the intense longing and love James expressed for Ruth while recounting the daily challenges of a life at sea. At the time, I had no idea additional letters existed, nor had I seen Nancy's booklet.

In 2015, after the death of my mother-in-law, Helen Powell Elder, the family came together to sort through their belongings. During this process I learned that more letters existed, neatly typed and saved by my father-in-law and my brother-in-law Charles Elder, who has compiled a wealth of historical documents relating to his family. I read these new letters with fascination, vowing one day to bring their stories to life. The letters were nearly identical to Nancy's collection, but our collection contained a few passages not included in Nancy's booklet, and vice versa. The location of the original letters remained a mystery. Such is the way of family history.

A treasure trove of original letters by Ruth and James Jenkins and Josiah Fish, along with another journal from Ruth Jenkins, came to light in 2024, one year after I had launched into the research and writing of this book. They were discovered by Charles Elder in a box long saved from his parent's house. In this box he also found the manuscript recounting the story of Thomas, a runaway slave from Baltimore who became a ship's cook.

For context, and to obtain a better understanding of the characters in this book, I drew on *Letters of Love & Faith*, a booklet containing letters written in 1893 by Mary Eliza (Minnie) Jenkins to her betrothed, Rev. Lester Marsh, available at Sturgis Library. This booklet was published by Nancy Normen in 1986. While the time period of my book precedes these letters, they nonetheless provided a window into the soul and spirit of Minnie and her father, James Jenkins.

*The Woman Who Saved a Meetinghouse* by J. Harold Williams, also available at Sturgis Library, is a biography of James and Ruth Jenkins' youngest daughter, Elizabeth Crocker Jenkins, who was instrumental in preserving the 1717 Meetinghouse. This book includes information on the history of the Meetinghouse during the time period of my book, as well as subsequent work to preserve

this important landmark. If you're interested in learning more, visit the 1717 Meetinghouse Foundation at <https://www.1717meetinghouse.org>.

### ***Sturgis Library***

The Sturgis Library in Barnstable proved a goldmine as I undertook the research for this book. In their archives, I located scans of many of the original handwritten letters from Ruth's brother, Josiah C. Fish, as well as a letter from Ruth's one-time suitor, Asa Jenkins. Here I also found details on the Sandy Neck Lighthouse and its keepers, including the original lighthouse keeper's log by Captain Henry Baxter, second keeper of the light.

They delved into their archives for early maps of West Barnstable and opened their impressive Mariner's Library to me during the many days I camped out in their reference room. Resources identified and used in this book include:

MS 96 Dave Crocker Historical Manuscript and Document Collection, including The Journal of the Beach Point Lighthouse Sandy Neck 1833 – 1844 by Captain Henry Baxter, Lighthouse Keeper, and the list of Sandy Neck Lighthouse keepers.

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### ***Local Experts***

Historian Nancy Viall Shoemaker of the West Barnstable Historical Society treated me, my husband, Bob, and our oldest daughter, Emily, to a private tour of the homesteads and graveyards of West Barnstable and the 1717 Meetinghouse, where we also met Steve Howland, producer of the film, *The Meetinghouses of Barnstable*.

Betsy Wheeler arranged a lovely kitchen table conversation with members of the West Barnstable Historical Society, where I was honored to receive gifts of several locally produced books, all of which are available at the Sturgis Library or from the West Barnstable Historical Society.

Kenneth G. Morton, current owner of the Sandy Neck Lighthouse, shared his extensive research on the lighthouse and allowed me to accompany him in his specially outfitted pick-up truck (with the tires partially deflated) across miles of sand and through the dunes out to the original site of the lighthouse where Joseph Nickerson served as first keeper of the light. While the original structure no longer stands, I was able to see remnants of the brick foundation and tour the existing lighthouse and keeper's house, built in 1857. The lighthouse was restored in 2007 and is now an official private aid to navigation. For more information, visit:

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## Glossary

### 19<sup>th</sup> Century Words and Phrases

**Calomel and Jalap:** A solution of mercurous chloride and pulvis jalap (from the roots of the *Exogonium jalapa* of Mexico), commonly administered in the 1800s for gastrointestinal diseases. The “cure,” famously used during the Lewis & Clark Expedition, causes one to purge through the bowels.

**Canaille:** the common people, the masses.

**Delaine:** Any high-grade woolen or worsted fabric made of fine combing wool. Delaine was originally a high-quality women's wear dress material. From the French, “of wool.”

**Fortnight:** Two weeks.

**Free Soil Party:** The Free Soil Party was a short-lived coalition political party in the United States active from 1848 to 1854, when it merged into the Republican Party. The party was largely focused on the single issue of opposing the expansion of slavery into the western territories of the United States.

**Humbug:** To deceive or trick, to act like a fraud or sham.

**Hurrah's Nest:** A pejorative term meaning an untidy heap or tangle of debris.

**Iron Horse:** A steam locomotive.

**Jack Tars:** A common English term that was originally used to refer to seamen of the Merchant Navy or the Royal Navy, particularly during the British Empire.

**Know-Nothing Party:** Also known as the American Party, it flourished in the 1850s and embodied strong anti-immigrant views. Members, when asked about their nativist organization, were supposed to reply that they “knew nothing.” In 1854, it won additional adherents from conservatives who could support neither the proslavery Democrats nor antislavery Republicans. At the American Party convention in Philadelphia the following year, the party split along sectional lines over the proslavery platform pushed through by Southern delegates. Antislavery Know-Nothings joined the Republican Party, while Southern members flocked to the proslavery Democratic Party.

**Seraphine:** An 18<sup>th</sup>-century reed-based keyboard instrument.

**Stupid:** A 19<sup>th</sup>-century term meaning very dull, insensible, senseless, wanting in understanding, heavy, or sluggish.

**Whig Party:** The Whig Party was formally organized in 1834, bringing together a loose coalition of groups united in their opposition to what party members viewed as the executive tyranny of “King Andrew” Jackson. They borrowed the name “Whig” from the British party opposed to royal prerogatives. By the late 1840s, the Whig coalition was beginning to unravel as factions of “Conscience” (antislavery) Whigs and “Cotton” (proslavery) Whigs emerged.

### **Sailing Terms**

**Aloft:** Anywhere 15 feet or higher than the highest solid structure on a ship.

**Astern:** At the rear of the ship, or behind the boat.

**Baffling Wind:** A wind that frequently shifts from one direction to another.

**Barometer:** An instrument that measures atmospheric pressure.

**Barrelman:** A person stationed in the barrel of the foremast or crow's nest of an oceangoing vessel as a navigational aid.

**Barque:** A type of sailing vessel with three or more masts with foremast, mainmast, and additional masts rigged square and only the aftmost mast (mizzen in three-masted barques) rigged fore and aft.

**Belaying Pin:** A solid metal or wooden device used on traditionally rigged sailing vessels to secure lines of running rigging.

**Binnacle:** A waist-high case or stand on the deck of a ship, generally mounted in front of the helmsman, in which navigational instruments are placed for easy and quick reference as well as to protect the delicate instruments.

**Boatswain:** The officer on a ship responsible for maintaining the ship's equipment.

**Bow:** The front of the ship.

**Bowsprit:** A spar extending forward from the vessel's prow at the bow of the boat.

**Butt:** A large cask or canister in which oil was kept (e.g., for lighthouses).

**Cat o' Nine Tails:** A whip, usually having nine knotted lines or cords fastened to a handle, used for flogging.

**Chronometer:** A precision timepiece that measures the ship's longitudinal position by celestial navigation.

**Fathom:** One fathom is equal to 6 feet or 1.83 meters.

**Figurehead:** An ornamental symbol or figure placed on some prominent part of a ship, usually at the bow.

**Fresh Breeze:** A wind of 17 to 21 knots.

**Gaff:** The spar which supports the upper edge of a gaff sail.

**Gunwale** (pronounced GUN-nel): the top edge of the hull of a ship.

**Halyard:** The line used to raise the yard which holds the sail.

**Headwind:** When the bow of the boat is pointing directly into the wind, and it is virtually impossible to make forward progress.

**Helm:** A wheel or tiller for steering a boat.

**Holystone:** A soft and brittle sandstone that was formerly used for scrubbing and whitening the wooden decks of ships.

**Hove To:** To “park” the boat while out at sea by facing head into the wind and/or through manipulation of multiple sails.

**Hove Up:** To elevate or lift something with great force (e.g., to hove up the anchor).

**Hull:** The portion of the boat that rides both in and on top of the water.

**Jack (or Union Jack):** The starred blue portion of the American flag is called the "union." This part of the national flag, called the Union Jack, served as a maritime flag on U.S. warships from 1777 until 2002.

**Jolly Roger:** A flag flown by a pirate ship before or during an attack.

**Lee or Leeward:** On or toward the side sheltered from the wind.

**Lorcha:** A type of sailing vessel having a junk rig with a Cantonese or other Chinese-style batten sails on a Portuguese or other European-style hull.

**Oilskin:** Waterproof cloth.

**Poop or Poop Deck:** A raised deck in the aft of a ship.

**Privateers:** A private person or ship that engages in maritime warfare under a commission of war.

**Quarterdeck:** The part of a weather deck that runs aft from the midship area or the mainmast to the stern or poop of a vessel.

**Scuppers:** Drain holes on deck, in the toe rail, in bulwarks, or in the deck itself.

**Sextant:** A navigational instrument for measuring the angle between the horizon and the sun or a star in order to find out the latitude.

**Signal (or Signalize):** The use of signal flags to communicate between ships. Each flag stands for a letter or number. Multiple flags are strung together to send a message as far as the eye can see.

**Spar:** A pole used in the rigging of a sailing vessel to carry or support its sail.

**Speak a Ship (or Spoke Ship):** To communicate with another ship at sea using flags, lamp, voice, or by any other means.

**Stern:** The back or aft-most part of the ship.

**Tacking:** A maneuver used in sailing to change the direction of a sailboat when sailing upwind or at an angle to the wind.

**Topside:** The portion of the ship's side which rises above the deck.

**Weather Brace:** A line used to rotate a yard around the mast, to allow the ship to sail at different angles to the wind.

**Windward:** The direction from which the wind is blowing.

**Yard:** A spar on a mast from which sails are set.

## Characters in *Tales of the Sea*

*In order of appearance*

**Joseph Nickerson:** First keeper of the Sandy Neck Lighthouse\*

**Percy Stone:** Friend of Joseph Nickerson\*

**George Jenkins and Eliza Crocker Hinckley Jenkins:** Parents of James Hamblin Jenkins

**James Hamblin Jenkins:** First son of George and Eliza Jenkins

**Zaccheus Hinckley and Sarah Crocker Hinckley:** Parents of Eliza Jenkins

**Asa Jenkins and Hannah Hamlin Jenkins:** Parents of George Jenkins

**Captain Charles Jenkins:** Older brother of George Jenkins

**Asenath, Almira, Abigail, Sylvia, and Edmund Hinckley:** Siblings of Eliza Jenkins

**Captain Josiah Fish:** Captain of the *Hellen Frayer*, friend of the Jenkins and Hinckley families, and father of Ruth, Josiah, and George Fish

**Captain William Sturgis:** Collector of books, operated clipper ships in the Northwest and China trades

**Henry Baxter:** Second keeper of the Sandy Neck Lighthouse

**Elizabeth “Lizzie” Crocker Jenkins:** Sister of James Jenkins and daughter of George and Eliza Jenkins

**Ruth Stanley Fish:** Wife of Captain Josiah Fish and daughter of Ruth Jacques Stanley

**Nathan Jenkins and Charles Jenkins:** Uncles of James Jenkins and brothers of George Jenkins

**Ruth Jacques Fish Jenkins:** Daughter of Captain Josiah Fish and Ruth Stanley Fish, wife of James Jenkins, mother of Mary Eliza “Minnie” Jenkins

**Mary Buxton:** Midwife from Salem, Massachusetts\*

**Josiah C. Fish:** Brother of Ruth Jacques Fish, first son of Captain Josiah Fish and Ruth Fish

**John “Johnnie” Jenkins:** Brother of James Jenkins and youngest child of George and Eliza Jenkins

**James Baxter:** Son of Henry Baxter and third keeper of the Sandy Neck Lighthouse

**Thomas P.D. Baxter:** Son of Henry Baxter and fourth keeper of the Sandy Neck Lighthouse

**George Stanley Fish:** Youngest brother of Ruth Jacques Fish and second son of Captain Josiah Fish and Ruth Fish

**Aunt Zelia:** “Aunt” of Ruth Jacques Fish (a close friend of the family, not a blood relation)

**Mary Brewster:** Wife of whaling captain William Brewster

**Captain Joseph Osgood:** Captain of the ship *Horsburg*, where James Jenkins served as first mate

**Captain “Mad Jack” Percival:** West Barnstable native and former captain of the *U.S.S. Constitution*

**Asa Jenkins:** Distant cousin of James Jenkins and first suitor of Ruth Jacques Fish

**Charlotte Forten:** First black woman to graduate from the Salem Normal School

**Mary Eliza “Minnie” Jenkins:** First daughter of Ruth and James Jenkins

**Gilman:** Childhood friend of Josiah C. Fish (the son of Captain Josiah and Ruth Fish)

**Lucy Hinckley Baxter:** Wife of Thomas P.D. Baxter and fifth keeper of the Sandy Neck Lighthouse

**Miss Gilbert:** Headmistress of the Anglo-Vernacular school in Rangoon where Ruth Jenkins taught\*

**Thomas:** A self-emancipated slave who became a ship’s cook on the *Hoogly*\*\*

\*The dates of Joseph Nickerson’s tenure as first keeper of the Sandy Neck Lighthouse are part of recorded history. Little else is known of him, except for two references in the log of his successor, Captain Henry Baxter. His character was developed based on the lives of early 19<sup>th</sup>-century lighthouse keepers and the history of West Barnstable. Percy Stone, Mary Buxton and Miss Gilbert are fictional characters based on research into the lives of people with similar life experiences in the same time period.

\*\* Thomas’ complete story includes 84 pages of handwritten memories recorded most likely in the 1860s, a small portion of which are included in this novel. The manuscript was found in 2024 among the letters, logs and journals of the Jenkins family. The author believes he recounted his adventures and tribulations to members of the Jenkins family and crew aboard the *Hoogly*, while he served as ship’s cook. The manuscript detailing Thomas’ life is the subject of further study by a team of researchers at Roger Williams University as we seek to find Thomas’ family and consult with experts to place this narrative in historical context.

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~~~ **SPOILER ALERT** ~~~

**The following contains information revealed in the novel,  
*The Journey Begins (Tales of the Sea, Book 1).***

**A Note from the Author**

I know what it means to love a sailor. My first date with my husband, Bob Elder, took place aboard a 38-foot sailing sloop on the waters of Penobscot Bay in Maine. That date lasted a week. While some women go to the salon or buy a new dress for their first date, I found my way to a West Marine store in Orlando, Florida, where I lived and worked at the time. “I think I need rain gear and topsiders,” I told the salesman. I flew up to Boston, and Bob spirited me up the coast to the town of Camden, Maine. Here, the story of my family’s life began. I sailed through two pregnancies. Both of our daughters experienced life aboard a sailboat from their earliest weeks and months of life. Sailing is in our blood.

I have long been fascinated by family history. Through my twenties and thirties, I compiled several anecdotal history books, where I invited relatives far and near to contribute their own stories, poems, and historic documents long held in boxes, trunks, and drawers, far from view. While compiling one of these histories during the first year of our marriage, I laid eyes on a transcription of a letter penned in the 1860s by my husband’s great-great-grandfather, James Hamblin Jenkins. He had written it aboard a 177-foot merchant sailing ship, the *Hoogly*, as he traversed the vastness of the ocean writing to the woman he loved. His words captivated me, for he shared many qualities with the sailor I had married.

Twenty years later, after the death of my husband’s parents, I learned that this was not the only letter that existed. Over the course of two years, hundreds of pages of original handwritten letters, ship’s logs, and journals emerged from boxes that had been stored for one hundred and fifty years, ending up in the back porch of my in-law’s house.

The affection that I had felt for James Jenkins grew to include his entire family, flawed as they were, and especially his wife Ruth, who would ultimately sail the world with him and their little daughter, Minnie. Both James and Ruth were prolific writers with strong voices. They poured their heart onto the pages they wrote to each other. Through their eyes, I witnessed the day-to-day

realities of people living in a seafaring community during the final chapter of the Great Age of Sail and the years leading up to and through the Civil War.

Month after month, I immersed myself in their lives, until they became as familiar to me as my own family. Working with these letters was like stitching together a patchwork quilt. A letter written over the course of weeks or months aboard a sailing ship might spend months more wending its way toward its recipient. I combed through the details hidden within their correspondence and created timelines to understand what had happened on particular days and months in their lives. I pieced together the letters of several family members to create a full picture of this family, beginning with the generation preceding James and Ruth, where this story begins.

There were still holes, however, so I researched newspaper archives for small towns and big cities where their travels led them. I visited lighthouses and the backrooms of small museums. I had tea with members of a local historical society and spent many wonderful hours in the Mariner's Reading Room at Sturgis Library in West Barnstable, where they graciously opened their archives, revealing hand-drawn maps from the 1800s and books which detailed the lives of everyday people in that era. I accompanied our relatives John and Deb Esborn on a "dead ancestors' tour" to see the sites, many now erased by time, where the people of this family had lived. Nancy Shoemaker, president of the West Barnstable Historical Society, showed me the graves where our ancestors were buried and the meeting house which figured so prominently in their lives. I checked the phases of the moon and weather events for specific dates in the 1800s. I sailed with my husband, watching the quality of light on the water, scribbling in my journal to capture a hundred different types of waves and cloud formations. Yes, I went all the way down the rabbit hole.

Through the extensive research which resulted in these books, I've gained a window into a time in my country that previously felt wooden and remote. In today's era of instant communication, technological change, and deep political divisions, perhaps there are lessons for us here in how to care for each other, endure loss, and fight for those we love. This book strives to do justice to their stories.

So begins the voyage...