

ARTISTS ON OCEANOGRAPHIC EXPEDITIONS,
A NEGLECTED PARTNERSHIP

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ABSTRACT

The partnership between artist and marine scientist has too long been neglected and needs to be brought to the attention of both artists and oceanographers. The work of two artists nearly one hundred years apart is presented with examples of their art at sea.

Benjamin Shephard on H.M.S. Challenger during its 1872-1876 global expedition painted a series of charming sketches of the Challenger between her departure and her arrival in Australia. A century later, the U.S. marine artist, Jack Coggins, aboard the NOAA Ship Discoverer painted oils, watercolors, and sketches of work aboard.

INTRODUCTION

Oceanographic ships and the work of marine scientists at sea could provide exciting subjects for the marine artist, yet few have risen to accept the challenge. With a conference theme of "Partnership of Marine Interests", the artist/marine scientist partnership, one long neglected, seemed a natural to bring to the attention of both artists and oceanographers. A nineteenth century sailor who filled a sketchbook with paintings of his research ship and a twentieth century professional artist as a member of the scientific party aboard an oceanographic ship exemplify this unique partnership.

SHEPHARD ABOARD H.M.S. CHALLENGER

J. Welles Henderson is the "guru", the "godfather", of the Philadelphia Maritime Museum. A number of years ago on a visit to Boston, he was pursuing his favorite pastime- snooping second-hand and antique bookstores for illustrated log books of 19th century ships to add to his museum's collection. It was there that he found a sketchbook of really delightful sketches of a British ship on what appeared to be a long voyage. He bought the sketchbook. On his return to Philadelphia, he studied the sketchbook more carefully and felt that the vessel might have been engaged in some sort of marine scientific, oceanographic endeavors. He called me at the NOAA lab in Miami and asked if I had ever heard of a British ship named H.M.S. Challenger. Indeed I had, and I questioned him at length about his discovery. It proved to be an exciting find - an original book full of sketches of the Challenger at sea and at various ports of call. Each full-page sketch was titled and dated. The artist was one B. Shephard.

The 34 paintings show the ship off Gibraltar, off many of the islands in the Atlantic Ocean and the southern Indian Ocean, at Halifax, St. Croix, Capetown, and six paintings of the ship among the icebergs near the Antarctic Circle.

Shephard's depiction of the ship in every painting is accurate and very detailed. Other than for the paintings themselves, Shephard had a delightful disregard for accuracy. For example, the vessel towed by the Challenger into St. Thomas in the Virgin Islands on March 23, 1873, was named Varuna. Shephard has a good painting of the ship in tow, but his title lists her as the Baruner, missed the actual date by four days, and even misspelled the name of the island to which the abandoned vessel was being towed. Another titled "H.M.S. Challenger in a gale in the Gulf of Florida, May 21th, 1873" shows the ship under reduced sail heeled way over amidst monstrous seas under black clouds. In truth the official log of the expedition (1) mentions no storm in May of '73. The ship was enroute from Halifax to Bermuda, and there is no Gulf of Florida between these two ports, or anywhere else, for that matter. But these are the comments of an incurable nitpicker. Shephard's water colors are magnificently done and well preserved. They provide to today's oceanographers and maritime and scientific historians a new dimension to our knowledge and understanding of what is still regarded as the greatest marine science expedition of all time.

Shephard's original sketchbook now resides in the Philadelphia Maritime Museum. The sketches have been reproduced in the original sketchbook format, and an accompanying text for each painting has borrowed extensively and shamelessly from two contemporary personal journals kept by expedition members (2) and (3). Copies of the Challenger Sketchbook (4) are available from the Philadelphia Maritime Museum, 321 Chestnut Street, Philadelphia, PA. 19106.

COGGINS ABOARD NOAA SHIP DISCOVERER

In 1968, at the invitation of the Expedition Chief Scientist aboard the NOAA Ship Discoverer, the well-known American maritime artist, Jack Coggins, joined the expedition at Barbados. The ship was carrying out studies of the interactions between the sea and the atmosphere as precursors to the multi-ship BOMEX Expedition. Operations included

CTD lowerings, meteorological, and tethered balloon observations, and the anchoring of instrumented vertical towers that obtain meteorological data at several heights above the sea and oceanographic data at several depths as well as wave data at the sea surface. Professor Michael Garstang and his students at Florida State University had designed and built these towers and were proud that the ballasting system maintained the towers in the true vertical --an essential characteristic for their measurements.

Coggins did a large oil painting of one of these towers with a Boston whaler in the foreground and the Discoverer in the background. Like Shephard a hundred years earlier, Coggins also injected an element of artistic license. When he painted the instrumented tower as floating absolutely in the vertical, it looked to him like a bridge abutment rising from the sea floor. To impart the feeling of its being a floating tower, he painted it as leaning about 20 degrees in a choppy sea. The painting is magnificent, but Professor Garstang was furious when this painting was reproduced as a NOAA Christmas card and widely distributed throughout the oceanographic community.

The other three large oils depict a nighttime CTD lowering, interior view of night operations on the ship's bridge, and one of the ship underway. Water colors show a meteorological balloon release, the instrumented inflated kite (Kytoon), putting Nansen bottles on the wire and a series of sepia sketches of work aboard. These paintings are skillfully done with great attention to accuracy and detail, the hallmark of all of Coggins' work.

These paintings hung for a number of years on the walls of NOAA's Atlantic Oceanographic and Meteorological Laboratory in Miami and are now in the possession of the person who commissioned and paid for them.

Some 25 color slides of the artistry of Shephard and Coggins constitute the major portion of the paper presented at Oceans '88. They are, however, too numerous and too expensive to reproduce in color for this proceedings volume.

CONCLUSION

With the availability of good cameras and good photographers, artists are no longer required to document our work at sea. But in the tradition of the Roux (pere et fis) in Marseille, Fritz Hugh Lane in Gloucester, Coggins, Barber, and Goertmiller today, ships and their work at sea still provide a challenge to the capable artist. Today's oceanographic expeditions should provide a berth for an artist. It is a long neglected but very appealing partnership of marine interests.

REFERENCES

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