

## King of the South Seas

When Sag Harbor men shipped out on a whaleship, they quickly found out it wasn't a luxury cruise. They slept on crude bunks in a jammed forecabin, the food was inedible, and a rough captain and mate could make their lives miserable. And then there was the chance of being bashed by the flip of a whale's tail. So when a ship called at one of the South Seas islands in the Pacific, it's not surprising that sailors gazed with wonder at the palm fringed beach, the scantily clad native girls waving on the shore, and fresh food you could pluck from a tree or out of the lagoon.

Harry B. Sleight's *The Whale Fishery on Long Island*, published in 1931, tells the stories of several Sag Harbor men who succumbed to the temptations of these exotic islands, deserted their ships and lived long lives among hospitable natives. We can assume they had few ties in Sag Harbor and perhaps remembered tough Northeast winters.

As late as 1890 a visitor to the Navigator Islands (now the Samoan Islands) found that "the chief of the island, father and grandfather of a stalwart race of halfbreeds," was none other than Tom Seaman of Sag Harbor. He had shipped out from New Bedford on the *Albatross* in the 1830s, and when the ship touched the Polynesian Islands, probably to acquire fresh food, he and a pal slipped over the side, swam ashore and were hidden by native women when ship officers came looking for them. His shipmate pined away and died, but Seaman settled in nicely and many years later, at age 75, was discovered living contentedly with his wives in a hut near the beach.

Charles Nordhoff, who later collaborated with James Norman Hall in writing *Mutiny on the Bounty*, shipped aboard a Sag Harbor whaler and wrote about it in his book *Whaling and Fishing*. Compare life in the "hut near the beach" to his description of work on a whaler.



































































