



# **Narrative of the Most Extraordinary and Distressing Shipwreck of the Whale-Ship Essex**

*Owen Chase*

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**Narrative of the Most Extraordinary and Distressing Shipwreck of the Whale-Ship Essex** Owen Chase  
Narrative of the Most Extraordinary and Distressing Shipwreck of the Whale-ship Essex is an account by first mate Owen Chase of the Essex, a whale ship from Nantucket, Massachusetts, that was sunk by a sperm whale in the Pacific Ocean near South American in 1820. Of the twenty-man crew, only eight survived the horrific ordeal; some men were stranded on an island, all remaining crew were forced to eat food tainted by seawater and drink their own urine, and finally, when members of the crew started dying, those still alive resorted to cannibalism until they were rescued. Narrative of the Whale-ship Essex inspired Herman Melville to write his enduring classic Moby-Dick in 1851; it also inspired the 2015 movie In the Heart of the Sea, based on the 2000 best-selling book of the same name. OWEN CHASE (1797-1869) was the first mate of the whaling ship Essex, from Nantucket, Massachusetts. The second-youngest member on board, Chase was only 21 when the boat left on a two-year whaling journey in 1819 that resulted in months of shipwreck in 1820. Chase was one of only eight survivors and wrote an account of it the following year titled Narrative of the Most Extraordinary and Distressing Shipwreck of the Whale-ship Essex. Chase returned to sailing in 1821 and continued until 1840, when he finally retired. Memories of the Essex tragedy haunted him for the rest of his life, and he was eventually institutionalized due to the effects.

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