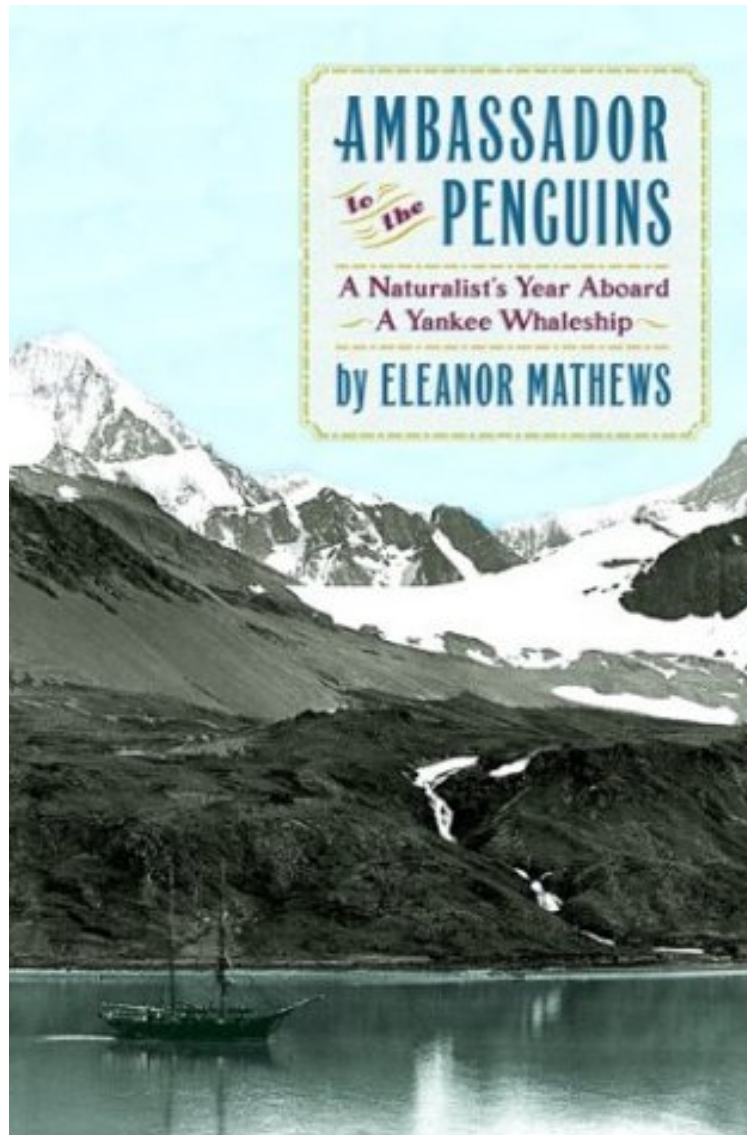


# Ambassador to the Penguins: A Naturalist's Year Aboard a Yankee Whaleship

*Eleanor Mathews*

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**Eleanor Mathews : Ambassador to the Penguins: A Naturalist's Year Aboard a Yankee Whaleship** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Ambassador to the Penguins: A Naturalist's Year Aboard a Yankee Whaleship:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five Stars By B. Olson Great addendum to "Logbook For Grace." 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Great book! By ESLSJL This book should not be overlooked! Both my

husband and I read it and then bought this new for a gift! 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A Naturalists Dream Come True By Jeannie Mancini In 1912, Robert Cushman Murphy from Long Island, a young budding naturalist who is working for The American Museum of Natural History, sees his longtime dream come true; a chance to travel to distant lands to observe and chronicle wildlife in natural habitats. The museum offers Murphy the chance of a lifetime to voyage out to South Georgia Island in the Antarctic, aboard a New Bedford whaling ship named "The Daisy". Previous to his invitation from the Museum, Robert had just got engaged to a young woman named Grace who shared his love of wildlife. His first inclination was to decline the invitation stating he had made commitments to marry. Grace, upon hearing his decision to decline this opportunity offers to move the wedding date up. So both of his dreams are realized and therefore Murphy plans his departure and sets sail for a year long journey of excitement and wonder. The author, Murphy's granddaughter, takes Murphy's firsthand account of the voyage, "A Log for Grace", that was published soon after his return, and embellishes his story; filling in the gaps and adding photographs and other information later gathered. In Eleanor Mathew's *Ambassador to the Penguins*, the reader gets an accurate and detailed account of true New England whaling history. Her vivid depictions and evocative portrayals of just what those men went through to bring home hundreds of barrels of oil that would eventually light the homes of New England, is both astonishing and riveting. Describing the step-by-step process of how the whales were hunted, killed and stripped of blubber, to then be finished off by boiling the blubber in huge pots for the skimming of the oil, gives the reader an incredible sense of appreciation of the hard labor and horrifying work conditions involved. Alternating the chapter scenes from death-defying whale hunts, to Murphy's jaunts on land to observe and sketch a variety of ocean birds, seals, the delightful and enigmatic King Penguins, and his letters home to Grace, the author pens a somewhat engaging read and accompanies the work with authentic black and white photos taken by Murphy himself. Although I learned a lot about whaling that I found very interesting, I feel the book could have used a hefty dose of editing. The book could have been cut in half and still gotten the message across. Mathews gets very very repetitive chronicling each and every whale captured, repeating the process of hunt, kill, strip and boil, over and over and over. After a few episodes I had a clear understanding but soon got bored reading the same scenario time and time again every few pages. The first half of the book is exciting and informative, the middle gets boring, and then the book gets interesting again once the captain and crew finally arrive in Antarctica where Murphy is in seventh heaven amongst his albatrosses and penguins. But again, while Murphy finally gets to do his job, the sailors begin a second round of repetitive slaughter of the huge elephant seals, therefore setting the motion by the author to kick in gear again with multiple paragraphs of the same hunt, kill process with every seal they find. If the author had kept this to a minimum, gave us enough to get the picture, I would have felt better and given the book more stars. If you are a reader doing research on whaling history, or a sailor, you certainly will enjoy the accuracy of Mathews account aboard the Daisy, and will feel you are sailing the seas right along with her. If you are natural history buff, you might enjoy some of it, but might like myself, get a little tired of the repetition.

In 1912, a young naturalist named Robert Cushman Murphy was offered the opportunity of a lifetime to spend a year on one of the last Yankee whaleships out of New Bedford, on a voyage to the Antarctic. Only recently married, Murphy had many regrets at leaving his wife Grace so early in their life together, but he saw that the chance to journey to the end of the world, to bring back new specimens, to record what he saw, was also the chance to launch a stellar career. During the voyage, Murphy kept a journal, packing it with observations of his experiences on board, both as a naturalist and as a witness to a disappearing way of life. When he was not taking photographs and developing them in seawater, or skinning birds to take back to the American Museum of Natural History, he was watching his shipmates raid penguins' nests or harpoon whales and boil down their stripped carcasses. This journal, recorded in the voice of a man who relished the world around him, was later published as *Logbook for Grace* and became a bestseller. Murphy himself went on to become a world authority on oceanic birds. Eleanor Mathews, his granddaughter, has now taken this extraordinary diary, updating supplementing it with never-before-published information and his own original photographs. She presents his voyage in a compelling third-person narrative, maintaining his voice while expanding the tale for modern readers. As a story of seafaring life, a portrait of the whaling industry still under sail, an account of a natural history expedition, and a love letter to an absent wife, it was described as a book to set on the shelf beside *Moby-Dick Two Years Before the Mast*. *Logbook for Grace* has disappeared; but we can proudly offer *Ambassador to the Penguins* to replace it.

From Publishers Weekly From July 1912 to May 1913, the young naturalist Robert Cushman Murphy sailed on one of the last Yankee whale ships to South Georgia, at the edge of the Antarctic penguin territory. His mission was to gather information and specimens of wildlife for the American Museum of Natural History, but in addition to his scientific records, he kept for his wife a personal account of the trip, which was published in 1947 as *Logbook for Grace*. In this enjoyable and informative book, Mathews, his granddaughter, has rewritten this logbook in the third person, rounding out Murphy's notes with previously unpublished details and adding photographs he made and developed himself during the voyage. Murphy described the birds and sea life he encountered and presented a vivid picture of life aboard

the whaler: the irascible captain, the rowdy sailors, the terrible food and inadequate medical supplies, the constant battle with rats and cockroaches, and the grisly business of killing whales and elephant seals and reducing their blubber to oil. Especially touching are the passages Mathews quotes in which her grandfather expresses his longing for his wife, left behind after only a few months of marriage. As all the quotations from the logbook attest, Murphy was an accomplished writer with a fine-tuned sense of humor. Mathews, a cartographer, graphic designer, software developer and writer, does an admirable job of reworking his impressive account of his voyage. Her handsome book is a fitting tribute to a man who went on to become one of this country's most distinguished naturalists and environmentalists. Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

From Booklist Robert Cushman Murphy--ornithologist, oceanographer, photographer, and prescient conservationist--recognized his calling early and found encouragement at the American Museum of Natural History, where staff secured him a college scholarship and, in 1911, a berth on an Antarctica-bound whaling ship. Also lucky in love, Murphy had the blessing of his brand-new wife, Grace, who insisted that he go even though they would be out of touch for two years. Murphy coped with their separation by keeping a special journal, which he published to great acclaim as *Logbook for Grace*, but which has been all but forgotten. Mathews, Murphy's granddaughter, skillfully and zestfully recounts the entire gripping story of Murphy's arduous and successful specimen-collecting expedition, shares Murphy's stellar photographs, and retains many of his vivid descriptions of the ship and its crew and his utter astonishment over whales, seals, and seabirds, from majestic albatrosses to comic penguins. While the irrepressible Murphy painstakingly documented the wildlife of South Georgia Island, calling the animals he reluctantly killed and carefully preserved "martyrs to science," his shipmates indulged in wanton slaughter of whales and seals, a contrast that inspired Murphy, who became an international expert on oceanic birds, to work equally hard at raising environmental awareness. Donna Seaman Copyright American Library Association. All rights reserved