Whaler’s Wife

The wind blows in her hair as she wistfully watches her husband sail away. Delivered to the shores of Vasse, the New England woman, surrounded by her few possessions, gently places her hands protectively about her pregnant belly, and ponders when she may see him next.

American whalers were visitors to Geographe Bay from the earliest settlement days. Captains’ wives often rested here, to share tales of sea life, bear children and begin to raise them. They gave lessons in life and learning to a wide community.

This sculpture testifies to the triumphs of these families, especially the wives of these adventurers. Often strangers to a new place, and weary from pregnancy amid a long voyage, many paused at “Westbrook” (home of Elijah Dawson) to live and teach until the whalers returned a year later. (Many babies were registered as being born at Westbrook, and the wives taught at Westbrook for their keep.)

“For years whalers and sealers had sailed the local waters to reap the rich harvest of the seas, the relatively quiet waters of Flinders Bay and the calm friendly waters of Geographe Bay providing landing places to process the blubber and take in fresh supplies of water... Many were the ships, mainly American, that frequented these bays when the first settlement occurred, some hunting sperm whales out at sea while others remained fishing for hump backs in the bay, and although the settlers were at first pre-occupied with their efforts to tame the wild countryside, opportunities nevertheless arose for social intercourse between them and the lonely sailors.”

Rodger Jennings
“Busselton: Outstation on the Vasse”

There was much trade between the whalers and early settlers – an exchange of fresh produce, butter, meat and firewood, for oil, molasses, clothing, tobacco, spirits, soap, jewellery, saddlery, crockery and tinware.

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