National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

New Bedford Whaling
National Historical Park
Massachusetts

# New Bedford Whaling

## *Thar she Blows!*



Hoisting a sperm whale jaw.
NEW BEDFORD WHALING MUSEUM



Clock oil produced in New Bedford by the W.F. Nye Company.
NPS

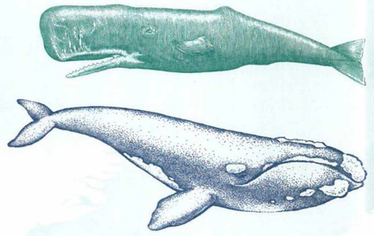


Whale oil lamp made by New Bedford Glass Works.
NEW BEDFORD WHALING MUSEUM

The oil within whales' huge bodies was the first natural energy resource that men pursued globally. Before fossil fuels and electricity, whale oil lit the world. From 1830 to 1860 most American ships that hunted whales sailed from New Bedford, which replaced Nantucket as the center for the industry.

Ships' logs preserved in New Bedford and elsewhere include records that help us understand where whales lived, bred, and fed *(below)* and identify types of whales hunted and taken.

Many New Bedford whalemen sought the toothed blunt-nosed sperm whale, whose huge head contained spermaceti, a waxy, clean-burning substance. The sperm whale was fast and aggressive toward hunters. The slower, toothless right whale, also highly prized, was less risky to hunt. Its carcass floated, making harvesting its blubber and baleen easier. Whaleships often sighted but seldom hunted killer and finback whales.



**TOOTHED WHALES** Most whale species are toothed, with one blowhole. The sperm whale's head is one-third its length, which can reach 60 feet. Its brain is the largest of any mammal's on Earth. © STEVEN NOBLE

**BALEEN WHALES** Through bristles of baleen (keratin) suspended from their gums, these toothless whales filter their food. The right and bowhead whales in this family have two blowholes. Baleen's many uses included fans *(below)*, corsets , and buggy whips. NPS

*The mighty whales which swim in a sea of water, and have a sea of oil swimming in them.*

—THOMAS FULLER, 1642

Barrow

ALASKA

NORTH AMERICA

ASIA

EUROPE

By the late 1700s whalers had hunted out many of the right whales' grounds in the North Atlantic. In the 1800s whaling expanded to more distant waters.

New Bedford whaleships like the *Nassau*, which took many bowheads on a voyage from 1851 to 1853, resupplied in San Francisco.

San Francisco

UNITED STATES

New Bedford

Azores

Honolulu

Lahaina

HAWAI'I

PACIFIC OCEAN

ATLANTIC OCEAN

Cape Verde Islands

AFRICA

Equator

Guayaquil, Ecuador

INDIAN OCEAN

SOUTH AMERICA

Sperm whales mate in warm waters close to the Equator. They feed on squid, abundant in the rich seas west of Ecuador.

Tahiti

St. Helena

INDIAN OCEAN

AUSTRALIA

Concepcion, Chile

**WHALING—A GLOBAL INDUSTRY**
Ships from New Bedford and other American ports took 34,765 whales—

- 23,301 TOOTHED (Spermaceti)
- 11,464 BALEEN (Bowhead, right)

—at 24,848 locations from 1780 to 1920. Each dot shows where one or more whales were killed on one day.

Ports used by New Bedford ships.

DATA: T.D. SMITH, R.R. REEVES, E.A. JOSEPHSON, E.A. LUND, SPATIAL AND SEASONAL DISTRIBUTION OF AMERICAN WHALING AND WHALES IN THE AGE OF SAIL, 2012, PLoS ONE 7(4): E34905. THIS MAP SHOWS A SAMPLING OF WHALE KILLS RECORDED IN AMERICAN SHIPS' LOGS BEFORE 1920. THE TOTAL NUMBER OF WHALES KILLED IS UNKNOWN.

## SEEKING LIGHT, FINDING FREEDOM

New Bedford owes its era of greatest prosperity, 1825 to 1925, to the business acumen of its founding Quaker families. They moved their whaleships and related business interests from Nantucket, America's first whaling center, to New Bedford's deeper port on the mainland. They hoped to realize greater profits by developing an integrated whaling industry in what was then a small village on the Acushnet River. The Quakers built refineries, a candle factory, and import/export operations. Their banks and insurance companies supplied the capital to finance the long whaling voyages. In the 1850s more whaleships sailed from New Bedford than from all of the world's ports combined.

Hunting and butchering the whale, harvesting teeth and baleen, and rendering blubber into oil was grueling, dirty work. Whaling was especially dangerous for those who crewed the small rowboats that carried the "harpooneers"—often Native Americans of the coastal tribes. Upon hearing the lookout's cry, "Thar she blows!" the oarsmen began to chase the whale. Once the harpoon securely lodged in its target, the whale would often drag the boat on a perilous "Nantucket sleigh ride." It could end in a watery grave for the crew when an enraged whale "stove" (rammed) the boat. If the crew prevailed to deal the final death blow, a single sperm whale could yield 100 barrels of oil—a fortune.

Whaling was lucrative for some. People of many backgrounds sought opportunities to share in the wealth as ships' captains, mates, laborers, cooks, carpenters, coopers, sailmakers, and riggers. The city's population surged as mariners from the Azores and Cape Verde, the West Indies, St. Helena, and the Pacific Islands signed on with ships that took on supplies and loaded off cargo at tiny island ports. Men who had sickened, deserted, or died at sea had to be replaced.

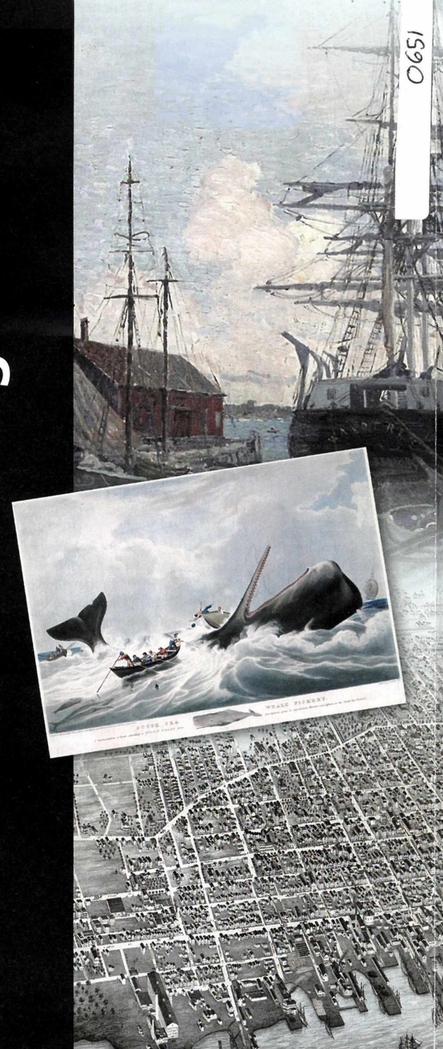
Before the Civil War, increasing numbers of African Americans fled enslavement in the South, via Underground Railroad routes over ground and by sea. Some sought personal and economic freedom aboard the whaleships.

As New Bedford whaleships ventured into the Pacific and Arctic oceans, the average length of a voyage stretched to 30 months. Life aboard ship was not entirely without respite, though. "Gamming," visiting other ships met by chance, offered rare chances to exchange information.

Some mariners expressed their longing for home and family in scenes carved into whale teeth. Wives and children, deprived of husbands and fathers, and of news, learned to manage shops, farms, and families ashore.

By the 1860s petroleum began to replace whale oil. Whale populations dwindled. Still, into the 1900s the Nye Company of New Bedford sold whale oil *(above left)* in small quantities to lubricate clocks, watches, and bicycles.

The harbor, which had attracted the whaleships that brought prosperity in the 1800s, continued to drive New Bedford's economy. It allowed for the shipping of glass and textiles—products of new industries that replaced whaling—and made New Bedford a thriving commercial fishing port.



New Bedford in 1876 *(left)*.
*BACKGROUND:* LITHOGRAPH OF OAKLEY HOOPES BAILEY & CO., VIEW OF CITY OF NEW BEDFORD, 1876. LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

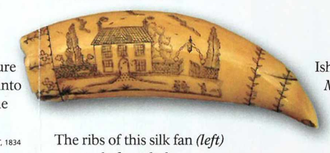


*Wanderer*, the last three-masted whaleship to sail from New Bedford *(above left)*.
C.W. ASHLEY, *WANDERER*, OIL ON CANVAS, 1920
NEW BEDFORD WHALING MUSEUM



A crew, in three small boats, capture a sperm whale. One man is flung into the shark-infested South Sea as the whale rolls onto its side *(left)*.
W.I. HUGGINS AND E. DUNCAN, SOUTH SEA FISHERY, PRINT, 1834
NEW BEDFORD WHALING MUSEUM

Sailors rubbed pigment into designs carved in whale teeth *(scrimshaw)*.
EDWARD BURDETT, COUNTRY COTTAGE SCRIMSHAW, 1825–33
NEW BEDFORD WHALING MUSEUM



The ribs of this silk fan *(left)* are made from baleen.
FAN, CA. 1850 © QUOGUE HISTORICAL SOCIETY





Harvesting baleen in the Arctic.
ALBUMEN PRINT, 1850S, NEW BEDFORD WHALING MUSEUM

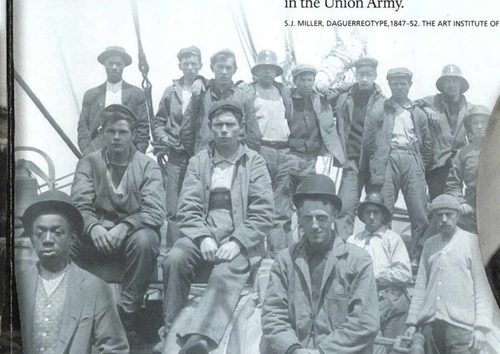



*Call me Ishmael.*

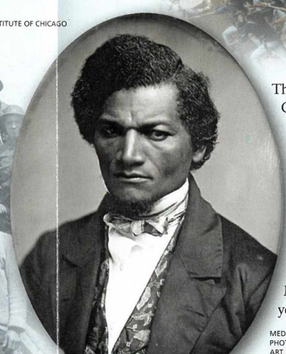
Ishmael narrates Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* (1851); spine of modern edition, with two-flued harpoon.
© ARION AND UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORMIA PRESS, 1979

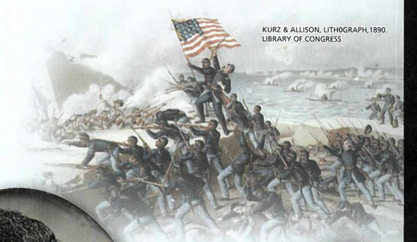
African American blacksmith Lewis Temple of New Bedford designed this toggle harpoon *(left)*. NPS

Crew of *Charles W. Morgan*, the last American whaleship afloat *(below)*.
P.B. GIFFORD, PHOTOGRAPH, 1917
NEW BEDFORD WHALING MUSEUM



Frederick Douglass found his freedom and his voice in New Bedford *(below right)*. Many African Americans heeded his call to enlist in the Union Army.
S.J. MILLER, DAGUERREOTYPE, 1847–52. THE ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO





KURZ & ALLISON. LITHOGRAPH, 1890.
LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

The African American Co. C, Massachusetts 54th Regiment, led the Union attack on Fort Wagner, SC, in 1863 *(above)*. Sgt. William H. Carney of New Bedford lifted the US flag when enemy fire felled the flagbearer. He received this Medal of Honor 37 years later *(right)*.



MEDAL: CARL J. CRUZ COLLECTION
PHOTO: NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART, WASHINGTON

Visitor information
Restrooms
Ferry terminal
Parking
Bus station

North
0 50 100 Meters
0 200 400 Feet

To Whale's Tooth Parking Lot
To Pope's Island Marina and Fairhaven

New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park boundary

ELM STREET PARKING GARAGE
Pedestrian crossing
Middle Street
Purchase Street
Frederick Douglass Way
Elm Street
North Water Street
Bethel Street
MacArthur Drive
Acushnet Avenue
Dover St
National Park Visitor Center
Corson Building
Rodman Candleworks
Closed to public
Double Bank
Closed to public
Buzzards Bay Center
Hamilton Street
William Street
US Custom House
Closed to public
54th Massachusetts Volunteer Regiment Memorial Plaza
Mariners' Home
Closed to public
Custom House Square
Barkers Lane
North 2nd Street
Seamen's Bethel
Johnny Cake Hill
New Bedford Whaling Museum
Centre Street
Front Street
Rose Alley
Sundial Building
Closed to public
Captain Paul Cuffe Park
Union Street
South Water Street
Commercial Street

Middle Street
North 6th Street
Pleasant Street
Post Office
Elm Street
Bus Station
Mechanics Lane
New Bedford City Hall
Whaleman Statue
New Bedford Art Museum/Artworks!
William Street
New Bedford Free Public Library
Lewis Temple Statue
Market Street
Park Place
Union Street
UMASS CVPA / BCC
Spring Street
Zeiterion Theatre

Nathan and Polly Johnson House
Open by appointment

School Street
Pleasant Street
Purchase Street
Acushnet Avenue
South 2nd Street
South 6th Street
7th Street
Walnut Street
Pedestrian crossing
MacArthur Drive

Rotch-Jones-Duff House and Garden Museum
Madison Street
County Street
Joli Gonsalves Memorial Way
Hawthorn Street

National Park Foundation
Join the park community.
www.nationalparks.org

To Fort Taber Fort Rodman
To New Bedford Fire Musem

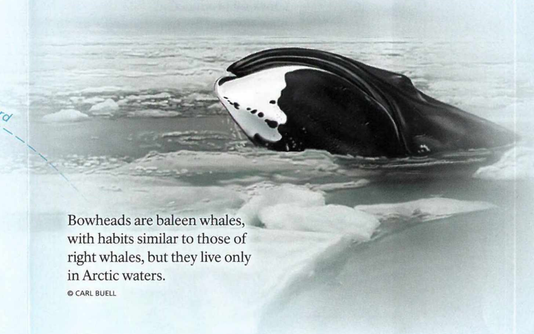
FISH ISLAND
ACUSHNET RIVER
Fisherman's Wharf
PIER 3
Waterfront Visitor Center (Wharfinger Building)
Seasonal Passenger Ferry to Martha's Vineyard
Tonnessen Park
Ferry Terminal
STATE PIER
Schooner Ernestina-Morrissey
Open seasonally
Coast Guard Park
STEAMSHIP PIER
Bourne Counting House
Closed to public
MERRILL'S (HOMER'S) WHARF
LEONARD'S WHARF
NEW BEDFORD HARBOR

## WHALES SURVIVE AND SING

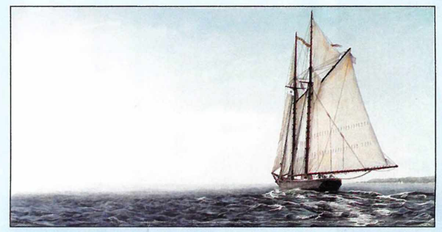
Steam-powered whaleships eventually developed into floating factories. By 1925 they had found most sperm, right, bowhead *(below)*, humpback, and gray whales' feeding and mating grounds.

Sperm whales inhabit deep, remote seas, but right whales live in shallow coastal areas. Believed to have been hunted to extinction in European waters, right whales are now among the most endangered and closely watched species on Earth. Several hundred survive in the North Atlantic and Arctic oceans.

But human-generated noise disrupts sounds that whales use to communicate. Whales are often struck by ships and entangled in fishing nets. As people continue to learn about whales, science and industry have come together to help protect whales, making changes in shipping lanes and observing new, whale-friendly regulations.



Bowheads are baleen whales, with habits similar to those of right whales, but they live only in Arctic waters.
© CARL BUELL



The Schooner ***Ernestina-Morrissey*** *(above)* first sailed the Grand Banks as a fishing vessel and later took explorers to the Arctic. The Republic of Cape Verde, from which thousands emigrated to the United States, gave the schooner to the American people. The last sailing ship to carry immigrants across the Atlantic, it is berthed in New Bedford *(left)* where it is open seasonally to visitors.
© ARTHUR A. MONIZ

# Navigating Historic New Bedford

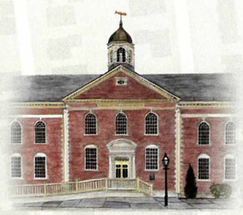
**Within the National Historical Park boundaries, the streets are paved in Belgian blocks. You'll need sturdy shoes. Most of the sites described below are inside or close to the park boundaries. Some partner sites are open year-round, others seasonally. Most are managed by nonprofits and some charge an admission fee.**

**To visit the Waterfront Visitor Center (Wharfinger Building) and the Schooner *Ernestina-Morrissey*, use the pedestrian crosswalk at Route 18.**



NATIONAL PARK VISITOR CENTER
33 William Street

Begin your visit here. Browse the exhibits and bookstore and watch a short film to learn about the people whose labor made New Bedford the "City That Lit the World." Free.



NEW BEDFORD WHALING MUSEUM
18 Johnny Cake Hill

The American whaling and maritime history collections are the world's largest, with five whale skeletons, a replica of the whaling bark *Lagoda*, hundreds of examples of scrimshaw, photographs, paintings, and documents. Fee.



SEAMEN'S BETHEL
15 Johnny Cake Hill

The bethel has continuously served mariners as a place for reflection since 1832. It also once housed a school for seamen, letter exchange, seamen's register, library, and a reading room. The walls are lined with marble cenotaphs, memorials to those lost at sea.



US CUSTOM HOUSE
37 North 2nd Street

Here seafarers from around the world register papers and pay duties and tariffs. The Custom House was built of granite in 1836, in the Greek Revival style seen in many of New Bedford's historic buildings. The portico is supported by four Ionic columns.



NATHAN AND POLLY JOHNSON HOUSE
21 7th Street

The free African American owners ran several successful businesses in New Bedford. Here the Johnsons provided shelter to abolitionist Frederick Douglass and his wife after he escaped from slavery in 1838.



ROTCH-JONES-DUFF HOUSE AND GARDEN MUSEUM
396 County Street

This Greek Revival style mansion, built 1834, was home to three prominent New Bedford families. Fee. The gardens (free) include a historic wooden pergola, formal boxwood parterre garden, and orchard.

ALL BUILDING ILLUSTRATIONS © ARTHUR A. MONIZ

PARTNERS Community bonds are strengthened by the park and its partners—the City of New Bedford, New Bedford Whaling Museum, Schooner *Ernestina-Morrissey*, Rotch-Jones-Duff House and Garden Museum, New Bedford Port Society, New Bedford Historical Society, and Waterfront Historic Area LeagueE.

AN AFFILIATED SITE
**Iñupiat Heritage Center**
PO Box 69
Barrow, AK 99723
907-852-0422
www.nps.gov/inup

**The Iñupiat, natives of Alaska's north coast, seasonally hunt the bowhead. Its raw skin with blubber *(muktuk)*, their staple food, has spiritual associations for the culture. Each year the Iñupiat are allotted a limited number of bowheads, which they hunt with traditional methods.**

ACCESSIBILITY We strive to make our facilities and services accessible to all. For information go to a visitor center, ask a ranger, call, or check our website.

For firearms and other regulations check the park website.

EMERGENCIES CALL 911

MORE INFORMATION
**New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park**
33 William St.
New Bedford, MA 02740
508-996-4095
www.nps.gov/nebe

New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park is one of over 400 parks in the National Park System. To learn more about national parks and National Park Service programs visit www.nps.gov.

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