



# Foundation Document Overview

## New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park

Massachusetts



### Contact Information

For more information about the *New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park Foundation Document*, contact: [nebe\\_superintendent@nps.gov](mailto:nebe_superintendent@nps.gov) or 508-996-4095 or write to: Superintendent, New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park, 33 William Street, New Bedford, MA 02740

## Purpose



*The purpose of NEW BEDFORD WHALING NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK is to preserve, protect, and interpret the cultural resources associated with the American whaling industry that illustrate the dynamic social, economic, and cultural histories and perspectives tied to the American whaling industry. As a model in partnerships, the park works closely with the City of New Bedford, local and regional institutions, and the Iñupiat Heritage Center in Barrow, Alaska.*



## Significance

Significance statements express why New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

- New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park preserves and interprets a heritage extending back to New Bedford's dynamic era as the world's foremost whaling port during the 19th century. A complex social, economic, and cultural network evolved to support the whaling industry, fostering an entrepreneurial spirit that has sustained the transformation of the city and enriched the cultural history and fabric of the park.
- New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park preserves an extensive assemblage of cultural resources ranging from cultural landscapes, historic buildings, historic districts, and museum collections that showcase the enduring legacy and history connected to the whaling industry and industrialization of the city of New Bedford.
- A shared cultural relationship between New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park and the Iñupiat Heritage Center in Barrow, Alaska provides an opportunity and commitment to explore the contributions of Alaska Natives to the history of whaling and to inform modern day understanding of subsistence whaling.
- The success and global exploratory nature of the whaling industry helped create a bustling, cosmopolitan seaport community and one of the richest and most diverse cities in the world. In pursuit of whales, New Bedford's fleet traveled the world's oceans and rapidly expanded knowledge of the distant Pacific and Arctic Oceans, both increasing global knowledge and causing profound impacts on indigenous communities, natural resources, and ecological systems.
- As a legislated partnership park, New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park is built on a foundation of collaborative management with an extensive network of local, regional, and national institutions and organizations that support an innovative management model to support preservation, stewardship, education, and interpretation.

## Fundamental Resources and Values

Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

- **New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park Buildings, Structures, and Associated Sites**
- **Maritime Heritage and Community Fabric**
- **Cultural Landscape**
- **New Bedford Harbor**
- **Collaborative Partnerships**



New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park contains other resources and values that may not be fundamental to the purpose and significance of the park, but are important to consider in management and planning decisions. These are referred to as other important resources and values.

- **The Underground Railroad**
- **Civil War History in New Bedford**
- **Coastal Natural Resources**

## Interpretive Themes

Interpretive themes are often described as the key stories or concepts that visitors should understand after visiting a park—they define the most important ideas or concepts communicated to visitors about a park unit. Themes are derived from—and should reflect—park purpose, significance, resources, and values. The set of interpretive themes is complete when it provides the structure necessary for park staff to develop opportunities for visitors to explore and relate to all of the park significances and fundamental resources and values.

- Throughout most of the 19th century, New Bedford was the whaling capital of the world, bringing wealth and prosperity to the city. Since then, the city's port has adapted to meet changing demands of the nation and the world in order to maintain its status as one of the most important ports in North America.
- By traveling around the world, whalers not only brought the world to New Bedford, they shared New Bedford with the world including communities as far away as Barrow, Alaska, making the city one of the most important hubs of cross cultural globalization in the 19th century.
- For reasons as diverse as its population, New Bedford has always been a city filled with travelers, immigrants, and risk-takers, resulting in a diverse city rooted in progressive values that is rich in history, culture, art, and architecture.
- Whales, once viewed as a commodity and now as a species needing protection, highlight the complex and ever-changing relationship between science, human values, and the natural world.
- Founded on the principles of partnership and community collaboration, New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park exists not only to share New Bedford's rich whaling history, but also to work with the community in its efforts to preserve and protect historic buildings and resources necessary to tell the whaling story.



# Description

Designated in 1996, New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park encompasses 34 acres spread across 13 city blocks, including the New Bedford Historic District, a national historic landmark district designated in 1966. The park is interwoven into the urban fabric of the city of New Bedford. Within the park boundary there are more than 70 historic resources, the majority of which include historic structures that contribute to the park's historic context and are held in private ownership. The Schooner *Ernestina-Morrissey*, a national historic landmark, is also considered to be within the boundary of the park and, when in port, is docked at State Pier on the waterfront. In addition, the National Park Service is authorized to assist in the interpretation and preservation of a number of specific sites named in the enabling legislation that are outside the physical boundary of the park but are considered to be part of the park. These sites include the southwest corner of State Pier, Waterfront Park to the south of State Pier, the Wharfinger Building (Waterfront Visitor Center), Bourne Counting House, and Rotch-Jones-Duff House and Garden Museum.

A maritime city in southeastern Massachusetts on Buzzard's Bay, New Bedford served as home port to the largest U.S. whaling fleet and the center of the nation's whaling industry during the 19th century. Its waterfront teemed with sailors and tradespeople drawn from every corner of the globe by the whaling industry's promise of prosperity and adventure. Despite the collapse of the whaling industry during the decades following the Civil War, New Bedford continues to symbolize whaling in the popular imagination. Today, New Bedford is a city of nearly 100,000 people. Its streets, buildings, and harbor preserve the stories of early settlers, whaling merchants, and maritime workers, including those who found safe haven via the Underground Railroad, and the many people for whom

New Bedford was a port of entry and opportunity. New Bedford remains the number one fishing port in the United States in terms of the dollar value of its catch.

New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park is a partnership park, with limited property in federal ownership, collaboratively working with other institutions to achieve its resource protection and public use mandates. The park actively coordinates with a number of community partners including, but not limited to, the City of New Bedford, New Bedford Whaling Museum, the New Bedford Port Society, the Schooner Ernestina Commission, the Rotch-Jones-Duff House and Garden Museum, the New Bedford Historical Society, the New Bedford Fishing Heritage Center, the Waterfront Historic Area League (WHALE), and the New Bedford Historical Commission. The park also has a partnership with the Iñupiat Heritage Center in Barrow, Alaska, to interpret and educate the public on Barrow as an important outpost for New England whalers in the Arctic during the 19th century.

