

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC New Bedford Historic District

AND/OR COMMON

New Bedford Historic District

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER Acushnet Avenue, Elm, Water, Rodman, Front, Commercial and
Union Streets

—NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

New Bedford

— VICINITY OF

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

Twelfth

STATE

Massachusetts

CODE

025

COUNTY

Bristol

CODE

005

3 CLASSIFICATION**CATEGORY** DISTRICT BUILDING(S) STRUCTURE SITE OBJECT**OWNERSHIP** PUBLIC PRIVATE BOTH**PUBLIC ACQUISITION** IN PROCESS BEING CONSIDERED**STATUS** OCCUPIED UNOCCUPIED WORK IN PROGRESS**ACCESSIBLE** YES: RESTRICTED YES: UNRESTRICTED NO**PRESENT USE** AGRICULTURE COMMERCIAL EDUCATIONAL ENTERTAINMENT GOVERNMENT INDUSTRIAL MILITARY MUSEUM PARK PRIVATE RESIDENCE RELIGIOUS SCIENTIFIC TRANSPORTATION OTHER:**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME multiple ownership (administered by New Bedford Historical
Commission c/o City Hall)

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

New Bedford

— VICINITY OF

STATE

Massachusetts

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, Registry of Deeds, Southern District
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

New Bedford

STATE

Massachusetts

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE Historic American Buildings Survey (listings for individual
buildings)

DATE

1961

FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

Division of Prints and Photographs, Library of Congress

CITY, TOWN

Washington 20540

STATE

D.C.

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The New Bedford Historic District, bounded by portions of Acushnet Avenue and of Elm, Water, Rodman, Front, Commercial, and Union Streets, is comprised of eleven city blocks and part of a twelfth, totaling some 19.6 acres. Within this area, some 20 buildings, most of them constructed between 1810 and 1855, are significant examples of the architectural types to be found in the commercial district of a major New England seaport of that period. In addition to the primary buildings, such as the Custom House and the banks, the district contains good examples of smaller Federal and Greek Revival buildings with shops on the ground floor and living quarters above, and several gable-roofed warehouses of brick or stone, 2½ to 4 stories in height.

The Historic District is separated from New Bedford's still active waterfront, immediately to the east, by the John F. Kennedy Expressway, a limited access highway now under construction. To the north and south of the district are areas devoted to mixed commercial-industrial use. On the west is New Bedford's central business district.

The construction of intrusive elements within the area in recent years was a significant factor in the adoption of a local historic district ordinance aimed at preventing further deterioration of its historic character and encouraging its rehabilitation. Chief among the intrusive elements are a gas station at the corner of Second and Union Streets and a parking structure and lot which occupy most of the block bounded by Acushnet Avenue, Barkers Lane, Second and William Streets. Many buildings in the area have been turned to new commercial uses and their character affected by inappropriate signing and changes in fenestration. However, the local historic district commission hopes, with the cooperation of property owners, to see these inappropriate elements gradually removed.

Among the buildings of primary interest in the district are the following (numbers correspond to those on the attached district map):

1. United States Custom House. Designed by Robert Mills and constructed by Seth H. Ingalls in 1834-36; two-story, granite ashlar building with low hipped roof and giant Doric portico; an outstanding example of the Greek Revival public building.
2. New Bedford Institution for Savings. Designed by Russell Warren and erected in 1853; a one-story structure in Renaissance Revival style with brownstone front, brick sides and rear; after 1896 housed the Third District Court.

(Continued)

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES c. 1790, 1810-1855

BUILDER/ARCHITECT Russell Warren and others

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The New Bedford Historic District, bounded by portions of Acushnet Avenue and of Elm, Water, Rodman, Front, Commercial, and Union Streets, is a good example of the commercial district of a major New England seaport of the period 1810-1855. The district retains some 20 historic buildings, several of which were designed by the noted architect Russell Warren.

New Bedford began its rapid growth as a whaling port shortly after the town's establishment in the early 1760's. By 1840, she had superseded Nantucket as the nation's leader in the industry and maintained that position until the growth of the petroleum industry, beginning in the late 1850's, brought American whaling to an end. New Bedford's last whaling voyage ended on August 20, 1925.

In the late 1960's, a campaign was begun to preserve the remaining portions of New Bedford's historic waterfront. Led by a citizens' group, the Waterfront Historic Area League, it resulted in 1971 in the enactment of a local ordinance (under the authority of a state enabling act) establishing the Bedford Landing Waterfront Historic District.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

New Bedford, located at the mouth of the Acushnet River on Buzzards Bay, began its rapid rise as a whaling port shortly after the town's establishment, as Bedford Village, in the early 1760's. Joseph Russell, who is regarded as the town's founder, promoted New Bedford's birth because of his extensive land holdings in the general area. Several ship builders, a blacksmith, and other skilled workers soon settled there.

In 1765, Joseph Rotch, a leading Nantucket whaling merchant, moved to New Bedford. He and Russell took advantage of the deep harbor, something Nantucket lacked, and spurred the development of whaling by the young settlement. A ship, the Dartmouth, soon slid from the ways at New Bedford, the first locally constructed whaling vessel. The ship carried the first load of New Bedford whale oil to London in 1767. Within eight years, New Bedford and the nearby area claimed fifty whaling sloops.

(Continued)

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

(See Continuance Sheet)

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY c. 19.6 acres
 UTM REFERENCES

A	1,9	33,986,0	4,611,00,0	B	1,9	33,989,0	4,611,073,0
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C	1,9	33,962,0	4,611,070,5	D	1,9	33,959,0	4,611,097,0
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The boundaries of the National Historic Landmark designation for the New Bedford Historic District are those of the Bedford Landing Waterfront Historic District, established by the City of New Bedford in 1971 under authority of the Massachusetts Historic Districts Act, Chapter 40 C of the Massachusetts General Laws. Boundaries are outlined in red on the attached map of the Bedford Landing Waterfront Historic District, prepared by the New Bedford City Planning Department.

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME/TITLE Polly M. Rettig, Historian, Landmark Review Project; original form prepared by S. S. Bradford, Historian, 1/24/67

ORGANIZATION	DATE
<u>Historic Sites Survey, National Park Service</u>	<u>1/30/75</u>
STREET & NUMBER	TELEPHONE
<u>1100 L Street NW.</u>	<u>202-523-5464</u>
CITY OR TOWN	STATE
<u>Washington 20240</u>	<u>D.C.</u>

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL STATE LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE N/A National Historic Landmark

TITLE

Landmark Designated: 11-73-66
 date

Boundary Certified: [Signature] 6-10-76
 Chief, Hist. & Arch. Surveys date

FOR NPS USE ONLY
 I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER (NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS)
 DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF TECHNOLOGY AND SURVEYS AND PRESERVATION
 ATTEST: [Signature]
 KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER 1.18.75

Boundary Affirmed: [Signature] 4/11/76
 Director, OAHPS date

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3. Samuel Rodman House. Built in 1831; a square, three-story building of dressed stone with quoins; hipped roof broken by interior chimneys and gabled dormers.
4. Mariner's Home. Built c. 1790 as the residence of merchant William Rotch, Jr.; moved from original location at William and North Water Streets; a Federal style building with clapboard front, brick ends, hipped roof; center hall plan with good detail and paneling.
5. Seamen's Bethel. Described by Melville in Moby Dick; two-story frame church built in 1832; rebuilt in 1867 after a fire, at which time the front elevation was redesigned, the present tower added, and the original interior (seating) plan reversed.
6. Whaling Museum. Sponsored by the Old Dartmouth Historical Society; a massive 20th century building in Georgian Revival style; houses extensive collections illustrating the history of the whaling industry.
7. Mechanics Bank (north half) and Merchants Bank (south half). Built in 1831 from designs by Russell Warren; Greek Revival, Ionic temple style; steps, foundation, and front wall of polished granite, remainder of brick; portico supported by eight wooden columns, northern four with entasis, southern four without; interior wall divides the building into halves.
8. Samuel Rodman Candlehouse. Built in 1810; square, three-story building of stone, later stuccoed; semicircular lunette windows at third story level; quoined window and door frames and corner quoins.

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The American Revolution led to the near destruction of New Bedford. Angered by the depredations of New England privateers, the British raided the coast of Connecticut and southeastern Massachusetts in the fall of 1778. Two thousand redcoats attacked New Bedford early in September. The inhabitants, alerted to the danger, had already fled, leaving their homes unprotected and many vessels unmanned. Smoke soon told the tale. Fires set by the British destroyed 11 homes, 76 shops, 26 storehouses, 2 ropewalks, and 34 ships.

Despite the devastation suffered during the Revolution, New Bedford rapidly recovered, and within half a century after 1783 had become America's greatest whaling port. She dispatched the Rebecca on a voyage in September, 1791, and the vessel became the first American whaler to fill her hold with oil taken from the Pacific Ocean. The precedent-breaking ship returned on February 23, 1793. War again disrupted New Bedford's whaling industry when Great Britain and the United States joined in battle during the War of 1812. But as after the end of the Revolution, New Bedford rapidly recovered from the effects of the second war. By 1823 her whaling fleet equalled that of Nantucket in tonnage. Both towns strove for dominance during the next several years, with New Bedford finally edging beyond her competitor. In 1827 Nantucket recorded a total catch of 33,063 barrels of sperm oil, while New Bedford posted a total of 38,752. And in 1828 New Bedford sent out forty-nine vessels, twenty-four of which sailed for the Pacific. The town continued to develop the industry in the 1830's, and by the end of the decade had superseded Nantucket as America's whaling center.

New Bedford reached her zenith in the 1840's and 1850's. In 1841 she employed about 10,000 men in the industry and had at least \$12,000,000 invested in ships and equipment. She owned half of the Nation's whaling ships by 1857. In the same year, her fleet accounted for 48,108 barrels of sperm oil, 127,362 barrels of whale oil, and 1,359,850 pounds of whalebone.

New Bedford's eminence in the whaling industry is explained by several factors. First, she possessed an excellent harbor. Located on the mainland, unlike Nantucket, the town also benefited from the rise of the railroad. Second, the demand for whaling's products increased during the first half of the nineteenth century. But most important was the enterprising and vigorous nature of the merchants engaged in the industry. Mostly Quakers, the New Bedford whale oil merchants concentrated on their business and availed themselves of every opportunity to exploit the industry.

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New Bedford whaling reached its peak in 1857 and then gradually declined, largely because of competition from the growing petroleum industry. After the Civil War, in which New Bedford lost many ships, whaling continued but at an even slower pace. Natural disasters during the last three decades of the 19th century--numerous ships were caught and crushed in ice packs in Arctic waters--were also a factor in the death of the industry. New Bedford's last whaling voyage ended on August 20, 1925.

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PAGE 1


- Allen, Everett S. Children of the Light: The Rise and Fall of New Bedford Whaling and the Death of the Arctic Fleet (Boston, 1973).
- Ashley, Clifford W. The Yankee Whaler (Boston, 1938).
- Hegarty, Reginald B. "New Bedford's History" (pamphlet, New Bedford, 1959).
- Morrison, Samuel Eliot. The Maritime History of Massachusetts, 1783-1860 (Boston, 1921).
- Stackpole, Edouard A. The Sea-Hunters (Philadelphia, 1953).
- Spears, John R. The Story of the New England Whalers (New York, 1908).


ARCHITECTURAL and HISTORIC MERIT


KEY

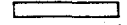
 70-100
Excellent Architecture and Important Historically

 60-69
Excellent Architecture or Good Architecture and Important Historically

 40-59
Good Architecture

 20-39
Fair Architecture or Good Architecture but in Poor Condition

 0-19
Worthless Architecture

 **OUTSIDE**
Worthless Architecture, Just Outside Study Area

A - in Good Condition
B - in Fair or Satisfactory Condition
C - in Poor Condition

