

Old Bedford Village

The area bounded by the Acushnet River, Union, County and Walnut Streets forms part of the original tract of land which in 1760 defined what would become the city of New Bedford. That year, Joseph Russell sold lots to ship builders, carpenters and housewrights and the Village of Bedford was established. In 1765 Joseph Rotch came from Nantucket to exploit the natural deep water port found here. ;In a short time whale hunting became a local preoccupation, and a very successful one after the War of 1812. At the heights of the Whaling Era (1820-1857) there were 329 whaling and trading vessels registered in New Bedford. This port became one of the busiest in the world. The homes built by whaling captains, who had by now become international merchants, line the streets of New Bedford. They remained a lasting testament both to the success of their enterprise and to the taste of an age which we now find so full of romantic adventure.

The walking tour of the Old Bedford Village begins on Spring Street, near its intersection with South Sixth Street (see following #1).



1.

83 Spring Street – The Friends Meetinghouse on Spring Street stands on the site of the first building erected for religious purposes in Old Bedford Village. Joseph Rotch donated the lot to the Friends in 1785. The Friends Meetinghouse represents much of what the surrounding community found valuable. The brick structure is sober, simple and without the slightest hint of decoration. The separate entrances for men and women can be seen as an outward manifestation of the strict morals upon which the faith was based. While this separation of the sexes may seem out of fashion today, it is the visible legacy of a tradition that encouraged simple – even spartan – living. This externalization of beliefs encouraged New Bedford's Quakers to found a branch of the Anti-Slavery Society in 1834 and to participate in the extensive Underground Railroad network until the Civil War.



2.

13 South Sixth Street – The land immediately across Spring Street, to the south of the Friends Meetinghouse, was owned by Humphrey Russell, a son of New Bedford's founder, Joseph Russell. The Humphrey Russell House was built by him in 1804 in the Federal style. This five-bay, two-story wood frame dwelling is likely one of the earliest in the neighborhood. Humphrey Russell lived here until 1836.



3.

15/17 South Sixth Street – Built in 1804 by Humphrey Russell for his daughter Rebecca (Russell) Thornton on the occasion of her marriage to Elisha Thornton, this five-bay, two-story Federal style building has thin fluting at the doorway, a common embellishment for a home of this period. In 1818, the Thornton family sold the dwelling to John Price, a whaling captain.



4.

14 South Sixth Street – This brick structure, built by Philip Anthony circa 1822, is an early example of a Greek Revival style home. Originally the site of an artillery gunhouse, the Selectmen of the town sold the parcel to Anthony, a merchant. He built this home for his new bride, Sarah Howland, a daughter of Captain Nathaniel Howland. With its rooftop cupola, the building approximates the appearance of a Greek Temple with its gable on South Sixth Street. The portico flanked by Greek columns completes the historical allusion.



5.

20 South Sixth Street – Built by whaling merchant Levi Standish circa 1829, this brick dwelling is a fine example of the Federal style. The hipped roof, thin Ionic columns at the entry and the fanlight over the door are all representative of this style. Standish, a descendant of Captain Miles Standish, was part owner of the whaling ships *Mercury* and *George Howland*. The Standish family owned the home until 1916, when it was sold to the New Bedford Women's Club. The house is presently owned by the YWCA of Southeastern Massachusetts.



6.
21 South Sixth Street – Captain James Howland 2d built this large Federal style dwelling between 1808 and 1815. Howland built the house on a lot he had purchased to the rear of his original lot. Howland had gone to sea as a youth, and, according to popular lore, having had enough of close calls on shipboard (including a near fatal fire) settled into a business partnership with his brother John, and then remained ashore. James Howland could not completely abandon the sea however, and had a large tower (since demolished) built behind his home. From here he could view the harbor. This earned him the nickname, “Observatory Jim.” This home in more recent years was converted into a hostelry, “The Elm Arch Inn,” and served many distinguished New Bedford visitors, including the authors John Dos Passos and e.e. cummings.



7.

23 South Sixth Street – In 1830, a fire destroyed brothers Gideon and William Allen's back-to-back homes located on lots on Sixth and Seventh Streets. Both brothers immediately rebuilt their homes in strikingly similar architectural styles (see number 30). Both houses, built in brick, possess a dramatic Federal style fanlight above the entry door and delicate Corinthian columns on the portico. The Allen brothers owned shares in multiple whaling ships, including the *Octavia*, the *Brahmin*, the *Coral*, the *Victory*, and the *Francis*. Gideon also owned shares of whaling ships in his own name.



8.

22 South Sixth Street – Built in 1812 by Abner Howland, a shipwright and nephew of John Howland Sr., this Federal style is one of the earliest houses in the town of New Bedford. While this home has an altered entry, it typifies the most practical option to a full-width Federal style home. Later additions expanded the house to its current size.



9.

27 South Sixth Street – This late Federal style home built in 1828 was known as Gibb's Mansion House because of the large addition erected by its second owner Captain Robert Gibbs. Captain Gibbs, the eldest son of Caleb and Experience Gibbs came to New Bedford to become a cabinetmaker. He became master of the sloop *Experiment*, a coasting vessel that traveled up the Hudson River during the summer and to Savannah, Georgia during the winter. He also served as master of whaling vessels the *Hibernia*, the *Huntress*, and the *Enterprise* in the 1830s. Captain Gibbs later served in the Massachusetts Legislature during 1860-1861. While the house has been radically altered, the tall windows on the first floor and the Doric frieze over the entry porch are remaining elements from the date of construction.



10.

232 Walnut Street – Captain Alfred Gibbs, the younger brother of Captain Robert Gibbs, built this home circa 1830. Gibbs served as master of the *Washington* and the *Factor* from 1802-1805. He co-owned the *Hibernia*, the *Huntress* and the *Enterprise* with his brother. Captain Gibbs served on the Board of Directors of the Merchants National Bank and was one of the founders of the New Bedford-Taunton Railroad. This home with its Doric entry and Federal style doorway has been altered by additions.



11.

223 Walnut Street – Originally built by Captain Andrew Swain in 1803, the Federal style entry was modified with a roof later in the 19th century. Like many other Nantucket whalemens, Captain Swain moved to New Bedford after the Revolutionary War. His home is best known, however as the residence of Francis Rotch, one of the men who owned the *Dartmouth*, one of the three ships involved in the Boston Tea Party. Rotch spent the entire Revolution in Europe and returned to live in this two-story residence after the conflict. Miss Mary Russell, the last descendant of the original Russell family, lived here until her death in 1928.



12.
34 South Sixth Street – Built in 1834 by David Coffin, this home was one of several large and imposing homes built by successful merchants after the installation of streetlights and paving stones on this street created a more cosmopolitan atmosphere in the city. Coffin's parents had come to New Bedford from Nantucket and it may be no coincidence that this home is similar to residences built by his Nantucket cousins between 1837 and 1839. The Greek Revival style portico is combined with Federal period details such as the stepped parapet gable ends connecting to bridged chimneys. Window shutters and a rooftop balustrade were removed in later years. David Coffin owned six whaling vessel in the mid-1830s, as well as a candleworks and tryhouse on Water Street. 'Coffin's Wharf,' at the foot of Walnut Street was once one of the busy whaling wharves during the heyday of the whale fishery.



14.

38 South Sixth Street – Captain John Howland Jr. built this residence also in 1834. He was a partner in the firm of 'J. and J. Howland,' which he co-owned with his brother James (see Number 6). This early Greek Revival style brick mansion employs simple Doric columns. This choice of the most monumental of the classical orders reflects the dignified simplicity of Quaker taste in New Bedford. The original chimneys, window shutters and roof balustrade have been removed.



13.

37 South Sixth Street – George Howland Jr. built this brick residence in 1834. Always wealthy and active in local civic affairs, he was originally employed in the counting house of his father. Howland was a Whig representative to the General Court in 1839, Mayor of New Bedford in 1855, and in 1863 after the death of Isaac Taber. He established a trust fund for the New Bedford Free Public Library from his mayor's salary that remains in use today. This home is a late Federal/early Greek Revival style residence with a simple Doric column entry. A balustrade between the chimneys and window shutters has been removed. Despite its seemingly simple exterior, his father, a staunch Quaker, is reported to have found this home far too extravagant.



15.

42 South Sixth Street – Originally built as the Tifereth Israel Synagogue in 1924 this building continues to serve New Bedford's religious community as the home of a different denomination. Designed by local architect Nathaniel C. Smith in the Byzantine style in 1924, this building served as a synagogue for almost 70 years before the congregation moved to a newer structure. Since that time, the building has been continuously used for religious purposes.



16.

46 South Sixth Street – The Ann Howland Dunbar home was built in 1820 on land owned by John Howland Sr., which he gave to his daughter on the occasion of her marriage to Elisha Dunbar. The severe appearance of the stuccoed exterior of this home is consistent with the Quaker belief that simple is better. This Federal style home has paired end chimneys. Elisha Dunbar was a successful whaling merchant and their son, George H. Dunbar, became the fifth mayor of New Bedford in 1857.



17.

48 South Sixth Street – Built by whaling merchant Gideon Allen in 1845, this house is a rare representative of the Gothic style in New Bedford. The steep front gable of the house is edged with vergeboard and a pointed arch window on the west elevation. Even though Gideon Allen owned this property, his brother, Captain Joseph H. Allen resided in this house with his family. In 1867, Gideon Allen sold the property to Joseph Vera, one of the first whaling era businessmen from the Azores. When Mr. Vera arrived in New Bedford in 1850, his share from a 30-month whaling voyage on the *Montreal* totaled \$3,761. Eventually he purchased a men's outfitting store, a rooming house, 18 parcels on real estate, a farm in Mattapoissett and also invested in whaleships.



18.

47 South Sixth Street (rear) – The green vinyl-sided house behind Our Lady of Assumption Church was built in 1838 for Miss Mary Rotch, age sixty-one, and the youngest child of William Rotch Sr. In that same year she moved into this house with her companion Miss Mary Gifford. Miss Gifford, daughter of Warren Gifford of Dartmouth, inherited the house after Mary Rotch died in 1848. This late Federal style house sat on the corner of South Sixth Street and Joli Gonsalves Way (formerly Cherry Street) and was moved west to make way for the construction of the church in 1957.



19.

One Howland Terrace – Designed by and built in 1910 for noted New Bedford architect Nathaniel C. Smith, this residence is an early Foursquare style. The shingled wall covering is broken by a stringcourse on every third row of the first floor, while a wider stringcourse separates the two stories. Ornate shutters are found on the multi-paned windows. Nathaniel C. Smith, born in New Bedford in 1866, attended the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris in 1889. Smith’s designs include the New Bedford Textile School, built in three stages in 1893, 1898 and 1901, the Dunbar School on Dartmouth Street, the Fall River YMCA, the Brockton Public Library, the “Studio” for the Swain School (now incorporated into the Kennedy-Donovan Center), and dozens of homes in New Bedford.



20.
54 Seventh Street – Originally the carriage house of the County Street estate of Edward Coffin Jones (now the Rotch-Jones-Duff House and Garden Museum), this building was constructed in 1855. Like other New Bedford whaling businessmen, Edward Coffin Jones came to New Bedford from Nantucket to seek his fortune. He began as a stock boy in a ships chandler and rose to become a business owner and successful investor in whaling ships.



21.

52 Seventh Street – The Edith Willis House is one of the few Queen Anne style buildings in the Bedford Village area. Edith Willis purchased this lot from the estate of George Howland Jr. in 1888. She and her husband Henry P. Willis hired architect Z. B. Davis to design this residence. The house features a hipped roof, multiple dormers and a full porch on the west side.



22.

51 Seventh Street – Captain John Akin had this Federal style home built as his residence in 1820. Born in South Dartmouth, Captain Akin came to New Bedford after his marriage and engaged in the merchant service as a first officer for several years. He left that business to go into the coastal packet trade between Boston and New Bedford. Captain Akin also served as a harbor pilot and was a veteran of the War of 1812. He made this house his home between the years 1820 until 1863. At one time Captain Akin was quite wealthy until a shipwreck combined with insufficient insurance ruined him.



23.

48 Seventh Street – Originally the home of Joseph Ricketson II and located at 5 Ricketson's Court (11 Park Place), this house was moved to this site in 1955. Joseph Ricketson II was the son of Joseph and Rebecca (Russell) Ricketson and brother to Daniel Ricketson, one of the New Bedford's well-known local historians. Ricketson built this house on part of his father's estate during the 1850s, but by 1858 he was bankrupt and lost all his property. His creditors sold the house to Rufus Sherman in that same year. In 1955, the owner, Merchants Parking Center, Inc., requested permission to relocate the house to the east side of Seventh Street between Walnut and Madison, where the house is found today.



24.

47 Seventh Street – Originally a Federal style half house built by Captain Constant Norton circa 1820; he sold it to his son, Captain Constant Norton Jr. by 1824. Captain Norton Jr. and his bride Mary (Gardner) Norton lived in this house until 1828, when they sold the house to Andrew Gerrish Jr., a trader. This building was extensively remodeled during the latter part of the 19th century with the addition of a gambrel roof and front porch.



25.

46 Seventh Street – Originally the carriage house for the George Howland Jr. Estate on South Sixth Street, this brick building is now a two-family residence. Constructed in 1834, the building has a steep front gable dormer extending from a hipped roof. George Howland Jr. served as Mayor of New Bedford during the Civil War and President of the New Bedford-Five Cents Savings Bank. George Howland Jr. owned shares in several whaling ships with his father, notably the *Ann Alexander*, *George and Susan*, and *Hope*.



26.

43 Seventh Street – This Federal style, five-bay hipped roof house was built by Captain Edward Merrill between 1825 and 1833. Captain Merrill came to New Bedford from Maine to work in the whaling industry. He is best known as the developer and builder of “Merrill's Wharf” located at the foot of Walnut Street. Not only did Captain Merrill construct the “Bourne Counting House” found on the wharf, but also the Baker-Robinson Oil Works candlehouse located across the street. Edward “Black Hawk” Robinson rented this house in 1834 and it is most likely the birthplace of his daughter, Henrietta “Hetty” Howland Robinson Green, known as the richest woman in America at the time of her death in 1916.



27.

246 Walnut Street – Captain Isaiah Burgess, Jr. built this house on land purchased by his father in 1829. A whaling captain, like his father before him, he captained the *Canton*, *Eagle*, *Nautilus* and *Nye*. His father, Isaiah Burgess, Sr. was the captain of the *Beaver*, one of the ships attacked during the Boston Tea Party and the first to fly the American flag in a British port after the hostilities. Later in life he partnered with Abraham Howland in the firm Burgess and Howland. This half-house, built in the Federal style with end chimneys, has multiple additions, but retained a Greek Revival style entry.



28.

242 Walnut Street – Built in 1878 by Hiram W. Wentworth, this house was constructed in the Second Empire style. It was built at a time when French culture was in vogue and American architects who studied in Paris brought this style to America. from the late 19th century. The roofline of this structure is commonly referred to as a Mansard roof. Hiram W. Wentworth was a successful merchant, beginning his career as a bookkeeper for W. R. Wing and later founding the firm F. W. Wentworth with his son, Frank.



29.

245 Walnut Street – George Howland Sr. built this home in 1811 for his new bride, Susan (Howland) Howland with the couple moving into the house on their wedding day. On the same day, the ship *George and Susan* was launched into the whaling industry, an event, which it is said, the couple observed from their doorstep. Originally a large Federal style mansion, the structure was substantially remodeled in the 19th century with Italianate features. George Howland, a lifelong devout Quaker became one of New Bedford's wealthiest whaling merchants with 10 ships flying his flag. Howland employed Frederick Douglass during his early days of freedom in New Bedford. Douglass wrote in his autobiography that Howland was “a hard driver, but a good paymaster, and I got on well with him.”



30.

251 Walnut Street – Built in 1807 by Captain Elkanah Tallman, this Federal style house has undergone extensive alterations. Captain Tallman purchased the land under this house from Humphrey Russell, son of Joseph Russell. The front entry, now enclosed, is topped by a triangular pedimented addition. Tallman was the Master of the *Othello* and the *Bristol* from 1805-1809, two early whaling ships out of New Bedford. Tallman was also a major investor in the whaling industry.



31.

36 Seventh Street – Built in 1875 by Joseph Brownell, this two-family building has Italianate brackets at the cornice as well as two-story bay windows on the front and side elevations. This home is one of the few specifically built multi-family homes in the neighborhood.



32.

35 Seventh Street – Originally built as the Guest House to the Samuel W. Rodman Estate in 1842, this Gothic cottage was intended to compliment Rodman's stone Gothic residence on County Street. Rodman was one of New Bedford's leading manufacturer's of cotton goods. The house retains many of its Gothic Revival features, such as a steeply pitched roof and intersecting transepts. The original slate roof is intact.



33.

34 Seventh Street – Built in 1807, the Captain William Taber House has undergone many alterations, including the addition of a tall dormer right above the center entry. The house still retains elements of the Federal style, namely, the five-bay front elevation and the end chimneys. The Taber House was built on land purchased from Abraham Russell. Captain Taber was Master of the ships *Abby*, *Vancouver* and *Defiance* between 1804 and 1809.



34.

33 Seventh Street – Owned by Captain Daniel Wood, this Greek Revival style house was built in 1834. The gable-fronted building has simple lintels and a portico with freestanding Ionic columns that supports a stylized entablature. Captain Wood was the Master of the *Minerva*, the *Commander Decatur*, and the *Braganza*. He also inspected vessels for insurance agents after his career on the seas.



35.

31 Seventh Street – Charles R. Tucker owned this Greek Revival style house, which was built in 1842. The gable-fronted building has a triangular pediment that slightly overhangs the body of the house. The pediment has corner returns, an element commonly seen on Greek Revival buildings. The second story polygonal bay window was added at a later date. Charles Tucker, a businessman engaged in the whaling industry served as an agent for whaling vessels. He also served as a director for the old Citizens Bank for many years.



36.

30 Seventh Street – Built by William H. Allen in 1831, this brick structure replaced a wood frame house destroyed by fire. This Greek Revival style residence has a highly decorated front entry with Corinthian columns on the portico. William Allen began his career as a tailor working with his father, James and brother Gideon which led to their outfitting sailors in the whaling industry. William and Gideon Allen owned shares in the whaling ships *Octavia*, *Brahmin*, *Coral*, *Victory* and *Francis 2*.



37.

29 Seventh Street – Built by Samuel Durfee, this house was sold to Captain John Congdon in 1807. Unfortunately Captain Congdon lived here only four years; in 1811 he died on board the merchant ship *Aldebaran* at the age of thirty-seven. His widow, Frances Hyer Congdon and their daughters, Elizabeth and Sarah remained in the house many years. Sarah and Elizabeth Congdon became the family breadwinners and worked as mantuamakers or dressmakers. Sarah Congdon was the last family member to occupy the house until her death in 1883.



38.

27 Seventh Street – Built circa 1870, the Ruth L. Smith House is one of the few late 19th century homes built in Old Bedford Village. Ruth Wilcox married Henry Smith, a mariner who shipped out of New Bedford with her father, Captain Wilcox. After Henry's death at the age of 50, Mrs. Smith built the house for her oldest son Henry Wilcox Smith, a local photographer. This structure built in the Stick style has many elements common to that style, such as the "X" braces over the windows and the kingpost truss along the porch.



39.

26 Seventh Street – George W. Baker purchased the land for this residence in 1827 and lived here until his death in 1843. Mr. Baker was an active member of the Society of Friends. He served as City Assessor, as librarian of the “Social Library,” the predecessor of the New Bedford Free Public Library and treasurer of the New Bedford Institution for Savings from 1835 until his death. This four-bay Federal style residence retains three chimneys that pierce the gabled roof and has a dressed granite block foundation.



40.

25 Seventh Street – This Federal style five-bay home was built circa 1815 for William C. Nye, a sea captain who was also part owner of many ships in the early days of the whaling industry. He married Eliza Tallman in 1817, the daughter of Captain Elkanah Tallman. After Eliza's death in 1828, Captain Nye married Betsey M. Tallman in 1831. Captain Nye died at age 40 in 1832, leaving his widow alone in the house. This house was moved from the corner of Seventh and School Streets to allow for the construction of the Smith House.



41.

24 Seventh Street – Although extensively altered on the exterior, 24 Seventh Street retains the steeply pitched roof that defines a Gothic Revival style house. George W. Baker purchased this parcel from Captain John Price in 1841. The 1849 City Directory showed William L. Gerrish, a druggist, living at 24 Seventh Street with his wife Virginia Thornton Gerrish and their two sons.



42.

23 Seventh Street – Now known as the Charles W. and Elizabeth Williams Read Rental House, this parcel was the site of a confectionary store owned by Nathan and Polly Johnson. The Read Rental House was built circa 1894 in the Eclectic style with its gable end fronting Seventh Street. Elizabeth Williams purchased the property in 1892 before she married Charles W. Read, a salesman long associated in the clothing business. The couple never lived in the house, using it for rental income.



43.

21 Seventh Street – Owned by Nathan and Mary (Polly) Johnson, 21 Seventh Street is a mix of both the Federal and Greek Revival styles. The original two-story house built in the Federal style is attached to the circa 1855 Greek Revival front that sits on Seventh Street. Nathan and Polly Johnson owned several properties in this area, but 21 Seventh Street was their primary residence. In 1838, the Johnsons offered shelter to Frederick Johnson, a recently escaped slave and Anna, his free-born wife. While staying with the Johnsons, Frederick changed his last name to Douglass with encouragement from Nathan Johnson. While living in New Bedford, Frederick Douglass began his journey as an abolitionist and civil rights leader.



44.

17-19 Seventh Street – Built in 1785, this structure was the original Friends Meeting House located on Spring Street. In 1824, the Society of Friends embarked on the construction of a new brick Meeting House on Spring Street and sold this structure. Purchased by Nathan Johnson, the building was moved to an adjacent site at the corner of Seventh and Spring where it sits today. Evidence of the building's origins as a Meeting House are evident in the entrance, which is separated for men and women.