



# Not Just Anywhere: The Story of WHALE and the Rescue of New Bedford's Waterfront Historic District

*By Marsha McCabe, Joseph D. Thomas*

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Picture the "Whaling City" in the days of Melville's Moby Dick, busy streets lined with shops and counting houses; docks bursting with the activities of whalers. New Bedford is the setting and Not Just Anywhere is the triumphant story of the preservation of this rich slice of New England history.

Fascinating reading for anyone interested in historic preservation, architecture, urban studies, or regional history, Not Just Anywhere looks at one of the most challenging restoration projects ever attempted in New England - the creation of a living, working museum in our city streets. Readers will learn how individuals and an organization called WHALE banded together during the onslaught of urban renewal and inner city demolition, to stop the bulldozers and preserve a city's unique architectural history.

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### **Editorial Review**

#### Review

"McCabe had documented the successful struggle to preserve the extant character of a commercial neighborhood, one that evolved in the last century from direct support of whaling to fishing. WHALE's leaders favored neither a historic preservation that would have turned the area into a museum nor an urban renewal that would have removed dilapidated structures and marginally profitable businesses. Instead, WHALE renovated structures without displacing businesses existing within them, thereby retaining the working present and the architectural tokens of the past.

A rich supply of 'before and after' photographs of buildings documents the transformation. The celebrants do not sully their account by describing those against whom they struggled or by detailing their battles. Celebrations, after all, are not usually forums for analysis. Illustrative for urban planners and preservationists; additionally heartwarming for those who know New Bedford." -- *J. L. Cooper for Choice Magazine*, April 1996

#### About the Author

Marsha L. McCabe, senior editor and writer, is a national award-winning columnist for The Standard-Times. She is the co-editor of *Lincoln Park Remembered, 1894-1987*, and co-editor and contributing writer of *Portuguese Spinner: an American Story*.

Joseph D. Thomas, publisher, editor and contributing writer at Spinner, is also responsible for art editing and design. In 20 years with Spinner, he has published 15 books and numerous articles about the history and culture of southeastern Massachusetts. Joe is a recent winner of the Commonwealth Award, Massachusetts' highest cultural achievement award.

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from Chapter 1, Beginnings

The story began in New Bedford's Waterfront Historic District in the late 1950s when a handful of concerned people came together to ask a question with no easy answer: How can we save our city's heritage from death by neglect and the tyranny of the bulldozer?

It gained momentum in 1974, when young John Bullard wrote his master's thesis about the revitalization of the Waterfront District and when uncommon men and women like Peter Grinnell and Sarah Delano shared a vision.

"WHALE began when a few people saw something terrible about to happen," says Sarah Delano. "WHALE was one step ahead of the wreckers - and sometimes behind."

WHALE - the Waterfront Historic Area League: an emergency rescue squad specializing in saving buildings: a salvage team devoted to keeping New Bedford New Bedford; impractical, idealistic people who taught themselves how to save a city as they went along. How did New Bedford manage to save its heritage at a time when preservation was almost unheard of in the United States? Why would a mayor, at great political risk, decide to put a million and a half-dollars into a project that seemed impossible? Why did the revitalization of New Bedford's Waterfront Historic District succeed?

It succeeded because there were people who said yes when there was every reason to say no, people who seemed absolutely foolish - perhaps even crazy - at the time, people who had one thing in common: a passionate desire to save their city's history and its architectural heritage.

It began in a small, quiet way.

In the 1950s, New Bedford's famed Whaling Museum presided over a neighborhood suffering from age and neglect. Except for the Seamen's Bethel and Mariners' Home across from the Museum, most of the buildings in the District were disintegrating relics of New Bedford's whaling days. But there was still life in those old buildings because many housed businesses that served the city's booming fishing industry.

In 1958, the Museum Committee of the Old Dartmouth Historical Society, the Whaling Museum's parent organization, began a heated debate: How could the decaying buildings of the neighborhood be saved? The committee persuaded the trustees to fund a study area and called upon Mitchell Wilder Associates of New York City to answer two all-important questions: Was restoration feasible? Was it worthwhile? "Yes" and "Yes," said the resulting report.

Nevertheless, the trustees felt the Museum's central mission lay in preserving its world-class collection of whaling materials; it could not get bogged down in real estate. Rescuing buildings was risky business and not in keeping with the Museum's conservative mission.

A handful of committee members disagreed, among them the committee's chairman. This was George C. Perkins, a history-loving attorney with a stubborn, passionate nature. Others were Richard Paull, Peter S. Grinnell and Stephen C. L. Delano. For them, the writing was on the wall. Without a powerful advocate, the Waterfront District would almost certainly die.

"There were buildings that had provided the support system for the whaling industry," says George C. Perkins. "They deserved better than to crumble away or fall to the wrecker."

At about this time, the terms of George Perkins, Stephan Delano and Peter Grinnell were expiring as trustees of Old Dartmouth. Fueled by anger and a sense of mission, the three formed the Historic Area Committee. Their goal was to save the history-laden waterfront district.

Richard Waingraf, New Bedford's city planner, shared their concern. Indeed, the planner became a strong ally and spokesman. He had a way of seeing that made people stop in their tracks and reconsider the impossible. Why not, he challenged the new committee, apply for urban renewal funds to rebuild the district.

Rebuild the District? That would be a twist. Federal urban renewal funds were generally used to wipe out old neighborhoods and start over. On the other hand, why not try? Only the federal government had the kind of money needed to turn the District around. But the Historic Area Committee had to make their case in writing, Richard Wengraf said. They needed hard facts, documentation, and a plan. It was an enormous project, but they went to work.

## **Users Review**

### **From reader reviews:**

#### **Teresa Hunter:**

Reading a reserve tends to be new life style with this era globalization. With reading through you can get a lot of information that could give you benefit in your life. Along with book everyone in this world could

share their idea. Books can also inspire a lot of people. Lots of author can inspire their own reader with their story or even their experience. Not only the storyplot that share in the textbooks. But also they write about the data about something that you need case in point. How to get the good score toefl, or how to teach your young ones, there are many kinds of book which exist now. The authors on earth always try to improve their expertise in writing, they also doing some investigation before they write to the book. One of them is this Not Just Anywhere: The Story of WHALE and the Rescue of New Bedford's Waterfront Historic District.

#### **Bruce Butera:**

A lot of people always spent their very own free time to vacation as well as go to the outside with them household or their friend. Do you know? Many a lot of people spent they will free time just watching TV, or perhaps playing video games all day long. If you would like try to find a new activity that is look different you can read the book. It is really fun for yourself. If you enjoy the book that you just read you can spent the whole day to reading a book. The book Not Just Anywhere: The Story of WHALE and the Rescue of New Bedford's Waterfront Historic District it doesn't matter what good to read. There are a lot of people that recommended this book. These were enjoying reading this book. In case you did not have enough space to develop this book you can buy typically the e-book. You can m0ore easily to read this book from your smart phone. The price is not to cover but this book has high quality.

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#### **Jesse Ward:**

What is your hobby? Have you heard that question when you got students? We believe that that concern was given by teacher for their students. Many kinds of hobby, Everybody has different hobby. And also you know that little person including reading or as reading become their hobby. You need to understand that reading is very important as well as book as to be the thing. Book is important thing to incorporate you knowledge, except your own personal teacher or lecturer. You discover good news or update in relation to something by book. Numerous books that can you choose to adopt be your object. One of them is Not Just Anywhere: The Story of WHALE and the Rescue of New Bedford's Waterfront Historic District.

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