PRELIMINARY STUDY REPORT
PROPOSED ABOLITION ROW LOCAL HISTORIC DISTRICT
New Bedford, Massachusetts

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Study Committee: New Bedford Historical Commission
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Date of Public Hearing: The Public Hearing will be held no sooner than sixty (60) days after the submission of this Preliminary Study Report to the Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC) and the New Bedford Planning Board.

Date of City Council Vote: After the Public Hearing, the final report will be drafted incorporating comments from the Planning Board, MHC and the community. This final report will be submitted to the New Bedford City Council for consideration. The Study Committee anticipates that the matter will be sent for review to the City Council Ordinance Committee, a standing committee. The City Council meets monthly and the agenda is determined by that body, thus it is not possible to state the expected date. The Study Committee anticipates that the issue will be considered in the spring of 2020.

Total Properties: There are a total of 38 parcels within the proposed local historic district, including two vacant parcels currently being developed into a city park commemorating the abolitionist movement in New Bedford.

Conclusion: The proposed designation of the Abolition Row Local Historic District will ensure that this unique and cohesive group of properties are recognized for their historic and architectural significance and protected from adverse and irreversible alterations, and to ensure that future redevelopment will be consistent with the historic character of the setting. Based on the high degree of integrity retained within the proposed district and the support and advocacy by the residents, this area merits consideration as a local historic district.
INTRODUCTION

New Bedford’s rich history is represented by its built environment which includes a diverse collection of buildings, objects, burial grounds and landscapes which provide a valuable material record of the history of the region and significantly enhance the quality of life in the city. These historic resources, which are located throughout the city, establish community character and identity, and in large part define what is unique about New Bedford.

The city values its heritage and has long established policies that encourage the utilization of historic preservation as part of a comprehensive revitalization strategy that serves to maintain and enhance the unique character of the city. New Bedford is proudly home to seven National Historic Landmarks, (three of which are located within the proposed Abolition Row District), and currently has fifteen National Register Districts which range in diversity from parks and textile mill complexes to industrial power plants and residential neighborhoods. The city currently has one local historic district, protected and regulated by Mass General Law 40C, which shares its boundaries with the New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park.

In the fall of 2016, prompted by residents’ interest, the New Bedford Historical Commission (NBHC) identified the Abolition Row (Seventh Street) neighborhood as potentially eligible for designation as a local historic district. The NBHC voted to pursue the study of the Abolition Row neighborhood and designated itself as the study committee as prescribed under M.G.L. Ch. 40C Section 3.

LOCAL HISTORIC DISTRICTS (LHD)

Local historic district designation is a longstanding and widely used tool for historic preservation in over 120 cities and towns in Massachusetts, as well as throughout the country. The first LHD in the United States was designated in Charleston, South Carolina in 1931 and the first LHD appeared in Massachusetts on Beacon Hill and Nantucket in 1955. Shortly thereafter, in 1960, the state legislature passed the Historic Districts Act: Massachusetts General Law Chapter 40C, to allow communities to protect areas that were of special significance to their heritage and granting to municipalities the power to establish and govern their own LHDs within overall guidelines.

Local Historic Districts have three main purposes:

- To preserve and protect the distinctive characteristics of buildings and places significant to the history of the Commonwealth’s cities and towns;
- To maintain and improve the settings of those buildings and places;
- To encourage compatibility with existing buildings when new buildings are planned in the districts.

The New Bedford Historical Commission (NBHC) oversees the City’s single existing local historic district, the Bedford-Landing Waterfront District, established in 1971, and works with property owners within this district to preserve the architectural integrity of their historic buildings. Governed by M.G.L. Ch. 40C and Chapter 2, Article XI of the City of New Bedford Code of Ordinances, the NBHC reviews the architectural appropriateness of most proposed exterior design changes to the district’s properties. There is no review of interior features. In addition, a variety of exterior features are often exempt such as paint, air conditioning units, storm doors, storm windows, and temporary structures.

Historic District Commissions do not prevent changes from occurring within an LHD, nor do they seek to prevent new construction. Their purpose is to allow for the thoughtful consideration of change and to ensure that changes and additions are harmonious with the architectural integrity of the historic buildings. Historic District Commissions also seek to prevent the introduction of incongruous elements that might distract from the district’s overall aesthetic and historic character. When properly established and administered, a local historic district is not unduly burdensome to property owners.
owners and, indeed, can enhance property values by mutually assuring similar care will be taken in the review of alterations to all properties in the district.

**LOCAL HISTORIC DISTRICTS VS. NATIONAL REGISTER DISTRICTS**

There is a substantial difference between local historic district designations versus National Register listing. While listing in the National Register of Historic Places indicates historical importance, it is primarily an honorary recognition that provides little protection from incongruous changes or demolition of significant structures. In contrast, a local historic district, designated by a local ordinance, offers the strongest form of protections for the preservation and retention of the historic character of buildings, streetscapes, and neighborhoods from inappropriate alterations and incompatible new construction, as well as outright demolition.
METHODOLOGY

The City of New Bedford has an existing Historic District Bylaw within Chapter 2, Article XI, of the City’s Code of Ordinances, and currently has a single designated local historic district, the Bedford-Landing Waterfront District, which shares its boundaries with the new Bedford Whaling National Historical Park. The New Bedford Historical Commission (NBHC) has the powers and duties of a Historic District Commission and is responsible for administering the Bedford-Landing Waterfront Historic District and overseeing the creation of any new districts in the city. The City’s Historic Preservation Planner, Anne Louro, serves as staff support to the NBHC for the proposed Abolition Row District.

In the fall of 2015, prompted by residents’ interest, the NBHC established itself as the Local Historic District Study Committee and directed the Preservation Planner to begin the research of Abolition Row (Seventh Street) and its buildings, commence the study report for the local historic district designation and conduct neighborhood meetings to gauge support for the designation.

Preliminary research for this report derives from the 2007 Amended County Street National Register District nomination form, various studies and reports written by historian Kathryn Grover, existing historic resource inventory forms, deed and tax records, along with review of historic maps, historic images, atlases and city directories.

The Abolition Row neighborhood informational meeting was held in October 2016 to discuss the proposed district and to answer residents’ questions. The neighborhood’s Ward Councilor was informed of the initiative and provided support. Based on the positive response from the residents of the neighborhood and the support of the Ward Councilor, the process of establishing an LHD continued, and information was placed on the city’s website.

As required by M.G.L. Chapter 40C, the NBHC will submit this Preliminary Study Report to the Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC) and the New Bedford Planning Board for their consideration. Following receipt of comment from the MHC and the Planning Board, the NBHC anticipates holding a public hearing in spring 2020. Based on comments received during the hearing, the NBHC will revise and complete the Final Study Report for the Abolition Row District for consideration by the City Council.
SIGNIFICANCE

OVERVIEW
The proposed Abolition Row Local Historic District comprises a unique and cohesive group of residential properties along Seventh Street, which represent New Bedford’s significant role in the Abolition Movement. Between 1790 and the Civil War, New Bedford became known not only as the whaling capital of the world, but also as one of the greatest asylums for fugitive former slaves. The city was a community of tolerance where African Americans lived and worked among wealthy white whaling and shoreside merchants, as well as skilled craftspeople, shop owners, service workers, laborers and mariners of all colors. Unlike other sections of the city, the proposed district is highly representative of an integrated neighborhood in racial, economic and residential terms. Overall the neighborhood is characterized by a high level of integrity of well-preserved early to late nineteenth century residential dwellings, with a wide range of historic architectural styles, reflecting the development of the neighborhood over the decades. As such, the Abolition Row Local Historic District represents a distinctive cross-section of New Bedford’s antebellum and post antebellum built environment and population.

The success and global exploratory nature of the whaling industry helped to create a bustling, cosmopolitan seaport community, and one of the richest and most diverse cities in the world. Opportunities for individuals and families from all backgrounds to make a living and prosper were readily available at sea, and in the shore-side businesses that supported the whaling industry. New Bedford was particularly attractive to the enslaved seeking freedom because of the employment opportunities presented by the whaling industry, a large racially-tolerant Quaker population, an existing free population of color, and a coastal trading system that provided opportunities to escape bondage by hiding on vessels heading to New Bedford from southern ports.

NEIGHBORHOOD DEVELOPMENT
The area in which Abolition Row is located emerged in the later part of the eighteenth century in response to New Bedford’s newfound whaling industry. Originally part of a large tract stretching westward from the riverfront, by 1746 the area was largely owned by the Quaker Joseph Russell (1719-1804), the great grandson of Dartmouth proprietor John Russell and the founder of New Bedford’s whaling industry. In a 1764 plan he developed for what he called “Bedford Village”, Joseph Russell (whose house stood on County Street at the head of William Street), included a street from the cart-way that ran from the waterfront to his property, what is now Union Street. Joseph Russell’s plan also featured Spring, School, and Walnut Streets running east to west, parallel to Union and eight north-south cross streets - Water and First through Seventh Streets, extending between the river and County Street. (See Original Purchase Map) By 1800 Russell had sold most of the lots on Union Street and forty lots south of Union, extending to Walnut Street. Seventh Street, from Union to Walnut Streets was formerly accepted as a street in 1807, and Walnut to Madison in 1838. By 1815, the most densely settled section of the village lay south of Union Street, and all but six parcels between Union and Walnut Streets on the north and south, and the river and County Street, east and west had been sold. Prior to the Civil War, Union Street served as the northern boundary of the village, County Street to the west, and the Acushnet River waterfront to the east.

By the early nineteenth century, Bedford Village’s street pattern had been established; however, there was a geographic distinction in the density and uses within this area. The eastern section of the village, closest to the waterfront and wharves, had a greater diversity of uses with warehouses, shops, candleworks, ropeworks and oil factories, with few residential dwellings interspersed. To the west, County Street became the site of many of the city’s most elegant estates and choice location to the wealthiest whaling merchants. Seventh Street, just east of County Street, developed as a residential neighborhood with homes on a somewhat more modest scale compared to County Street.
As New Bedford’s whaling economy grew, residents from more settled areas of Plymouth Colony and beyond were drawn to the area for larger allotments of land, economic opportunity and religious freedom. In the late seventeenth century, the General Court of Massachusetts Bay Colony banned “the cursed sect of heretics commonly called Quakers” which played a role in the settlement of the Seventh Street neighborhood. Founding families who lived in this neighborhood came from three principal areas—northeastern sections of Plymouth Colony, Nantucket, and Rhode Island, with smaller migrations from Cape Cod and Philadelphia. Quaker migration and the extensive and intricate family connections and marriages amongst the early Quaker settlers shaped the character and physical development of the Seventh Street neighborhood.

The white families along Seventh Street were not only connected by their family ties and inter-marriages, but their families’ association with whaling; as many were born into positions of management and investment. Men like William Rotch Jr. (396 County Street), George Howland Sr. (245 Walnut Street), Joseph Ricketson Jr. (179 Union Street, no longer extant), never worked as crew or mastered whaling ships. Others worked their way ashore through a career as a mariner or captain. Captain Elkanah Tallman (251 Walnut Street) was the Master of the Othello and Bristol in the first decade of the 1800s before he began to invest in whaling ships. William Nye (25 Seventh Street) was a sea captain and part owner of several ships. Nye also was the son-in-law of Captain Elkanah Tallman. Isaiah Burgess (246 Walnut Street), like his father before him had been a master mariner. Later in life he became partners in the whaling firm of Burgess and Howland. William H. Allen (30 Seventh Street) began his career as a tailor working with his father, James and brother Gideon, which led them into outfitting sailors in the whaling industry and ultimately into agency and ownership.

Seventh Street also was home to men who were simply mariners and not agents or ship owners. Captain John Akin (51 Seventh Street), spent most of his life in the merchant service commanding packet vessels between New Bedford and Boston. Daniel Wood (33 Seventh Street), was master of such vessels as the Minerva, Commodore Decatur, and Braganza. Many neighborhood residents were in the business of supplying whaling vessels with goods and tools and processing its products. In addition to his ship holdings, George Howland Sr. (245 Walnut Street) owned and operated a candleworks and oil refinery. The William Rotch family operated a ropewalk and David S. Bradley, who in 1836 lived at
35 Seventh Street was a cooper, although generally the neighborhood’s coopers, sailmakers, and blacksmiths lived in the more modest part of the neighborhood, south of Madison Street.

The neighborhood’s influence was not only related to whaling, as many men were civic leaders within the growing community. Many men like George Howland Sr. (245 Walnut Street) were directors of the city’s banks and insurance companies. George Howland Jr. (37 South Sixth Street with carriage house at 46 Seventh Street) was a Whig representative to the General Court in 1839, Mayor of New Bedford in 1855, and again 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. George W. Baker (26 Seventh St) was an active member of the Society of Friends and 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. William S. Allen (30 Seventh Street) had family ties to whaling and married Ruth Parker, daughter of John Avery Parker, one of the wealthiest men in the city. In addition, Allen held several key positions including the New Bedford representative to the Massachusetts General Court.

QUAKERS
As the primary shipowners and merchants in the late-18th and early to mid-19th century, New Bedford’s Quaker families carried substantial economic, social and political influence. The Quakers owned and operated the shoreside whaling businesses, held political offices and were on the board of directors of most institutions and philanthropic organizations. Quakers were characterized not only for their strict self-discipline and industriousness, but also for their principles of tolerance and moral beliefs of equality. New Bedford’s liberal and tolerant racial attitudes were attributed to the Quakers during New Bedford’s golden age of whaling which peaked in 1857.

Many of the city’s birthright Quakers converted to Unitarianism, however that did not diminish their tolerance for racial diversity nor their established Quaker principles to stand against oppression. Though some early Quakers had held slaves, individual Quakers and many Unitarians who had once been Quakers, were among the city’s staunchest abolitionists, and by 1785 not a slave was held in the city. Thus, New Bedford was slave-free seventy-eight years prior to the Emancipation Proclamation.

Despite the facts that Quakers were not all abolitionists and not all abolitionists were Quakers, numerous African American authors clearly equated the two. On his first days in New Bedford, for example, the fugitive Frederick Douglass was relieved to see “the broad brim and the plain, Quaker dress, which met me at every turn… ‘I am among the Quakers,’ thought I, ‘and am safe.’”

Local author Daniel Ricketson’s History of New Bedford, published in 1858, attributes the local anti-slavery sentiments to the influence of the Quakers. Ricketson, a member of one of the most ardent abolitionist families, described New Bedford in the early part of the nineteenth century as having “hardly a house in the place which had not given shelter and succor to a fugitive slave.” Ricketson stated that due to the anti-slavery sentiments of the Quakers, “there is but little prejudice against color, and a general willingness and desire that the colored population may enjoy equal rights and privileges with themselves.”

According to historian and author Kathryn Grover, from the 1830s to the Civil War, the period of greatest abolitionist activity, nearly every one of the most active abolitionists in New Bedford lived within or directly abutting the proposed district. The Rotch, Rodman, Ricketson, Howland, Allen, Taber and Thornton families are all commonly associated with
abolitionist activities, and all Quakers. Friend Joseph Russell donated the land for which the 1785 Quaker meetinghouse was constructed on the northeast corner of Spring and Seventh Streets. In 1822 the old frame meetinghouse was moved diagonally across to the southwest corner of this intersection to make way for a new brick meetinghouse built on its original site.

UNDERGROUND RAILROAD

The Underground Railroad, a term which refers to a vast network of people who helped fugitive slaves escape to the North and to Canada, was not run by any single organization or person. Rather, it consisted of many individuals -- many whites but predominantly blacks -- who according to one estimate, moved 100,000 fugitives from slavery between 1810 and 1850.

New Bedford was an important link within the Underground Railroad and was an attractive destination for those seeking freedom for several reasons. First, the whaling industry had made the city both wealthy and in constant need of labor. The maritime trades had historically been more welcoming to participation by people of color than other industries; however, whaling may have been the most open of all. The whaling industry drew seamen from all parts of the world. Free Africans as well as Native Americans, Cape Verdeans, West Indians and Polynesian men joined the crew of whaling ships at foreign ports of call. This multi-cultural population also worked in the shoreside industries.

Second, the city was an active part of an extensive coastal trading system. New Bedford merchant vessels carried oil, whalebone, and other products to southern ports and the West Indies and returned with goods. Fugitive slave narratives document that runaways took advantage of this commercial network. Often aided by crew members and dock workers of both races, they stowed away amid ships’ cargoes; sometimes sympathetic vessel captains brought them north. Many fugitives, like Frederick Douglass, traveled over both land and water to New Bedford, while others traveled entirely by vessel to the port.

Third, was New Bedford’s tolerance of diversity and the degree to which there existed support for integration within the community. The city’s white abolitionists, predominately Quakers, whether active or silent, provided a safe harbor for both formerly enslaved and free blacks. Every principal antislavery lecturer in the United States spoke in New Bedford, many of them repeatedly, and some abolitionists seem to have approached the city as a test case in the struggle for equal rights.

Finally, the city was home to a large population of people of color. In 1850, people of color were 6.3 percent of the city’s population, a greater proportion than prevailed in Boston, New York City, and Philadelphia at that time. Subsequent to the 1850 passage of the Fugitive Slave Act, which allowed southern slaveholders to capture runaway slaves who had escaped to free states, the black population of many cities declined, yet New Bedford’s actually grew; from 6.3 to 7.5 percent of the total population. And fully 30 percent of New Bedford’s people of African descent in 1850 were born in the South, compared to only 15 percent of New York’s black population and 16 percent of Boston’s at the time. This African American community was active in antislavery reform since at least the 1820s. When Frederick Douglass arrived in 1838, he found New Bedford’s people of color “much more spirited than I had supposed they would be. I found among them a determination to protect each other from the blood-thirsty kidnapper, at all hazards.”

It is estimated that New Bedford had become home to some 300-700 formerly enslaved persons at various times between 1845 and 1863. Fugitive George Teamoh described New Bedford as "our magnet of attraction." Many formerly enslaved persons fled to New Bedford to join friends or family who had already settled here and were working in the maritime industry or as domestic servants. The first documented fugitive in New Bedford was a man named John and his family who lived with Thomas Rotch, son of William Rotch Sr., who in 1792 sent the family to abolitionist Moses Brown in Providence for their safety.
A number of fugitive narratives exist which provide insight to the lives of those who made their way to New Bedford. In addition, after 1847 when the city was incorporated, there exists the Records of the Overseers of the Poor, which reference the city’s formerly enslaved and the aid provided to them. When former slave, Joseph M. Smith was interviewed by the local newspaper upon his 100th birthday in 1911, he recounted his 1830 escape from North Carolina by stowing away on a lumber boat to New Bedford. Upon his arrival he encountered a warm welcome and great generosity and charity from the citizens.

Of the narratives and accounts of escape from bondage that reference New Bedford, the most notorious is that of famed fugitive Henry “Box” Brown. In 1849, Virginian slave Henry Brown emancipated himself by arranging to have himself mailed in a wooden crate to abolitionists in Philadelphia. Upon his arrival and release from the legendary crate, Brown was sent on to New York and from there, New Bedford, to the home of Joseph Ricketson Jr. whose house was located on the north side of Union Street, at the head of Seventh Street (no longer extant). Here he was provided shelter and employment by Ricketson. Brown’s escape was celebrated openly and within a day or two of his arrival in the city he attended a party in his honor at the home of William J. Rotch. Henry “Box” Brown capitalized on the notoriety of his escape and went on to become a well-known speaker on the antislavery lecture circuit.

It is difficult to determine with great accuracy the number of people of color living and working in the neighborhood, as the only listing until 1836 for New Bedford was the federal census which lists only householders by name. The publication of New Bedford’s first directory in 1836 makes it possible to identify some of the people of color who lived and worked in white households. One such person is John Goings, who was born in Maryland and lived in the household of Mary Rotch (47 South Sixth Street, with lot extending to Seventh Street) from at least 1841 to at least 1870. He worked there as a waiter and later as a coachman. In 1843 Goings purchased a lot with a dwelling house on it on the east side of County Street between Bedford and Wing Streets. Two years later he bought another lot with at least two houses on it on lower Madison Street. He appears to have rented these houses, for he is not listed in his own household, on William Street, until the 1880 census. He died in 1898 at the age of ninety-two.

William Rotch Rodman (388 County Street) regularly employed formerly enslaved people for domestic service and had a long and close relationship with William Piper, who came to New Bedford, most likely as a self-emancipated person, from Virginia between 1825-1830 and worked as a hostler to Rodman for a number of years. Rodman also employed Piper’s son and son-in-law and sold Piper property. Piper and members of his family became anti-slavery activists within the community. John S. Jacobs, Harriet Jacob’s younger brother, self-emancipated himself and arrived by ship to New Bedford in 1839 and stayed with William Rotch Rodman for a few months until he shipped out on whaling vessel. Jacobs went on to become an ardent antislavery activist and lecturer. Jacob’s more notable sister Harriet, was a nanny for the prominent Grinnell family and visited New Bedford often, staying across the street from the Rotch House at the Joseph Grinnell House at 379 County Street.

Although many black persons in the neighborhood served as domestics and others worked within the trades of the whaling industry, the occupations of the people of color in the neighborhood ranged widely within the spectrum of jobs.
then available to them. John Perkins Jr., who lived at 17 Seventh Street, sold wallpaper in 1856; George T. Moore was a saddle, trunk, and harness maker who lived at 33 Seventh Street with William H. Willis, for whose company he worked. The investment in whaling was widespread, particularly when it came to owning shares in whaling vessels. In 1855 the laborer Abner T. Davis of 37 Seventh Street owned a sixteenth share in the brig Governor Carver and the bark Janet.

New Bedford leaders, George Howland Sr. (245 Walnut Street) and Jr. (37 S Sixth Street with lot and carriage house extending to Seventh Street), William Rotch Rodman (388 County Street), William Rotch Jr., (396 County Street) and others regularly hired men and women of color for whaling crews and as domestics, and there was some measure of occupational and income improvement among them. The role George Howland Sr. played in the lives of some of New Bedford’s men of color has been documented in Frederick Douglass’s last autobiography, The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass (1893). Besides employing Douglass, Howland had a long relationship with John Briggs of Tiverton, who came to New Bedford at the age of twelve and lived with Howland and Howland’s two sons of similar age. The two Howland boys assisted Briggs in his education and was so valued by the family that he was retained in the employ of the Howland’s, father and sons, up to the time of his death, which covered a period of more than fifty years. Briggs went on to purchase property and live on Allen Street. Fugitive Solomon Peneton also worked for George Howland Jr. who sold him a parcel of land on Cedar Street, where he lived and operated a grocery store until he left for California about 1863. Peneton married fugitive Lucy Hasler, who was also employed by Howland Jr.

ABOLITIONISTS

New Bedford’s Quakers and former Quakers played a defining role in forming New Bedford’s reputation as a hospitable destination for formerly enslaved people. The social justice values held by the Quakers and their initiatives related to local charitable and benevolent causes easily transferred to antislavery activism. Several members of New Bedford’s leading Quaker families such as the Rotch, Howland and Ricketson families were among the twenty-six men from Massachusetts who were charter members of the Providence Society for promoting the Abolition of Slavery, founded in 1789 and chartered in 1790.

No other family had a greater role in the development of New Bedford from a small port village into the global center of whaling that the Rotch family. The relocation of Joseph Rotch from Nantucket in 1767 began a family legacy of business, political and social leadership which would also reflect in the family’s abolitionist activities which have been documented in a recent publication sponsored by the Rotch-Jones-Duff House and Garden Museum and authored by Kathryn Grover.

In 1790, William Rotch Sr. was appointed by the New England Yearly Meeting of Friends to investigate the antislavery testimony of the region’s monthly meetings, at which time he advised that all then enslaved people be set free except those who were too old or too young to care for themselves. As clerk of the New England Yearly Meeting in 1793, he sought for an end to the slave trade, and his son William Rotch Jr. was among those who lobbied Congress as well.

In 1834, the same year he built his mansion at 396 County Street, William Rotch Jr. was the first president of the New Bedford Anti-Slavery Society and a member of the state antislavery society. As an active abolitionist, he financed the prosecution of the owners of the brig Hope on the charge of having fitted out as a slaver in Boston in June 1788, three months after Massachusetts passed a law banning the slave trade. His sister, Mary Rotch held strong anti-slavery sentiments based on her experiences during a religious mission to the South she took on behalf of the Friends as a young woman in 1804. As an adult residing at 47 South Sixth Street with lot extending to Seventh Street, she employed several formerly enslaved people as domestics who then went on to be property and business owners.
Joseph Ricketson Sr, whose house was located at 179 Union Street, at the head of Seventh Street (no longer extant) and his son Joseph Ricketson Jr, were ardent abolitionists. The housing of the famed Henry “Box” Brown by Ricketson Jr. is well documented as well as is his involvement in housing several unnamed fugitives.

Ardent abolitionist Unitarian cleric John Weiss came to New Bedford in 1847 as pastor of the First Congregation Church, as his abolitionist views forced him to leave his position in Watertown. He resided at Elkanah Tallman’s house at 251 Walnut Street and was a vocal opponent to the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act. In 1856 he left New Bedford due to poor health but returned in 1857 to speak at the funeral of famed fugitive assistant Captain Daniel Drayton.

Captain William Taber (34 Seventh Street) was an early whaling master whose ship the Union, in 1797 carried a concealed a fugitive “unbeknown to him” from Virginia; and due to the “wind being ahead” did not return the stowaway and continued to New Bedford with the fugitive.

Not all New Bedford residents could be characterized as abolitionists, however there was enough support by those with power to allow the fugitive populace within New Bedford to feel somewhat protected and for fugitives to seek out the city as a refuge. The bells at Liberty Hall (no longer extant) were used as a signal to warn of danger to fugitive slaves. In 1851, white abolitionist Rodney French tolled the Liberty Hall bell upon his seeing a strange vessel entering the harbor. This was a false alarm, but the story of New Bedford’s refusal to abide by the Fugitive Slave Act along with French’s ringing of the Liberty Hall bell had spread to New York and Boston, becoming somewhat legendary as an emblem of antislavery.

New Bedford’s black and white abolitionists cooperated in assisting the formerly enslaved; however black abolitionists were more forceful in their advocacy and provided most of the aid and protection for New Bedford’s fugitives. Solomon Peneton, who worked for George Howland Sr. & Jr. presided over numerous antislavery meetings held by the black community of New Bedford and was one of four New Bedford delegates to the Massachusetts colored people’s convention in 1857 and subsequently elected its vice president. By 1863 he had resettled in California, where he was at the center of movements to secure voting rights and equal education for that state’s black population.

Women of color were also involved in antislavery and abolition. In 1837, 107 of them signed a petition to protest the Negro Seamen’s Acts enacted in the Carolinas and Georgia, which subjected black mariners to potential imprisonment, and other slave-state laws that presumed all free black person were “runaway slaves” and thus liable to sale if no one could be found to document their free status. Amongst those who resided on Seventh Street were Lucy Peneton, who had lived in the George Howland Jr. household and Nancy King, who lived with Mary Rotch.

Paul Cuffe, a free black Quaker and abolitionist, who became one of the wealthiest men of color in the nation, had a long business relationship and personal friendship with the Rotch family. Cuffe refused to pay taxes because free blacks did not have the right to vote, and in 1780 he petitioned the state legislature demanding his right to vote as a taxpayer which led to the legislature in 1783 granting the voting rights to all free males in the state.

NATHAN & POLLY JOHNSON
Of all men and women of color in New Bedford, Nathan and Polly Johnson were probably the most active in black abolitionism. Nathan and Mary Johnson (better known as Polly) were free and lived in New Bedford where they owned a...
block of properties including their longtime home at 21 Seventh Street, the neighboring old Friends Meetinghouse at 17-19 Seventh Street and 93 Spring Street, located behind the meeting house. Nathan Johnson was an active abolitionist who assisted numerous formerly enslaved individuals, including famous abolitionist Frederick Douglass. The Johnson home was Douglass's first residence after his self-emancipation from slavery in 1838 and the only one of Douglass’s three homes in New Bedford that remains today. These properties have been recognized as National Historic Landmarks.

Nathan Johnson’s origin is uncertain, as he claimed to be born in Philadelphia, yet his death certificate lists Virginia as his birthplace. Polly Johnson was of mixed African and Native American ancestry from nearby Fall River. She and Nathan married in New Bedford in 1819. They lived and served as domestics to Charles W. Morgan for a short time at Charles and Sarah Morgan’s first residence located at the southeast corner of Union and Seventh Streets. Historian Kathryn Grover believes that Morgan sold Johnson the 21 Seventh Street property in the 1820’s and financed the conversion of the Old Quaker Meetinghouse at 17-19 Seventh Street to a residence in 1831.

By mid-century, Nathan and Polly Johnson were well-established and renowned residents of the city and had acquired a certain degree of economic prosperity. At one time or another Nathan ran a catering business, was a partner in a restaurant, operated a dry goods store, had been a proprietor of a bathhouse, and was part-owner of the whale ship Draper. Polly was a confectioner famous for her cakes and candies and was patronized by the city’s elite. She ran her confectionary business out a small shop at 23 Seventh Street (now replaced) next door to their home. By mid-century the Johnson’s property holdings included their residence at 21 Seventh Street, the confectionary shop at 23 Seventh Street, the former meetinghouse at 17-19 Seventh Street, and a property at 93 Spring Street, located behind the meeting house, both which were rental properties. In 1849 the city assessor valued this real estate at $15,500 and Johnson’s personal estate at $3200.

The Johnsons were among the best known and most active black abolitionists in New Bedford. Nathan Johnson was a delegate to the annual convention of free people of color from 1832-1835, one of five vice presidents of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, and was elected the president of the 1847 National Convention of Colored People in Troy, New York. Mary also attended anti-slavery meetings and the Johnsons regularly assisted fugitive slaves.

In 1838, it was local Quakers and abolitionists, William C. Taber and Joseph Ricketson Sr. who brought the formerly enslaved Frederick Douglass and his wife Anna to the Johnson residence. Douglass himself attested to Nathan Johnson’s regular practice of assisting fugitives in all three of his well-known narratives. According to Kathryn Grover, it is believed that the old Friends meetinghouse was a safe house for runaway fugitives as well; however, this has not been confirmed.

FREDERICK DOUGLASS
Fugitive Frederick Douglass did not provide the details of his escape from bondage and his journey to New Bedford until he wrote his 1881 autobiography. The specifics surrounding Douglass’s escape to New Bedford demonstrates a certain level of organization and collaboration that must have existed between black and white abolitionists within the New Bedford community.
In September 1838, dressed in sailor’s clothes and carrying another man’s seaman’s protection papers, Frederick Douglass, then Frederick Augustus Washington Bailey, left Baltimore and made his way to New York, where abolitionist David Ruggles of the city’s Vigilance Committee aided Bailey by providing him shelter. Within a few days Douglass changed his name to Johnson and waited the arrival of his fiancée Anna Murray, a free woman he had met years earlier in Baltimore, at which time they married. Citing his training as a caulker, Ruggles recommended that Douglass move on to New Bedford, where he presumably would be able to find employment on the waterfront.

It is uncertain whether Ruggles contacted white abolitionists in New Bedford to arrange for Douglass’s reception, however when the Douglasses arrived in Newport they found a stagecoach bound for New Bedford. The stagecoach was occupied by New Bedford Quakers William C. Taber and Joseph Ricketson Sr. who brought the Douglasses to the Seventh Street home of Nathan and Polly Johnson. The fact that the fugitives were brought to the Johnson residence, and that Douglass carried with him a letter from Ruggles addressed to Johnson, suggests the probability that the Johnsons had previously housed fugitives at their residence.

Nathan encouraged Douglass to drop the surname “Johnson”, which he had recently adopted in New York, as there were many Johnson families of color already in the city. Johnson suggested the new surname “Douglass”, for the hero Scottish lord from Sir Walter Scott’s *Lady of the Lake*, which Nathan was then reading. The Douglasses stayed with the Johnsons until 1839, when they were able to secure their own lodgings at 151 Elm Street (no longer extant). Two of Douglass’ five children were born in New Bedford and in 1841, the Douglass family moved to larger quarters at 111 Ray Street (now Acushnet Avenue, and no longer extant), to accommodate their growing family.

In New Bedford, Douglass was impressed by the living standards of the people of color, and a certain level of social integration, however he did encounter prejudice when he attempted to work in his trained trade as a caulker for staunch abolitionist Rodney French. French’s white caulkers threatened to quit if Douglass was hired, so Douglass was forced to find work doing unskilled day jobs such as digging cellars, shoveling coal and sweeping chimneys. He eventually found steady employment at places like Joseph Ricketson’s candleworks, on George Howland’s wharves, and at Gideon Richmond’s brass foundry. At the foundry he improved his ability to read and taught himself about politics by reading newspapers tacked up near his bellows. One of them was William Lloyd Garrison’s influential abolitionist newspaper the *Liberator*, a subscription to which was extended him in New Bedford by a "young man" whom Douglass never identified in January or February 1839. Douglass always credited the *Liberator* with his true political awakening.

During that year Douglass was licensed to preach in the local African Methodist Episcopal Zion church, and he also began taking active part in antislavery meetings. The first record of Douglass in local newspapers documents his first public lecture on March 12, 1839 at the Third Christian Church (one of the city's two churches started by people of color); Douglass spoke to a black audience against the American Colonization Society. Douglass may have heard famed abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison for the first time the next month, which may also have been Garrison’s first lecture in New Bedford.

Douglass’s next known public appearance was in early July 1841, as chair of a meeting of New Bedford colored citizens who denounced the effort of Maryland slaveowners to force free black Marylanders to resettle in Africa. His third
address came two months later, at the Bristol County Anti-Slavery Society’s meeting in New Bedford. Impressed by Douglass’s oratorical skills, local abolitionist William C. Coffin invited Douglass to speak at the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society convention to be held on Nantucket a few days later.

The Nantucket convention was held over a three-day period and was one of the first mixed-race, anti-slavery assemblies in the country which attracted abolitionist orators from various parts of New England and New York. His articulate speech, reflecting on his own experience as a formerly enslaved person, impressed the audience and mostly William Lloyd Garrison who offered him a job as an agent for the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society. This Nantucket speech was pivotal as it marked the point in time which Douglass launched his long career as a public speaker, abolitionist and civil rights leader.

Frederick and Anna Douglass left New Bedford in 1841, when his oratory skills propelled him to be the most popular and acclaimed abolitionist lecturer on the anti-slavery circuit, gaining both a national and international reputation. As a powerful orator Douglass rose quickly to prominence as a favorite abolitionist and anti-slavery speaker, traveling throughout the country and world to shed light on the horrors of slavery and by the end of his life, Douglass could proudly claim to have served as advisor, political ally, and friend to six presidents, abolitionists Gerrit Smith and William Lloyd Garrison; women’s rights activists Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Lucretia Mott; and authors Samuel Clemens (a.k.a. Mark Twain) and Ralph Waldo Emerson.

ARCHITECTURE
The District contains a mix of dwellings types and architectural styles built during the nineteenth century which reflect the relatively unaltered development of the neighborhood during the growth of the whaling industry. With nothing of the pre-Revolutionary architecture of the city remaining (much of the area was set afire and destroyed by the British raid in 1778) the oldest buildings date to the period of rebuilding between 1785 and 1820. With few exceptions, the dwellings in this neighborhood are two- or two-and-a-half-story wood frame or brick homes, have small side and rear lots, and either are set back slightly from or abut the sidewalks; there are few carriage houses in the area, as the neighborhood was so close to the wharves, factories, and shops of antebellum New Bedford. Today, while some of its dwellings remain single-family homes, many have been converted into apartments or into professional offices.

Federal Style
The Federal, or often referred to as the “Adam” style was dominant from 1780 to 1820, although locally this form of Neo-Classical architecture extended until the 1830’s. Typically, a Federal style house is a simple square or rectangular box, two or three stories high, two rooms deep with doors and windows arranged symmetrically. Exterior decoration in the Federal style is generally confined to a porch or entry element.

Generally, within the District, the Federal period buildings are two-story, wood-frame dwellings with granite foundations, gable roofs, symmetrical, three or five-bay, center-entrance front facades and wood clapboard and/or wood shingle siding. Large houses are five bays in width, and small houses are three bays wide with interior chimneys being the norm in both instances. Entrances, which are centered in the five-bay facades and shifted to one side in three-bay facades, are topped by transoms and, in some cases, ornamented by Neoclassical architraves and porticos. Windows have wood headers with splayed lintels and cornices are simple, although some are embellished with dentil strings or other carved details.
**Representative Examples**

The oldest building in the district is the first meetinghouse of the Society of Friends which was built in 1785. It is a large, two-and-a-half story, six-bay, wood-frame structure in the Federal style with a gable roof. Originally constructed on the northeast corner of Seventh and Spring Streets, in 1822 it was moved diagonally across Spring Street to 17-19 Seventh Street when the Quakers built their second, brick meetinghouse on its original site. The building was converted into a dwelling by Nathan Johnson by 1832. The attic floor contains a trap door that permits access to a large crawl space between that floor and the high first-floor ceilings; this space, large enough to fit a group of people comfortably; and according to its National Historic Landmark nomination, has legendarily been associated with the concealment of fugitive slaves, but has not been confirmed.

The earliest extant residences on Seventh Street were both built in 1807. The well-preserved structure at 29 Seventh was built by Captain John H. Congdon at the southwest corner of School Street but he lived there only four years due to his on-board death on the merchant ship *Aldebaran* in 1811, at the age of thirty-seven. His widow Frances Congdon and children retained the house until 1883. The Congdon House is a good example of a two-story, five bay façade with a centered, arched transom and classical portico.

Also, in 1807 Elkanah Tallman built 251 Walnut Street on the northwest corner of Seventh Street. Tallman was a whaling master who turned from sailing to investing in whaling, becoming part owner of over a dozen ships. He resided at 251 Walnut Street until his death in 1846. The Tallman House has been altered; however, its original two-story, five-bay section retains a distinctive cornice with modillion blocks.

The New Friends Meetinghouse, constructed in 1821 at 83 Spring Street, is strict in its expression of the Quaker plain aesthetic than the houses of the period. Its stark geometric form, flat facades, restrained decoration and conspicuous craftsmanship are defining features. The brick exterior walls, laid in a common bond pattern, are detailed only with a three-course belt dividing the first and second stories and sandstone lintels and sills framing the windows and doors. The building is elevated on a dressed granite basement in the Classical manner into which a pair of stone double stairs is engaged providing divided focus on the two doors representing the separate male and female spheres within.

**Greek Revival Style**

Greek Revival was the dominant style of domestic architecture between 1830 and 1850 and due to its widespread use, became known as the “American” style. Based on ancient Greek forms and celebrated Greek democratic principles, the form generally featured a columned portico supporting a triangular pediment, similar to a Greek temple.

By 1830, the Greek Revival style was beginning to find expression in New Bedford’s architecture, and it is a style that has become closely identified with the city’s whaling era, however the transition within the Neoclassical style was slow, as historian Kathryn Grover attributes this to the conservative nature of the Quaker community. Major shifts in style align with generational progression, as each new generation sought to separate themselves from their parents. The Neoclassical style is best represented by a group of significant brick houses constructed in the 1830’s by leading families within close proximity to each other on S. Sixth and Seventh Streets.

**Representative Examples**

The 1831 William Allen House located at 30 Seventh Street (NBE.237) is one of these high style homes which is situated within the District. This two-story brick residence is five bays wide in the front, four bays wide on the sides, and has a gable roof with the ends concealed by stepped parapet walls extending to the ridge line. The parapet rises in two stages from front and rear eaves with the two end chimneys functioning as vertical dividers. Although not present, it is likely...
that a balustrade ran between the lower parapet sections across the front and rear facades. The upper section of the parapet bridges the space between the two end chimneys at the roof ridge line with the chimneys rising an additional four or five feet. A wood frame lantern remains positioned in the center of the roof ridge.

The front facade’s roof line is detailed with a wide cornice with modillion blocks and the Greek Revival style entrance porch utilizes the Corinthian order with a Palladian window above. A two-story wood framed addition exists along the south facade and pyramidal capped granite posts and granite curbing remain along the edges of the property. A two story brick, gable end carriage house exists in the rear and is characterized with a central pediment entrance.

The most significant Greek Revival building within the District is the William Rotch Jr. House, located at 396 County Street, which currently operates as the Rotch-Jones-Duff House and Garden Museum. The Rotch Jr. House occupies a full city block on County Street, bordered by Madison, Cherry (now Joli Gonsalves), and Seventh Streets. The property is approximately one acre in size and was acquired by William Rotch Jr. in 1831 as part of the land owned by his father, William Rotch Sr., who passed the property to his children under the provisions of his will after his death in 1828.

William Rotch, Jr. built his house in 1834 at the top of the hill on County Street, where many of the most prestigious homes were being constructed by the wealthiest residents. He hired architect Richard Upjohn, who was at the time residing in New Bedford, and had opened his Boston office in the same year. The Rotch Jr. House is believed to be Upjohn’s first formal design commission, and he would soon begin his prolific career designing churches throughout the United States and becoming renowned for promoting the Gothic Revival style in America.

William Rotch, Jr. was 75 years of age when the house was built, and he insisted on a house that was more restrained in its appearance and materials than others built in the area about the same time. The two-story wood frame house has a three-bay front façade capped by a wide Neoclassical pediment containing a segmental arch light. A lantern is situated in the center of the roof ridge in the New Bedford tradition. A piazza with Doric columns, Classical entablature, and rooftop balustrade further distinguishes the façade. There is also a full piazza across the rear façade, which overlooked the harbor. The setting of the house is unusually intact with gardens, greenhouse, carriage barn, and other outbuildings.

Gothic Revival Style

The Gothic Revival is part of the mid-19th Century Romantic Movement in architecture reflecting the public taste for homes inspired by medieval design. The Gothic Revival style in America was advanced by architects Alexander Jackson Davis and Andrew Jackson Downing, authors of influential house plan books. The 1838 Unitarian Church (NBE. 2733) located nearby on Union Street and the 1845 William J. Rotch Cottage (NBE.210, NHL 2006), located just west of County Street, are attributed to Alexander Jackson Davis.

Representative Example

The Samuel W. Rodman Guest House (NBE.83) located at 35 Seventh Street was originally part of the large estate of Samuel W. Rodman, whose house faces County Street. The County Street home is constructed of granite while the guest house was wood framed with the typical Gothic steeply pitched intersecting gables. There have been later additions of a portico and new windows and siding, however the slate roof is original, matching the estate house on County Street.
ITALIANATE STYLE
The Italianate Style was prominent in New Bedford post antebellum and large Italian style villas were constructed along County Street; however, on the smaller lots which existed along Seventh Street, smaller gable end residences with Italianate elements are the norm.

Representative Examples
The Joseph Brownell House located at 36 Seventh Street was constructed in 1875 as a two-family residence. It has Italianate brackets at the cornice and supporting the two-story faceted bay windows on the front and side elevations as well as windows with pronounced headers.

The William S. Cobb House located at 1 Seventh Street was constructed in 1878 and is a two-story, front-gable house with a second-story, centered rectangular bay. The house is embellished with the typical Italianate features such as pronounced window headers and scroll-sawn brackets in the cornice, bay and full front porch.

These two example forms, with their gable ends oriented to the street and pilasters at the corners, indicates a vernacular faithfulness to Greek Revival forms even in mid-century when other styles had long since supplanted the Greek style.

STICK STYLE
The Stick style was a transitional style between the Gothic Revival style of the mid-19th century, and the Queen Anne style that it had evolved into by the 1890s. The most distinctive stylistic element of the Stick style is the decorative stickwork or bands of wood trim applied horizontally, vertically or diagonally to the exterior wall surfaces. A similar pattern of decorative wood trim appears in the trusses of the gables and across gables and on the porch braces.

Representative Example
The Ruth L. Smith House built in 1870 at 27 Seventh Street is one of the few late 19th century homes built along Seventh Street. 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 is one of the few local structures built in the Stick Style and has many elements common to that style, such as the asymmetrical plan, steeply pitched roof, the “X” braces over the windows and the kingpost truss along the porch.

QUEEN ANNE STYLE
The peak period of the Queen Anne style architecture was 1880–1900, although the style persisted for another decade. The Queen Anne style evolved from early English designs to become a distinctly American style associated with the Victorian era. The style is recognized by its asymmetrical and highly creative massing, use of wall texturing, decorative trims, expansive porches and turreted towers.
Representative Example
The Edith Willis House located at 52 Seventh Street was constructed in 1888 and is the only Queen Anne residence on Seventh Street. Edith Willis purchased this lot from the estate of George Howland Jr. and hired architect Z. B. Davis to design this residence. The house features a hipped roof, multiple dormers, a full porch with gable ornamentation, turned columns and spindlework.

MOVED HOUSES

Several houses within the District have been moved from different locations. The Captain William C. Nye House at 25 Seventh Street was moved northward from its original site at the northwest corner of Seventh and School Streets in 1869 to allow the Smith family to build the Stick Style House currently at that location.

The Joseph Brownell House located at 36 Seventh Street was constructed in 1875 as a two-family residence and originally located at 8 Fifth Street. The house was purchased by Arthur Coffin from the Brownell Estate in 1910 and Coffin had the house moved to a lot adjacent to his residence at 34 Seventh Street.

The Joseph Ricketson II House located at 48 Seventh Street was originally constructed in 1853 as 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.

NON-EXTANT HOUSES

Two houses within the District were recently lost to demolition; 18 Seventh Street due to a fire, and 20 Seventh Street due to deferred maintenance. Both properties were associated with the Thornton family.

Elisha Thornton Jr., who resided at 20 Seventh Street, was the grandson of a Quaker preacher who was an early opponent of slavery. He began his career as a druggist and starting in the 1820s, he invested in eight whaling vessels. Here in 1855, Thornton sheltered the fugitive slave Daniel Fisher, who had taken the name William Winters upon reaching the North. Winters lived with Thornton in 1855 and 1856 and left New Bedford after the Civil War.

Joseph Ricketson Jr was the most ardent white abolitionist documented within the city. His house at 179 Union Street was located on the north side of Union Street at the head of Seventh Street. It is here that the famed Henry “Box” Brown stayed after his notorious escape to New York in a wooden crate. The house was demolished in 1955.
JUSTIFICATION OF BOUNDARIES

The proposed local historic district consists of the norther portion of Seventh Street, located in the south-west section of New Bedford’s downtown. The proposed District is within the County Street and Central New Bedford National Register Districts and includes three National Historical Landmarks. Seventh Street runs north and south between Union Street and Joli Gonsalves Memorial Way (formerly Cherry Street), and the associated buildings and land include those along Seventh Street as well as those abutting properties on the cross streets of Union, Spring, School, Walnut and Madison Streets, as well as Howland Terrace.

The term “Abolition Row” and its association with Seventh Street can be attributed to the New Bedford Historical Society, who began utilizing the designation as a means of placemaking, promoting the location as being significant in New Bedford’s role in the Abolition Movement and the Underground Railroad. The New Bedford Historical Society owns the Nathan and Polly Johnson House which operates as a museum and exhibit space and is currently collaborating with the City in the development of “Abolition Row Park” located on the southeast corner of Seventh and Spring Streets where the Thornton family properties once stood.

In recent years Seventh Street and Abolition Row have become synonymous with the story of the Underground Railroad and Frederick Douglass. The National Park Service has designated the Nathan and Polly Johnson House as a Network to Freedom Underground Railroad site and has published a pamphlet titled “Behind the Mansions” which highlights Seventh Street. In 2017 the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth presented the very popular exhibit titled “Black Spaces Matter: Celebrating New Bedford’s Abolition Row.”

Research and documentation of New Bedford’s nineteenth century abolition activities demonstrates that areas adjacent to Seventh Street reveal similar historical associations, however the Seventh Street property owners are fully engaged, supportive, and have actively advocated for the proposed local historic district. As such, the NBHC determined to retain the initial Seventh Street boundary with the understanding that expansion may be explored at a future time.

The City has begun to make streetscaping improvements along Seventh Street with the introduction of reproduction gas lamps to provide the street with the similar historic sense of place that exists in the Bedford Landing Waterfront Local Historic District. The New Bedford Preservation Society has provided nearly all the property owners along Seventh Street with Historic House Markers in order to identify the properties with their original owners and to increase public awareness of the rich cultural and architectural heritage that exists there.

The proposed designation of the Abolition Row local historic district will ensure that these important properties are recognized for their historic and architectural significance and protected from changes by future owners that could irreversibly alter their architectural integrity.
OPTIONS and RECOMMENDATIONS for the ORDINANCE

In 1971 New Bedford adopted a local historic district ordinance, known as Section 2-150 through Section 2-156 of Article XI of the City Ordinances, which establishes a Historical Commission with all the powers and duties of an historic district commission. One local historic district, the Bedford Landing – Waterfront Historic District, was established and adopted in 1971 as part of the ordinance and was defined by a map which was amended in 2001.

ABOLITION ROW DISTRICT AND MECHANICS LANE DISTRICT ESTABLISHMENT
The New Bedford historic district ordinance provides for the establishment, in accordance with the provisions of the Historic Districts Act, of additional historic districts and changes in historic districts. The New Bedford Historical Commission, acting as the Local Historic District Study Committee (Study Committee), proposes for adoption by the New Bedford City Council, an ordinance establishing the Abolition Row and Mechanics Lane Historic Districts which includes individual maps defining the new districts.

Unlike the previously established Bedford Landing – Waterfront Historic District, the Study Committee determined to include exclusions and exemptions of certain elements and features from its review within the Abolition Row and Mechanics Lane Districts, which is consistent with the state enabling legislation, Chapter 40C, Section 8. (a). The option to include certain exemptions from review was determined as an effort not to overburden property owners and as a method to facilitate reviews and permitting.

HISTORICAL COMMISSION MEMBERSHIP
The local historic district ordinance provides the Historical Commission with all the powers and duties of an historic district commission, and due to the relatively small number of properties within the proposed Abolition Row and Mechanics Lane Districts, the newly established districts will be administered by the New Bedford Historical Commission, rather than establish separate District Commissions.

In order to accommodate the inclusion of one or more residents of or owners of property in the additional historic districts, the current Historical Commission membership is proposed to be adjusted. In addition to the inclusion of district residents, the study recommends additional organizations or categories for membership. The addition of one licensed general contractor or building tradesperson, and three persons, who through education or experience, have demonstrated a commitment to historic preservation or have a background in any of the categories represented by the regular members of the commission, as alternate members will provide essential skills and knowledge to the Commission and will supplement the Commission’s current membership composition.

HISTORICAL COMMISSION RULES AND REGULATIONS
Rules and Regulations presently exist for the New Bedford Historical Commission relative to its administration of the established Bedford Landing – Waterfront Historic District and for the administration of its duties and obligations as a city commission. The Study Committee recommends that the Rules and Regulations be updated to reflect the addition of the Abolition Row and Mechanics Lane Districts.
APPENDICES

ABOLITION ROW
PRELIMINARY STUDY REPORT
Abolition Row Local Historic District Study Area
By Parcel ID
ABOLITION ROW LOCAL HISTORIC DISTRICT STUDY AREA LOCUS MAP

WITHIN CENTRAL NEW BEDFORD and COUNTY STREET
NATIONAL REGISTER DISTRICTS
Proposed Ordinance to Establish Additional Local Historic Districts

AMENDING ARTICLE XI. - NEW BEDFORD HISTORICAL COMMISSION; HISTORIC DISTRICTS

By deleting Sec. 2-150. - Establishment; membership.

Substituting new:
Sec. 2-150 - Establishment; membership

There is hereby established under the Historic Districts Act, M.G.L.A. c. 40C, with all the powers and duties of an historic district commission, a New Bedford Historical Commission, consisting of seven (7) members, and seven (7) alternates, to be appointed by the mayor with the approval of the city council, who shall serve staggered terms of three years. The Commission shall include one (1) member or representative of the New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park, one (1) member from nominees submitted by recognized local historical societies, one (1) architect from nominees submitted by the local Chapter of the American Institute of Architects, one (1) member from nominees of the Greater New Bedford Board of Realtors, one (1) member of the City Planning Department, and two (2) members who are property owners or residents of separate established Historic Districts in the City. The alternate members shall consist of one (1) member or representative of the New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park, two (2) property owners or residents of a Historic District, one (1) licensed general contractor or building tradesperson, and three (3) persons, who through education or experience, have demonstrated a commitment to historic preservation or have a background in any of the categories represented by the regular members of the commission. If, within 30 days after the submission of a written request for nominees to any of the above-named organizations, no such nominations have been submitted, the mayor may make such appointment without nomination by said organization. To the extent a person meets more than one of the foregoing specific membership requirements, then each such specific membership requirement so met shall be satisfied by such person’s membership on the commission. All members and alternate members of the commission, except for the member nominated by the American Institute of Architects, shall be residents of the city. Vacancies shall be filled in the same manner as the original appointment for the unexpired term. In case of the absence, inability to act or unwillingness to act because of self-interest on the part of a member of the commission, his or her place shall be taken by an alternate member designated by the chairperson. Each member and alternate shall continue in office after the expiration of his or her term until his or her successor is duly appointed and qualified. All members shall serve without compensation. The commission shall elect annually a chairperson and vice-chairperson from its own number and a secretary from within or without its number.

By deleting Sec. 2-156 Bedford landing historic district established.

Substituting new:
Sec. 2-156 Establishment of Historic Districts

1) Bedford Landing Historic District

There is hereby established under the provisions of the Historic Districts Act, a historic district to be known as Bedford Landing, bounded and described as shown on the map entitled, "Bedford Landing-Waterfront Historic District," as amended, attached to and made part of the ordinance from which this section is derived. (Code 1963, § 3-3102; Ord. of 6-10-71; Ord. of 9-13-79; Ord. of 2-8-01, § 1)

2) Mechanics Lane Historic District

There is hereby established under the provisions of the Historic Districts Act, a historic district to be known as Mechanics Lane, bounded and described as shown on the map entitled, "Mechanics Lane Historic District," attached to and made part of the ordinance from which this section is derived.

a) All powers and duties set forth in this article shall be incorporated in this section, with the exception that the authority of the commission within the Mechanics Lane district is not extended to the review of the following:
i) Temporary structures or signs, subject to requirements of the local zoning code and/or planning board;

ii) Terraces, walks, driveways, sidewalks and similar structures or any one or more of them, provided that any structure is substantially at grade level with the qualification that on-grade areas intended for parking more than four motor vehicles are subject to review by the Historical Commission to assure that adequate planting, earth berms, walls or similar structures are implemented to screen or regulate the physical scale of the areas and to minimize their visual impact as viewed from public ways;

iii) Walls and fences;

iv) Storm doors and storm windows, screens, window air conditioners, lighting fixtures, antennae and similar appurtenances or any one or more of them;

v) The color of paint;

vi) Signs of not more than one square foot in area in connection with use of a residence for a customary home occupation or for professional purposes, provided only one such sign is displayed in connection with each residence and if illuminated is illuminated only indirectly, subject to requirements of the local zoning code and/or planning board;

3) Abolition Row Historic District

There is hereby established under the provisions of the Historic Districts Act, a historic district to be known as Abolition Row, bounded and described as shown on the map entitled, "Abolition Row Historic District," attached to and made part of the ordinance from which this section is derived.

a) All powers and duties set forth in this article shall be incorporated in this section, with the exception that the authority of the commission within the Seventh Street district is not extended to the review of the following:

i) Temporary structures or signs, subject to requirements of the local zoning code and/or planning board;

ii) Terraces, walks, driveways, sidewalks and similar structures or any one or more of them, provided that any structure is substantially at grade level with the qualification that on-grade areas intended for parking more than four motor vehicles are subject to review by the Historical Commission to assure that adequate planting, earth berms, walls or similar structures are implemented to screen or regulate the physical scale of the areas and to minimize their visual impact as viewed from public ways;

iii) Walls and fences;

iv) Storm doors and storm windows, screens, window air conditioners, lighting fixtures, antennae and similar appurtenances or any one or more of them;

v) The color of paint;

vi) Signs of not more than one square foot in area in connection with use of a residence for a customary home occupation or for professional purposes, provided only one such sign is displayed in connection with each residence and if illuminated is illuminated only indirectly, subject to requirements of the local zoning code and/or planning board;
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<td>262 UNION ST</td>
<td>46-25</td>
<td>Mrs. Anne Bates House</td>
<td>1875</td>
<td>Italianate</td>
<td>NBE 25</td>
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<td>1 SEVENTH ST</td>
<td>46-23</td>
<td>William S. Cobb House</td>
<td>1878</td>
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</table>
ABOLITION ROW PRELIMINARY STUDY BIBLIOGRAPHY

Assessor’s Records, 1819-present. City of New Bedford. New Bedford City Hall.


Findagrave.com


Massachusetts Historical Commission. Inventory records of individual properties. Accessed through the website at http://mhc-macris.net/


Oregon Public Broadcasting. Accessed through the website at [https://www.pbs.org/opb/historydetectives/investigation/whaling-ship/](https://www.pbs.org/opb/historydetectives/investigation/whaling-ship/)

Maps


Plan of the City of New Bedford, Massachusetts. Philadelphia: Collins & Clark, 1850.


