



# The Toggle Iron

## Park Welcomes New Superintendent

**“I was attracted to New Bedford’s rich and diverse history and culture, from the maritime history to the Underground Railroad to the vibrant mix of people who call it home today.”**

**Jen Nersesian**

### From the Superintendent

After a month on the job, I just want to share with everyone my own conviction that I could not have come to a better place. The many layers of New Bedford itself, including its history, culture, communities and local happenings, took no time at all to whet my appetite for learning and exploration. And I have been deeply impressed by both the staff here at the park – who are among the most professional, dedicated and warm rangers I have met, and who, while small in number, have already accomplished initiatives of a scale that belie their true size – and our many partners, who even in these challenging economic times remain more true than ever to the spirit of cooperation and collaboration upon which this park was founded.

Looking towards the future, I would like to give you all a sneak preview of what to expect over the next few months. The park has made significant progress in regards to its goals of preservation, visitor services and downtown revitalization; while we continue to pursue all of these, it is time to bring additional focus on the role we could play in education. As you know, the departure of Jen Gonsalves as our Chief of Visitor Services (see pg. 3) has left some big shoes to fill. We will be reorganizing this position as a new Chief of Interpretation and Education who will take on the development of a fully-fledged educational program for the park. Among our first tasks will be to plan and develop the education facility destined for the 2nd floor of the Corson Maritime Learning Center; work with our partners to determine what role in educational programming the National Park Service will play; and develop a pilot program that will begin to implement this vision. I am very proud of the fact that over the past month every eighth-grader in New Bedford has come through the park (see page 2), and would like to see this not as an end goal but as a starting point – of ensuring that schoolchildren, college students and adults have the chance to participate in educational programs that help catalyze meaningful, long-term connections with our local culture and history.

Jen Nersesian  
Superintendent



Jen Nersesian joined the staff on March 2, 2009 as the third superintendent of New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park.

National Park Service (NPS) Northeast Regional Director Dennis Reidenbach has selected Jen Nersesian as the superintendent of New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park. Nersesian began her assignment in March, following Celeste Bernardo, who left last year to become Deputy Superintendent at two Boston-area parks, Boston National Historical Park and Boston African American National Historic Site.

“Jen Nersesian brings strong skills in planning and collaboration” said Reidenbach. “She knows what a National Park Service site can do for a  
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region and will build on the strong foundation of partnerships that are in place at New Bedford Whaling.”

Since 2005 Nersesian served as Management Assistant in Yosemite National Park in California where she built the park’s community involvement program. She came into the National Park Service in 2002 as a Presidential Management Fellow, a program to recruit talented advanced-degree graduates into public service management. Before that, she worked in private, nonprofit, academic, and government sectors in communications;

in film, video, and animation production; in software development, watershed evaluation, and state planning.

“Since the park was designated in 1996, New Bedford has been a model throughout the NPS of what can be accomplished through partnerships; I intend to continue in this spirit of collaboration, and look forward to sharing the park’s stories with the public in ways that also benefit the greater region,” said Nersesian. “I was attracted to New Bedford’s rich and diverse history and culture, from the maritime history to the Underground Railroad

to the vibrant mix of people who call it home today.”

Nersesian holds a Master of Public Policy with a concentration in Environmental Policy from Rutgers. A native of New Jersey, with family ties in and around Massachusetts, Nersesian and her husband Luis are expecting their first child this summer.



National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior

New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park was established in 1996 to help preserve and interpret America’s nineteenth century whaling history. The park encompasses a 13-block National Historic Landmark District and addresses the history of the whaling industry and its influence on the economic, social, and environmental history of the United States.

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The National Park Service cares for the special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage.

## Education Collaborative Hosts 8th Grade Students

In March, the park achieved a milestone when every eighth-grade student in New Bedford was able to spend a day connecting with the city’s rich history and culture. Eight hundred and six students from Keith, Roosevelt, and Normandin Middle Schools were introduced to stories of New Bedford’s whaling legacy and the local history of the Underground Railroad. This exploration of the national park included visits to various partner sites. The field trips were made possible through a collaborative effort between the National Park Service, the New Bedford Whaling Museum, the Ocean

Explorium at New Bedford Seaport, and the City of New Bedford Public Schools. Students participated in docent-led tours of the whaling museum, an Underground Railroad activity presented by park rangers and volunteers, and a program at the Ocean Explorium utilizing the Science on a Sphere exhibit.

The New Bedford Whaling Museum component offered students an in-depth look at the experience of African Americans in nineteenth century New Bedford. Museum  
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Park Ranger Frank Barrows leads a group of local eighth graders on a program exploring the city’s Underground Railroad history.

**Temple Toggle-Iron:** The most successful harpoon ever made. Invented by Lewis Temple, an African American whalecraft-maker of New Bedford, Massachusetts in 1848, and at first called “porpoise iron” and “Temple’s gig,” it became the universal whale iron, and has never been improved upon. (From Clifford W. Ashley’s, **The Yankee Whaler**)

# From Volunteer to Acting Superintendent Park says goodbye to Jennifer Gonsalves



Jennifer Gonsalves started as a volunteer at the park and worked her way up to Acting Superintendent before accepting a position at Roger Williams NM.

A large crowd of staff, volunteers, friends and dignitaries were on hand in November of 2008 to send off Jennifer Gonsalves, Acting Superintendent at New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park. Gonsalves had recently accepted the position of Site Manager at Roger Williams National Memorial (NM) in Providence, RI. A reception was held in her honor in the Corson Maritime Learning Center. The event had special significance to Gonsalves, since it was partly due to her efforts and ideas that the Corson Building project was brought to fruition.

Jennifer Gonsalves had a long tenure at New Bedford Whaling NHP. She started here as a volunteer in 1997. Her first day with New Bedford Whaling NHP and the National Park Service was May 17, 1998, the day of the park's dedication. She went back to school to earn her bachelor's degree from the University of Massachusetts at Dartmouth and her master's degree at the University of Rhode Island while working here as a park ranger. She eventually became Chief of Visitor Services and, after Superintendent Celeste Bernardo accepted a position at Boston National Historical Park last year, Gonsalves became Acting Superintendent for several months.

Kathy Tevyaw, the interim Acting Superintendent, made some brief remarks about Jen's transition to work in the Ocean State. Tevyaw, who resides in Rhode Island, presented Gonsalves with Autocrat coffee syrup, an authentic Rhode Island treat, among other gifts. Ranger Emily Prigot spoke briefly, thanking Gonsalves for helping to bring her to this park and the innumerable things she had taught her. She presented her with a painting of the Seamen's Bethel, one of Jen's favorite places in the park, from the Arthur Moniz Gallery. The piece was a gift from staff, volunteers and friends. Ranger Frank Barrows also spoke, citing the staff's appreciation for Jen's kindness, guidance and friendship. The warmth and affection was keenly felt by everyone in the room. In perhaps the biggest surprise of the day, the staff doffed uniform shirts and polo shirts to reveal t-shirts with Jen's picture on the front, with the motto, "NB Rockstah," an accolade the park confers on those who excel there and bring honor to the National Park Service and its mission.

Jen Gonsalves, always the consummate professional, made some brief yet poignant remarks about her long career in the park. She

loves this park and its people, and she assured all those present that her connections to New Bedford were far from over. She resides in the city with her family, and she serves as a member of the New Bedford Planning Board. She has always been, and would continue to be, she noted, close to this park and her friends here. In an interview, Gonsalves said this about her work at New Bedford, "Leaving New Bedford Whaling NHP was bittersweet. I left a great staff, a compelling story, and dynamic and invested partners. That said, my new position at Roger Williams National Memorial presents many incredible opportunities. The story of Roger Williams and religious freedom is so relevant today. The site is beautiful, well taken care of, and interpreted by a small, but very passionate, staff. The city of Providence is a vibrant urban center with many cultural, historical, and education institutions within walking distance of the park. The opportunities for collaboration are endless, and I embrace the chance to explore them with park staff and partners to help Roger Williams National Memorial gain the national recognition it greatly deserves."

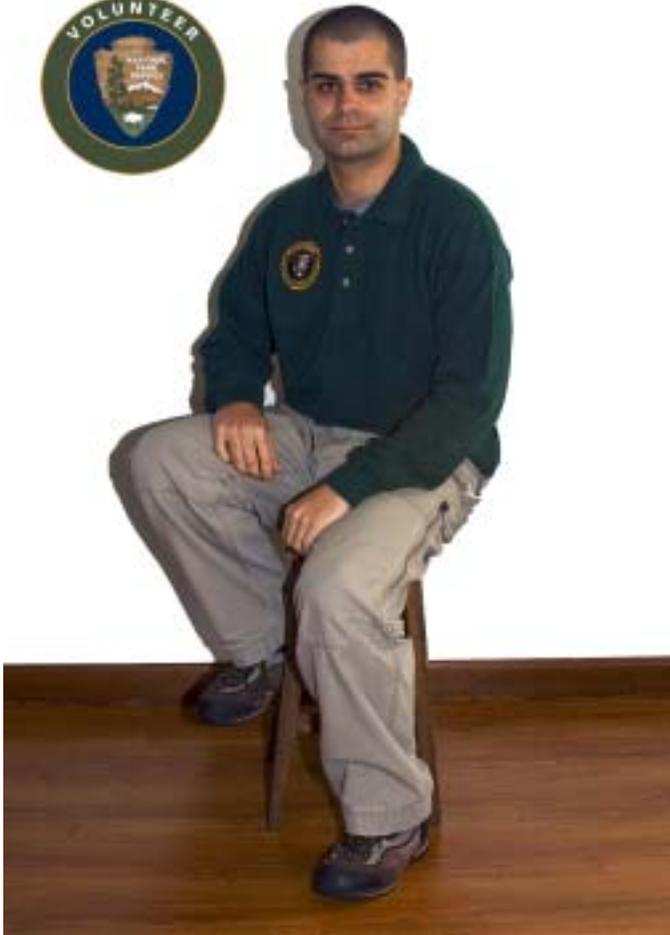


Jennifer (middle, in uniform) with staff members (left to right) Frank Barrows, Michelle Spink, Emily Prigot and Jan da Silva at a going away celebration held in November.



# Volunteer Spotlight

## John Pereira



**Occupation:** Full-time Port Agent for REMSA, Inc. (contracted by the National Marine Fisheries Service). Part-time rock climbing instructor for Eastern Mountain Sports Climbing School

**Special Interests/Hobbies:** Mountaineering, rock and ice climbing, bouldering, kayaking, hiking/backpacking, reading, volunteering for the New England Wild Flower Society and the North American Nature Photography Association, cultivation of desert plant species, gardening, bird watching, photography, and traveling.

**How long have you been a volunteer at the visitor center?** Since October of 2008

**Why did you decide to become a volunteer?**

I saw it as an opportunity to use my photographic skills to help the park.

**What do you enjoy most about volunteering at the visitor center?**

Knowing that I am contributing in making the visitor's experience an enjoyable one.

**What is the most interesting thing that you've done in your life?**

Choosing one thing from my life is an extremely difficult task because there are so many. But the most recent would be my completion of New Hampshire's 4000 Footers (a 14-year adventure which entailed hiking to the summit of 48 peaks measured at 4000 feet or higher).

**What is the one thing that you'd like to do or try?**

Complete at least one long distance backpack in the U.S.

**What is your favorite thing about this area?**

Taking the ferry to Martha's Vineyard for the day in order to explore the island with friends and then enjoying eating ice cream when we landed near Davy's Locker.



## Young Helpers Assist at Visitor Center

If you pop into the visitor center on a Monday afternoon, you may be surprised to find a couple of young helpers at the information desk. Mitchell and Gavin Spell are the nephews of longtime park volunteer Christine Berry and have taken an interest in helping others at a very early age. They have assisted with duties such as pressing the button to start the park's orientation movie, stocking brochure racks, and showing visitors to the restrooms and theater. Here they are shown assisting with a "flat Stanley" project at the Seamen's Bethel. Perhaps some future volunteers or park rangers are in the making?

# Park Crew List

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## New Leadership for Core Partners

### Phil Mello selected as President of Port Society



Phil Mello, President of the New Bedford Port Society

Phil Mello has been selected as the new president of the New Bedford Port Society, one of the city's oldest, most venerable institutions. By day Mr. Mello is a plant manager, running the filet division of Bergie's Seafood. Mello knows the fishing business well, describing it in detail—calling scalloping “backbreaking work,” and talking about the process of shucking scallops while aboard a vessel that is pitching and rolling.

In 2003, Mello joined the Port Society, a group which organized in 1830 under “An Act To Incorporate The New Bedford Port Society For The Moral Improvement Of Seamen.” This group owns and runs the Seamen's Bethel (a non-denominational house of worship) and the Mariner's Home, the structure adjacent to the Bethel, offering shelter as well as spiritual and moral guidance to thousands of seamen over the years.

Mello wanted to give back to the fishing community, so he volunteered to work on the grounds with the late Dr. Fairfax. Later, he started on his first major project at the Bethel to restore the weathervane. Mello was voted in by the board of directors in October of 2008. Unfortunately for Phil, smooth sailing was not in the cards. Some “rough weather” came along two weeks into Mello's term as president when the park lost longtime friend and partner Buddy Carr, who was the former Director of the Mariner's Home.

The next big project for Mello and the New Bedford Port Society is investing in the

restoration of the two structures it maintains; in particular, repairing the antique glass windows in both the Seamen's Bethel and Mariner's Home—an enormous and expensive job. The New Bedford Port Society applied for grant money and has started work on the Seamen's Bethel. It is looking into fundraising and a drive to raise money for the window restoration project.

The New Bedford Port Society, dedicated to the spiritual and moral needs of whalers and “men who go down to the sea in ships,” has found itself at a crossroads. With Mello at the helm and Peter Haley onboard as the new manager of the Mariner's Home, the organization is looking towards the future. A new website was developed ([www.portsociety.org](http://www.portsociety.org)) to bring the public closer to this organization and its support of mariners through the centuries. Phil Mello is a man who respects and understands the group's past, yet is coming to grips with the present and looks ahead to help steer a course into the future.

### James Russell Takes Helm at Whaling Museum



James Russell, Executive Director of the New Bedford Whaling Museum

James Russell, a native of Warwick, England is a newcomer to our National Park partnership, having recently taken the position of Executive Director of the New Bedford

Whaling Museum. Russell moved to Ireland as a lad of four. It was during his high school years when he heard of some Irish athletes going to the United States to study; Russell decided to do the same. He attended Harvard University and graduated with a degree in science.

While attending college, Mr. Russell served an internship for four years with a professor emeritus in the art department. This internship led Russell to work in the nonprofit world. He began by working at the Attleboro Museum, then at the Boston Center for the Arts. Russell then took a position at the Herreshoff Marine Museum in Bristol, Rhode Island, a setting which

deepened his interest in the Yankee maritime tradition. From the mid-nineteenth century until the mid-twentieth century the Herreshoff Manufacturing Company produced the world's finest yachts on the cutting edge of design and engineering. Mr. Russell then went to Newport to serve a five-year apprenticeship in the restoration of wooden boats. Asked why he decided to come to work here in New Bedford at the Whaling Museum, Mr. Russell replied, “The history of the Charles W. Morgan, the sailing tradition of the area, the Concordia boatyards and the rich maritime history were all a draw for me.”

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# Readathons Celebrate New Bedford Heroes

## Historical Society Honors Frederick Douglass



Park Preservation Specialist Jan da Silva reads at the 10th annual Frederick Douglass readathon.

Sunday, February 8, 2009, marked the tenth reading of the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave*, written by Himself. Sponsored annually by the New Bedford Historical Society, this event has become a New Bedford tradition. Mayor Lang and US Representative Barney Frank began the event, reading from the Preface. Students from the Global Learning Center, Nativity Prep, Our Sisters' School and the New Bedford School Department came ready to read their sections about Frederick Douglass. Many local notables participated in the event including Rev. David Lima, Chief of Police Ronald Teachman and local historian, Carl Cruz. In addition, Ricardo Pitts-Wiley and Bernadet Pitts-Wiley, actors from the Mixed Magic

Theatre & Cultural Events located in Pawtucket, Rhode Island ended the five-hour read-a-thon, adding some dramatic flavor to the Appendix and Parody found at the end of the Narrative. Jan da Silva, Preservation Specialist at New Bedford Whaling NHP, represented the park. She remarked that she was glad to participate in the event, since she remembers reading at the first read-a-thon in 2000. The New Bedford Historical Society did a fantastic job sponsoring the event, providing food and beverages to attendees and readers throughout the day. All in all, approximately 75 people attended the event, enjoying the atmosphere of the Unitarian Church and soaking up the words of Frederick Douglass.

## Over 1000 Visitors Flock to *Moby-Dick* Marathon



Readers and listeners packed into the Jabob's gallery of the New Bedford Whaling Museum for the 12th annual *Moby-Dick* marathon.

On January 3, 1841, the whaleship *Acushnet* left New Bedford harbor, bound for the Pacific Ocean. This scene had played out many times before in New Bedford, but this particular vessel had among its crew the 21 year old Herman Melville. The voyage he embarked on as a young man inspired him to write one of the greatest American novels ever written—*Moby-Dick*.

One hundred sixty eight years later to the date, the New Bedford Whaling Museum filled with local dignitaries, school children, Melville enthusiasts, costumed characters, scholars, and visitors from all over the globe to share in the reading of his acclaimed novel. The 12th annual *Moby-Dick* marathon drew a little over one thousand visitors and nearly 150 readers including Congressman Barney Frank, City of New Bedford Mayor Scott W. Lang, and Peter Whittemore, great-great grandson of Melville himself.

Starting with the infamous words, "Call me Ishmael," the marathon takes participants on a 25-hour voyage through Melville's imagination. In chapters 2 through 13,

Melville describes the New Bedford landscape vividly. Though some buildings have long since disappeared, the city retains some of the landmarks and a good deal of the character that sparked Melville's imagination. The Seamen's Bethel, which was known as the whaleman's chapel in *Moby-Dick*, serves as the setting for Father Mapple's sermon. When readers reach this chapter, the marathon moves from the Whaling Museum into the Seamen's Bethel, where the audience is treated to a dramatic reading by Rev. Edward Dufresne as Father Mapple.

The event has become so popular, and reading spots so coveted, that there is a backup list of readers just in case anybody backs out at the last minute. New England staples such as clam chowder and hot cider serve as fuel for those who try to stay awake for the entire marathon. The few who were able to achieve that feat walked away with a pop-up *Moby-Dick* book. Do you have what it takes to make it through a 25-hour reading of a great American classic? If so, you may want to start planning your trip to the city that lit the world for next year's marathon.



Reverend Edward Dufresne as Father Mapple.

# Ernestina Due Home in May

The Schooner *Ernestina* is due to return to her home port of New Bedford in early May after having the front half of the historic vessel rehabilitated at the Boothbay Harbor Shipyard in Maine.

The \$1.1 million project is being supported in part by a Save America's Treasures grant administered by the National Park Service, Department of the Interior; The Partnership Matching Funds Program of the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation; and donations from the general public.

Built in 1894 in Essex, MA, *Ernestina ex-Effie M. Morrissey* is the official vessel of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, a National Historic Landmark, and part of New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park.

As a National Historic Landmark, all work on *Ernestina* is following the requirements set forth in the *Secretary of the Interior's Standard's for Historic Vessel Preservation Projects* and U.S. Coast Guard standards. Harold Burnham, an 11<sup>th</sup> generation Essex

Master Shipwright, is under contract to serve as the Commonwealth's liaison with the shipyard.

The work has been from the waterline up in the front half of the vessel and has included a new inner stem, frames, top timbers, knees, deck beams, and deck. A professional marine survey of the hull was completed in 2006. The visual and hammer tap inspection outlined what work was needed to be done.

"It's like working on an old house. You never really know what you are in for until you open her up," said Paul Brawley, *Ernestina's* executive director.

The challenges on a project like this are many and include finding properly seasoned white oak and long leaf southern yellow pine. Trees have come from as far away as Michigan, Tennessee, and North Carolina.

For more information and to view more photographs of the work, please visit [www.ernestina.org](http://www.ernestina.org) and [www.sailerenestina.org](http://www.sailerenestina.org).

## Before



Starboard bow before rehabilitation.

## After



Port bow as of April 18, 2009.



Stanchions and futtocks on starboard side



New inner stem being fitted.

(Education Collaborative, Continued from page 2)

docents examined New Bedford’s abolitionist roots, discussed the contributions that African Americans made to the whaling industry and illuminated the impact that whaling had on New Bedford’s African American community. The museum plans to expand the program into a lasting tour option for all school groups.

During the Ocean Explorium part of the program, students reviewed the standards they have learned in school by using the global visual medium of the Science on a Sphere. Students were whisked away on a tour of the planets. They discovered why Earth is unique in the Solar System, they learned why Earth is so hospitable to life, and explored how energy is transferred around the planet and through living things.

In addition to learning about the national park in their city, students were exposed to some of the untold stories of New Bedford’s maritime and Underground Railroad past by visiting local memorials, monuments, and historical sites in the park. Some of the sites visited were the Nathan and Polly Johnson house, which was the first free home of Frederick Douglass after he escaped slavery, the 54th Regiment Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry Plaza, which was the site of the local recruiting station for the 54th Regiment, the Lewis Temple Statue, and other significant sites in and around the park.

(James Russell, Continued from page 5)

Russell has worked with non-profit groups and with the state, but he notes that this is the first time he is working with a federal agency. He likes the fact that this park underscores and promotes the idea of partnership, and says that his organization, the Whaling Museum, is more than just one organization. “The story extends to the waterfront and the Rotch-Jones-Duff House and Garden Museum. We tell one part of the story; other partners tell other parts of that story,” he said in a recent interview. When asked what he likes best about his job, he answered, “Never doing just one thing. I am the boss, I get to make decisions, and I get to work with very good people. I go from one meeting with the staff and the board to another meeting talking about the newsletter. Later on, I am dealing with construction issues and exhibits. I like the diversity of activities, while balancing and engaging different constituencies.”

While it is clear that James Russell is a busy man, deeply committed to doing quality work at the New Bedford Whaling Museum, he does know how to relax and have some fun. He loves visiting National Parks, playing soccer, and woodworking. Like so many whalemens of centuries past, he is an active, adventurous man; one of his goals is to hike the Appalachian Trail. The park is thrilled to welcome James to New Bedford and looks forward to continuing our partnership with him at the helm.



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