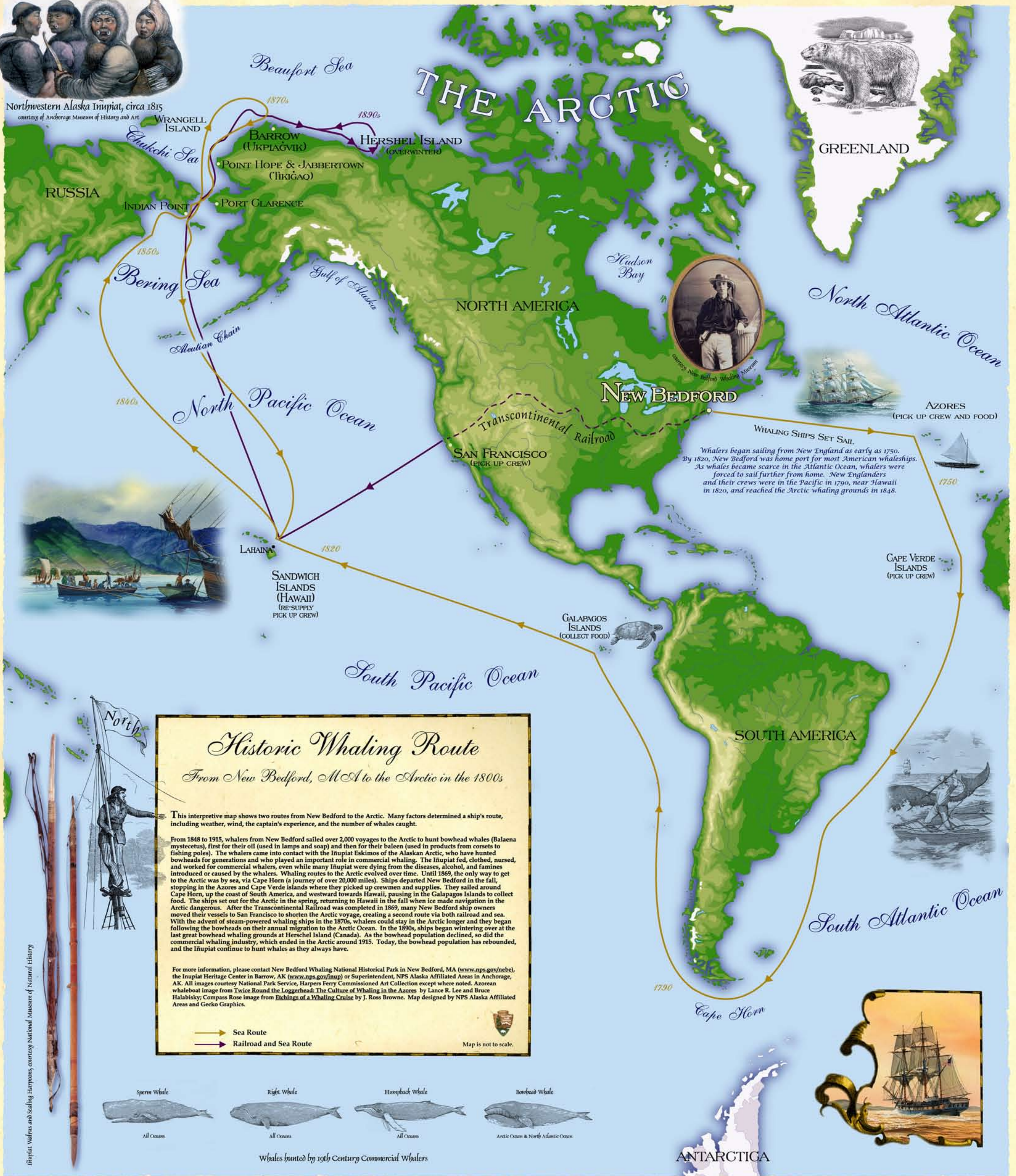




Northwestern Alaska Inupiat, circa 1815
courtesy of Anchorage Museum of History and Art



GREENLAND



© New Bedford Whaling Museum



AZORES (PICK UP CREW AND FOOD)

Whalers began sailing from New England as early as 1750. By 1820, New Bedford was home port for most American whaleships. As whales became scarce in the Atlantic Ocean, whalers were forced to sail further from home. New Englanders and their crews were in the Pacific in 1790, near Hawaii in 1820, and reached the Arctic whaling grounds in 1848.



Historic Whaling Route

From New Bedford, MA to the Arctic in the 1800s

This interpretive map shows two routes from New Bedford to the Arctic. Many factors determined a ship's route, including weather, wind, the captain's experience, and the number of whales caught.

From 1848 to 1915, whalers from New Bedford sailed over 2,000 voyages to the Arctic to hunt bowhead whales (*Balaena mysticetus*), first for their oil (used in lamps and soap) and then for their baleen (used in products from corsets to fishing poles). The whalers came into contact with the Inupiat Eskimos of the Alaskan Arctic, who have hunted bowheads for generations and who played an important role in commercial whaling. The Inupiat fed, clothed, nursed, and worked for commercial whalers, even while many Inupiat were dying from the diseases, alcohol, and famines introduced or caused by the whalers. Whaling routes to the Arctic evolved over time. Until 1869, the only way to get to the Arctic was by sea, via Cape Horn (a journey of over 20,000 miles). Ships departed New Bedford in the fall, stopping in the Azores and Cape Verde islands where they picked up crewmen and supplies. They sailed around Cape Horn, up the coast of South America, and westward towards Hawaii, pausing in the Galapagos Islands to collect food. The ships set out for the Arctic in the spring, returning to Hawaii in the fall when ice made navigation in the Arctic dangerous. After the Transcontinental Railroad was completed in 1869, many New Bedford ship owners moved their vessels to San Francisco to shorten the Arctic voyage, creating a second route via both railroad and sea. With the advent of steam-powered whaling ships in the 1870s, whalers could stay in the Arctic longer and they began following the bowheads on their annual migration to the Arctic Ocean. In the 1890s, ships began wintering over at the last great bowhead whaling grounds at Hershel Island (Canada). As the bowhead population declined, so did the commercial whaling industry, which ended in the Arctic around 1915. Today, the bowhead population has rebounded, and the Inupiat continue to hunt whales as they always have.

For more information, please contact New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park in New Bedford, MA (www.nps.gov/nebe), the Inupiat Heritage Center in Barrow, AK (www.nps.gov/inup) or Superintendent, NPS Alaska Affiliated Areas in Anchorage, AK. All images courtesy National Park Service, Harpers Ferry Commissioned Art Collection except where noted. Azorean whaleboat image from *Twice Round the Loggerhead: The Culture of Whaling in the Azores* by Lance R. Lee and Bruce Halabisky; Compass Rose image from *Etchings of a Whaling Cruise* by J. Ross Browne. Map designed by NPS Alaska Affiliated Areas and Gecko Graphics.

→ Sea Route
→ Railroad and Sea Route

Map is not to scale.



Whales hunted by 19th Century Commercial Whalers



Inupiat Walrus and Sealing Harpoons, courtesy National Museum of Natural History