new bedford whaling museum
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For Immediate Release

New Bedford Whaling Museum Honors South Coast Women's Contributions in Multimedia Exhibition

Lighting the Way: SouthCoast Women's Lives, Labors, Loves, traces Women's Experiences and Value in the Region over time

NEW BEDFORD, MA - *February 25, 2025* – This Women's History Month, celebrate the powerful stories of the South Coast community's trailblazers with the exhibit *Lighting the Way: SouthCoast Women's Lives, Labors, Loves* at the New Bedford Whaling Museum, on view in the Wattles Gallery through May 4, 2025.

"Women have always shaped the South Coast of Massachusetts and its histories. Their contributions to domestic and civic life, to education and public institutions, to the cultural fabric of New Bedford and its neighbors, and to the political and social environs of the area are immeasurable," says Naomi Slipp, Douglas and Cynthia Crocker endowed chair for the chief curator and director of museum learning.

Historically, women's lives and contributions have been underappreciated, their material histories under-collected, their stories left untold. In this exhibition, curators use physical objects and visual materials to tell stories about the past and lend a new perspective to who records history, who defines a life well lived, which stories make the history books, and what gets left out.

"From entrepreneur Anne Rose Donovan Vera and suffragist Emily Hussey to social reformer Edith Guerrier and activist and teacher Alberta Knox, women were integral to the historical development of the region over hundreds of years," continued Slipp. "We're honored to lift up diverse stories that cut across race, age, class, ability, ethnicity, immigration status, gender identity, and sexuality to demonstrate the unique and evolving experiences of women in the SouthCoast."

The rich collection of over 340 artifacts, portraits, and manuscripts encompass hundreds of women's stories and showcase their diverse contributions to domestic life, education, public institutions, and political and social movements. Visitors are encouraged to reflect on how women and the art, objects, and documents made by and for them continue to shape the area, its culture, history, and life. **Starting March 1st and developed as a complement to this special exhibition, the museum will launch a new audio tour featuring stories about local women focused on the permanent galleries.**

The exhibition focuses on items in the collection made by and for women, including pottery by the Saturday Evening Girls, a Progressive Era reading group for young immigrant women in Boston's North End; artwork by photographer and artist Theodosia Potter Chase; and works by female Swain School graduates. Portraits of regional women and girls, as well as objects, toys, and textiles related to girls' childhood activities, women's communal activities, and motherhood and domestic life, are placed in

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conversation with manuscripts and photographs from women's organized involvement in labor, social, and civic rights movements.

The gallery spans pivotal periods in history from the fight for women's suffrage, to WWI and WWII leadership and involvement with the NAACP and NACWC, all the way through second-wave feminism and union organizing.

The Museum will host several programming events during Women's History Month to enhance the exhibit:

- March 11, 5:30 p.m., : Local History Guild, virtual panel discussion on 'New Bedford Women and the Whaling Era' (free)
- March 13, 4:00 p.m. – 7:00 p.m.: AHA! Night, featuring The New Whaler Bookshop Pop-up (free)
- March 16, 4:00 p.m.: "Sweet Freedom" film screening and reception
- March 18, noon: Curator-led tour of *Lighting the Way*
- March 18, 6:30 p.m.: Lecture on *Lighting the Way* with the Sippican Historical Society
- March 29, 10-2pm: Women's History Month: Day of Celebration (open to all ages), focused on women's history

Lighting the Way: SouthCoast Women's Lives, Labors, Loves is rooted in the Museum-led public history project "Lighting the Way." which ran between 2018-2023 and produced over 125 community-authored biographies of women from the region. Past programming related to that project included walking tours and student art showcases. This major exhibition carries the momentum of the earlier project forward and is focused on hundreds of items of material and visual culture, and art and artifacts from the museum collections, cementing women's impact and importance to the region over time.

- Link to hi-res images and captions, courtesy of the New Bedford Whaling Museum. Specific object images available upon request.
- Page link to more information on *Lighting the Way: SouthCoast Women's Lives, Labors, Loves*:

About the New Bedford Whaling Museum

Anchored in the story of New Bedford's whaling industry, the Museum documents and shares the diverse stories of this vibrant maritime region and its people, both bygone and current. Founded as the Old Dartmouth Historical Society in 1903, the Museum's rich history reveals an intimate relationship with the communities it serves. Today, the New Bedford Whaling Museum ignites learning through explorations of art, history, science and culture, rooted in the stories of people, the region and an international seaport. The New Bedford Whaling Museum is the leading cultural institution in the region, attracting more than 100,000 visitors annually.

The cornerstone of New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park, the Museum is located at 18 Johnny Cake Hill in the heart of the city's historic downtown. Between January 2-March 31, the institution is open from 9:00 am to 4:00 pm Tuesday-Saturday and from 11:00 am to 4:00 pm on Sunday. Between April 1-December 31, daily hours are 9:00 am to 5:00 pm. The Museum is open until 7 p.m. every second Thursday of the month (on AHA! nights) and closed on Christmas Eve, Christmas, and New Year's Day. Admission is free for Museum members; adults $23, seniors (65+) $21, youth $13. For more information, visit www.whalingmuseum.org.

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