

# MASTER MARINERS, WHALING WIVES, AND TRADESMEN OF THE WHALING ERA

*A Self-Guided Tour from the Whaling Museum to the Civil War Monument*

---

*NPT's house-marker program provides the passerby with information about past Nantucketers and their houses. Betsy Tyler, historian and local author, chooses a handful of the 150 houses with NPT markers that now grace the island, for a stroll of about an hour.*

**Beginning at the Whaling Museum, walk north on North Water Street, past Ash Lane to Ash Street**

**8 ASH STREET: built for Benjamin Barney Jr., cooper, 1765**

The Great Fire that rampaged through the downtown on the night of July 13–14, 1846, destroyed the houses along North Water Street up to Sea Street, and burned the houses on Ash Street east of 8 Ash Street. The house built by cooper Benjamin Barney Jr. in 1765 was owned at the time of the fire by blacksmith George M. Jones, who, with his wife Jane Ann and three children, must have watched the conflagration in horror, immensely relieved when their home was spared. Both the first two owners of this house worked in trades associated with the whaling industry. Of all the tradesmen on the island in the eighteenth century, coopers—who built the casks for storing whale oil—were most numerous. Blacksmiths forged all sorts of whaling implements, such as harpoons, lances, cutting spades, and other necessary tools for whalers, and they also fashioned door hardware. Some fine examples of the latter, probably made by Jones, are still in use here.

**Walk back down to North Water Street and continue to Step Lane, turn left**



*A watercolor painting of Ash Street houses by J. B. Reid*

**5 STEP LANE: built for Joseph H. Nickerson, 1840  
Home of Peter C. Brock, master mariner, and Eliza Brock, whaling  
wife and journal keeper, 1851–99**

Two Nantucket whaling captains lived in this house, built in 1840. The first, Barzillai Folger, met an untimely end in Rio de Janeiro in 1850, when he was only forty-two, leaving three young children and a widow, Harriett, who sold the house to master mariner Peter C. Brock. Brock had been “retired” on shore for eleven years when he took command of the whaleship *Lexington* in 1853, during the final years of Nantucket’s whaling era. His wife, Eliza, and the youngest of their four children, four-year-old Joseph C. Brock, accompanied him on a three-year voyage that took them around the Cape of Good Hope and through the Indian Ocean to New Zealand. Eliza kept a journal during the voyage, noting her struggles with isolation—“a wanderer upon the wide ocean, far away from friends and sweet home”—and her delight in gamming with other whaling wives during the course of their travels. Widowed in 1878, Eliza continued to live at 5 Step Lane with her son Joseph until she died in 1899. He lived in the family home until 1925.

## Walk up Step Lane to Centre Street, and turn left

### **45 CENTRE STREET: built for Reuben Russell, master mariner, 1833**

Reuben Russell, master mariner, bought the lot on Centre Street in 1832 and had this impressive Greek Revival home built for his family. As captain of the whaleship *Susan* from 1841 to 1846, Reuben kept a journal of the voyage full of his colorful and droll illustrations: one of them shows a whale towing two boats, driven by a man standing on the whale's flukes. Captain Russell returned to Nantucket two months before the Great Fire of 1846, which came within two doors of his home. That calamity, and the decline of the whaling industry, caused him to consider finding a new occupation on the mainland. Reuben wrote to his brother in Auburn, New York, in August 1846: "I am about winding up my ship affairs and then I shall be more at liberty to travel—my last voyage was long and tedious but in the end proved profitable. I am now about tired of the Sea, and think of trying something else—what sort of farmer do you think I should make?" Perhaps his brother wrote encouraging words; Reuben, his wife, Maria, and their four children left the island and moved to Ohio in 1847.

## Continue on Centre Street until you come to Academy Lane, on your right. Follow the lane as it zigzags up to Westminster Street

### **12 WESTMINSTER STREET: built for (or moved to this site by) Robert Hussey, blacksmith, 1807**

When Robert and Miriam Hussey moved into their new home here on Academy Hill in 1807, the large brick school building just down the street—now the Academy Hill Apartments for older residents—was not yet built, but there was an earlier academy just across the lane of that name. Perhaps the ten Hussey children were educated there. Like blacksmith George Jones of 8 Ash Street, who worked several decades later, Robert forged whaling implements and household tools, probably at a shop on, or near, one of the wharves. The Husseys lived here at 12 Westminster until 1830, when they sold the house to a mariner, who sold it to a merchant, who sold it to a "hat and bonnet presser." In the late nineteenth century, artist George Flagg

lived here, painting in a little studio where the garage now stands. Over his bedroom fireplace he painted a timely inscription: “He that maketh haste to be rich shall not be innocent.”



*12 Westminster Street, c. 1890; the sign over the door reads “The Summit”*

### **Walk down Westminster Street to Quince Street, turn left**

#### **15 QUINCE STREET: built by Joseph Edwards, ship carpenter and house carpenter, c. 1812**

Joseph Edwards purchased the land on Quince Street, then known as Crown Court, in 1811, and probably built his house shortly thereafter. He was twenty-seven years old, married to Lydia Gates, with two young children. The house belonged to Joseph his entire life, and remained in the Edwards family until 1889. As a ship carpenter, Joseph would have been employed at the only shipbuilding establishment on the island, the Brant Point Shipyard, where whaling ships and other vessels were constructed in the early 1800s.

That he referred to himself in his deed of purchase as a ship carpenter and a house carpenter is significant, since most men practiced one trade at a time. The skills of shipbuilding were compatible with those of house building and Edwards could obviously do both. He probably had a hand in building his own house here at the top of Quince Street.

### Continue down Quince Street

#### 5 QUINCE: Nathaniel Hussey, cooper, 1757

Nantucket was just getting its feet wet in offshore whaling in the mid-eighteenth century, when the house was built for cooper Nathaniel Hussey. He died young, leaving his wife Judith with eight children under the age of fifteen. Like their father, the Hussey sons became tradesmen; among them were a mariner, a cooper, and a housewright, David, who purchased the family home from his siblings. The Hussey family owned 5 Quince for almost a hundred years. In the mid-nineteenth century, master rigger Robert Ratliffe boarded here. He was a British sailor who had been shipwrecked off Nantucket in 1820, and decided to make his home on the island, where there was plenty of demand for his trade. His many adventures at sea—including serving on the ship *Northumberland* when Napoleon was a prisoner being transported to St. Helena in 1815—made him a popular character in a community that relished sea stories. Five Quince Street was later owned by playwright Austin Strong and his wife, Mary.



5 Quince Street, c. 1890; Photograph by Henry S. Wyer

**Continue on Quince Street to Centre Street, turn right and walk two blocks to India Street, turn right**

**15 INDIA: built for William Stubbs, mariner, 1800**

In 1800, mariner William Stubbs purchased the land at 15 India Street from fellow mariner Abishai Hayden, for \$306. He built his house when the economy favored mariners, but when the War of 1812 shut down maritime commerce he suffered financial losses. In 1815, Stubbs, now a “master mariner,” was arrested for debt; he satisfied the claims against him by selling off some of his real estate, but was forced to mortgage his home and lost it to foreclosure in 1818. Several other master mariners owned the house at 15 India during the nineteenth century—Josiah Macy, Thaddeus Coffin, and Richard Gardner—but it was cooper John Elkins who secured the dwelling for his family for more than a hundred years.

**18 INDIA: built for Silas Paddack, mariner, 1767**

Mariner Silas Paddack, who was the first owner of this house, was the great-nephew of Ichabod Paddack, a Cape Codder who had been invited to Nantucket in 1690 to teach the craft of whaling. He obviously taught well, for by the mid-eighteenth century Nantucket was the leader in what had become an international industry, and Silas was a participant. After the Revolutionary War, he and his family moved to Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, with about a dozen other Nantucket families to set up a whaling center there, but it was not successful. Captain Silas Paddack died at sea on his way to Halifax in 1795, and his family returned to Nantucket, but not to 18 India; they had sold the house in 1791. The next owner of 18 India, mariner William Barnard, was serving as first mate on the ship *Leo* in 1797 when the captain was killed by a whale, gaining Barnard an instant promotion. Local tradition tells us that the small one-story addition on the west side of 18 India was a “rum shop”; physical evidence suggests that the addition was built in the mid-eighteenth century, so was likely part of the original structure. Whether rum was sold or another business conducted there, it was not uncommon for Nantucket women to supplement their seafaring husbands’ unpredictable incomes with enterprises of their own.



19 India Street, c. 1890s; Photograph by F. A. Hartford

**19 INDIA: built for Zaccheus Hussey, merchant, 1809**  
**Home of Joseph Winslow, master mariner, and Susan Sprague Winslow, whaling wife, 1864–68**

Like Eliza Brock of 5 Step Lane, Susan Winslow went to sea with her husband. Their voyage on the *Constitution* lasted five years, from 1857 to 1863, and two of their daughters were born aboard ship, joining two other young daughters who had accompanied their parents. While cruising in the South Pacific, Captain Winslow picked up a boat carrying nine men from the wrecked Italian merchant ship *Mia Madre* of Genoa. They had been adrift for nineteen days, and eight of their companions had perished, furnishing sustenance to the survivors in the same gruesome manner as recounted by survivors of the wreck of the Nantucket ship *Essex* several decades earlier. Despite the hardships of life on board, Susan Winslow enjoyed it, as expressed in a letter she wrote to her sister-in-law, Mary Morrow Winslow, wife of Captain Perry Winslow: “Perry said you like being at sea first rate and so do I, it is a great deal more pleasant than being at home alone.” When the Winslows returned to Nantucket after a long but successful voyage, they bought the house at 19 India Street. Clara Winslow—who went to sea as an infant and spent her first six years on board the *Constitution*—eventually became the owner of the family home and lived there until 1947.

### **37 INDIA: built for Charles Fittenberry Hussey, ropemaker, 1804**

In 1803, Charles Fittenberry Hussey purchased land on Pearl Street, the former name of India Street, from his parents, Reuben and Phebe Hussey. Charles was one of the fifth generation of the Hussey family on Nantucket. He was a twenty-eight-year-old ropemaker, married to Sarah Jenkins, with three young children. Successful at his trade and with a growing family, Charles was ready to build his own home, which he probably did by 1804. He may have worked at one of the island's numerous ropewalks—long buildings where hemp was spun and twisted into rope—south of the windmills on Mill Hill, or at other establishments on the east side of Union Street, or near Brant Point. Charles and Sarah owned 37 India until 1813. Other nineteenth-century owners included a trader, a shipwright, and a cooper. In the late twentieth century, the India House Inn and Restaurant was located here.

**At the end of India Street, turn left and walk to 16 Gardner Street.**

### **16 GARDNER STREET: built for Reuben F. Coffin, master mariner, 1831**

When master mariner Reuben F. Coffin bought the land at 16 Gardner Street in 1831, his deed specified that he was entitled to half the vegetables from the garden located here. Coffin had retired from a career at sea after his last ship, the oddly named *Hycso*, wrecked in the Society Islands. He sold the new house in 1836 to boatbuilder Edward R. Folger. Edward was the son of Walter Folger Jr., one of Nantucket's best-known men—inventor, clockmaker, state representative—in a family known for intellectual achievement. The famous astronomical clock built by Walter Folger Jr. and now in the Whaling Museum once reposed here. Like his father, Edward was mechanically minded. According to his obituary, he gave up boatbuilding when the island's maritime interests declined, and “being possessed of fine mechanical skill, he then turned his attention to the mechanical department of dentistry.” The Folger family owned the house for more than a hundred years. Edward Folger's uncle, Gideon, lived across the street at 15 Gardner.




## 15 GARDNER STREET: built for Gideon Folger, cooper, 1807

Although his first trade was that of a cooper, Gideon Folger's tract of land, which extended north almost to Liberty Street, included a dwelling house, barn, blacksmith's shop, candlehouse, and other buildings; he obviously had diverse business interests related to the whale-oil industry. He was also part owner of two ships in 1819, the *Aurora* and the *Essex*, both of which left Nantucket for whaling grounds in the South Pacific. The *Aurora*, on its maiden whaling voyage under the command of Daniel Russell, returned in 1822 with 1,630 barrels of prized sperm oil and 130 barrels of lesser "whale oil," an average amount. The *Essex*, as every student of maritime disaster knows, was stove by a sperm whale and sank in the South Pacific in 1820. That tragedy may have prompted Gideon to consider other investment strategies. His fellow *Essex* investor, Paul Macy, is listed as the sole owner of the *Aurora* on her next voyage in 1823.

## 10 GARDNER: built for Daniel Worth, cooper, 1768

Our tour begins and ends with the home of a cooper. Daniel Worth was a contemporary of Nathaniel Hussey of 5 Quince Street, working during the difficult era of the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812, when the whaling industry was essentially shut down due to maritime blockades and restrictions, and times were hard. Worth sold this house before the Revolution to Thomas Snow, a bookkeeper, who in turn sold it to Samuel Nye, a cabinetmaker. Although Snow and Nye did not work directly in the whaling industry, their livelihoods depended on a vibrant island economy fed by the revenues from maritime ventures.

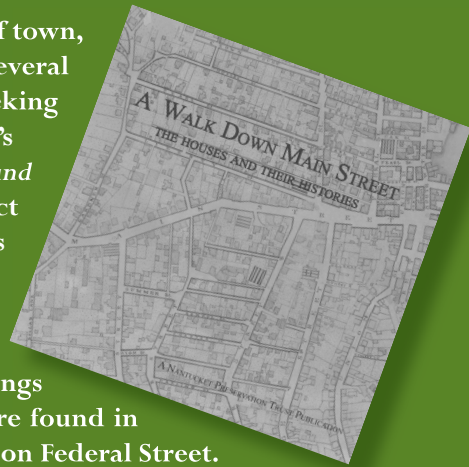
**Continue on Gardner Street to the monument at Main Street. Turn left and walk back to town through the prosperous residential neighborhood created by whale-oil merchants and ship-owners. In season, the Hadwen House, a house museum operated by the NHA at 96 Main Street, is open and worth a visit. It provides a rare glimpse of the interior of one of Nantucket's finest Greek Revival homes.** 

## HOUSE MARKERS

The NPT House-Marker program provides owners not just with a marker, but a chain of title that determines the date of construction and the original owner. This research sometimes provides information about the Nantucket builders and the families who lived in these structures. For more information about participating in the NPT House-Marker Program, visit us online at [www.nantucketpreservation.org](http://www.nantucketpreservation.org), or call us at 508-228-1387.

## WALKING TOUR INFORMATION

There are a number of walking tours of town, 'Sconset, and natural areas on island. Several handy guides are available to those seeking self-guided tours. Among them is NPT's *A Walk Down Main Street: The Houses and Their Histories*, which makes a perfect gift or memento of your visit. It is available for \$25 at the NPT office or at local bookstores. The Chamber of Commerce also offers a walking tour in a pamphlet highlighting key buildings and events. Other books and guides are found in the bookstores or at the Visitor Center on Federal Street.



For those who prefer a guided architectural tour, NPT offers a tour of 'Sconset at 9:00 A.M. on the second Tuesday of each month, in season. The tour begins at Pump Square in 'Sconset. Main Street tours are held every Wednesday and Thursday from June to September. The tour begins at 9:30 A.M. from our office at 2 Union Street. Both the 'Sconset and Main Street tours are \$10 per person.