In Provincetown, MA, one of the nation’s most desirable vacation spots where whale watching is one of the most sought after excursions, the Pilgrim Monument and Provincetown Museum (PMPM) is opening a new exhibition that reveals how it was that whaling largely built this town. Forgotten Port: Provincetown’s Whaling Heritage tells the story of how the country’s most outermost town evolved from hunting whales to saving whales.

John McDonagh, executive director of PMPM says “Forgotten Port is a story that hasn’t been told. Few realize the fundamental and enduring impact of the whaling industry in shaping the town’s economy and culture. Because of whaling, by 1870 Provincetown was one of the richest towns in Massachusetts and second in American whaling, rivalled only by New Bedford.”

Author Amy Whorf McGuiggan, is the guest curator of Forgotten Port: Provincetown’s Whaling Heritage. McGuiggan’s family were major artists in this thriving art colony. She has written about the history of the town extensively and brings her passion for the town to this project. McGuiggan says, “This show takes us from the earliest days of hunting whales in the bay through the Golden Age of Yankee Captains and the arrival of Portuguese seamen who built a welcoming fishing village that attracted artists, to today as the Provincetown Center for Coastal Studies is saving whales from extinction.”

PMPM will also run continuously the film, ‘Whaling Days,” which is the only film made of a whaling voyage. This film was commissioned by Provincetown’s famous Captain John Atkins Cook and shows him leading the actual hunt, the capture, and the rendering of whales onboard. Among many historical artifacts, the show features harpoons and lances from whaling vessels, glass oil lamps, scrimshaw and articles made of whalebone.

This is some of the history the exhibition covers:
Early Whaling

When the *Mayflower’s* Pilgrims first landed on Provincetown’s shores in 1620 they saw an abundance of whales playing nearby. They wished their ship had the means to take them as “we might haue made a very rich returne, which to our great grieue we wanted.”

For native cultures, whales – the source of food, clothing, tools and illumination – were the gift of life. Native Americans and early settlers practiced drift whaling. When a whale stranded up on the beach its blubber was boiled for the oil to use for lamps and whalebone dried for tools and corset stays.

Soon hardy fisherman took to sea to pursue the whales in nearby waters, especially the ‘right whale,’ given its name because it was slow and easy to catch. They used harpoons to capture them and toggles to tow them to shore for ‘trying out,’ leaving the carcass to be washed away by the sea.

Colonists in Nantucket were the first to begin shore whaling operations from which the island prospered. And in the mid-18th century, whalers discovered sperm whales further out and coastal towns joined in deep ocean pursuit for their valuable spermaceti oil to meet the insatiable demand.

Provincetown was among them.

Provincetown’s Golden Age of Whaling

Provincetown’s Whalers were hardy and adventurous. They sailed to exotic ports of call and brought back sophistication and cosmopolitan flavor to the town. They were savvy businessmen and controlled every aspect of whaling and fishing and contributed to the town’s prosperity.

Hardly a man did not own shares in whaling and fishing vessels, salt works and drying yards, windmills, wharves and wharf industries. They were master mariners, crew members, sail makers, riggers, blacksmiths, caulkers, coopers and chandlers.

By the 1850s, the schooners of enterprising Yankee families were sailing from Provincetown to the rich whaling grounds of the Azore islands to hunt sperm whales and returning with skilled Portuguese seamen. These young seamen with an adventurous spirit and drive for better opportunities settled in Provincetown, transforming the Yankee enclave into a Portuguese fishing village. They manned the ships, built homes, worked in shops, and became Captains and owners of fleets.

By 1860, the Whaler’s resourcefulness had made Provincetown one of the most prosperous and enterprising towns in Massachusetts.

In the century between 1820 and 1920, more than 160 vessels had outfitted from Provincetown, ranking her, among 72 American ports, 5th in vessels and 3rd in voyages (902).

Final Days of Whaling

The American whaling industry began to decline because of the depletion of whale stocks, the discovery of oil in Pennsylvania in 1859, and the high cost of outfitting a ship. The Portland Gale of 1898 delivered a devastating blow when it destroyed Provincetown’s two major wharfs that the fleet depended upon.

Yet Provincetown played a role to the last days of American whaling:

Of the many Yankee and Portuguese whalers focused on in this exhibition, two were well represented in the final days of New England whaling: Captain John Atkins Cook and Portuguese entrepreneur Joseph R. Manta.

…none played a more prominent role in Provincetown’s whaling fortunes and subsequently the town’s fortunes, than the Cook family, descendants of Mayflower Pilgrims. The Cook dynasty spanned four generations of whaling …
Few lived as colorful and tumultuous a life as **John Atkins Cook**. Born in 1857, he began as a harpooner, was shipwrecked as first officer, led voyages in the Arctic as Captain of his own ship, and survived a mutiny.

In 1910, Cook launched his new ship, *Viola*. This was the last ship built specifically for whaling and named for his wife who had accompanied him on many voyages. He commissioned a motion picture to be made of his final voyage as Captain of the *Viola* in 1916. This is the only movie ever made of an actual whaling voyage and it spares no detail showing how they hunted the whales and cut them up to render their oil on board.

Cook was also owner of the legendary whaling ship **Charles W. Morgan** which left on the last whaling voyage out of New Bedford under the command of Portuguese Captain John T. Gonsalves in 1920.

The *Charles W. Morgan* has been undergoing a five year renovation at Mystic Seaport and will making its historic 38th Voyage to New England coastal ports in the summer of 2014. It will be anchored off Provincetown from July 12 – 14 and take daytrips to Stellwagen Bank, followed by the Provincetown Whale Watching Boat.

**Joseph Manta** emigrated in 1864 from Valencia, Spain and became a prosperous fish merchant and owner of fleet of five schooners and a wharf. His schooner, *John R. Manta* has the distinction of making the last successful whaling voyage from an Eastern port, unloading its oil in New Bedford in 1925.

**Rise of Tourism**

By 1890, more than half of Provincetown’s population was Portuguese, reshaping the town’s religious, economic and cultural future.

*In 1898, when the Portland Gale ravaged the waterfront, the town was already in transition, as its businessmen had begun to reinvent the town as an art colony and summer resort.*

*In 1899, Provincetown’s celebrated art colony took root when Charles Webster Hawthorne, enchanted by the Mediterranean light and picturesque fishing scenes, opened his Cape Cod School of Art. The town’s flourishing bohemianism attracted writers and playwrights and, in time, a growing atmosphere of tolerance and freedom encouraged LGBT acceptance and prominence.*

Portuguese families offered rooms in guest homes and their cuisine in family run restaurants. They provided fishing excursions in the harbor and whale watching in the bay, favorite attractions for tourists visiting from around the world today.

**Today: Saving Endangered Whales**

By the moratorium on whaling in the 1970s, Provincetown had become a pioneer in eco-tourism and the research and watching of whales.

Due to more than a century of hunting and the impact of entanglements and vessel strikes, the North Atlantic Right Whale and the Humpback Whale are endangered species. The Right Whale, with a population of about 500, faces extinction.

In 1978, **the Provincetown Center for Coastal Studies (PCCS)** was founded to promote the preservation of marine and coastal habitats and the recovery of the whale species. PCCS has become a world leader in saving whales. *Its staff travels the globe teaching effective and safe response techniques to disentangle the powerful, frightened wild animals.*

In 1984, **Dr. Charles Stormy Mayo**, one of the founders of PCCS and a descendent of a whaling entrepreneur, freed a humpback whale named IBIS from a life threatening entanglement. Since then 30 right whales and 80 humpbacks have been rescued and released by the Center's release team.
It was a happy day in 2013 when, *Wart*, a right whale freed from entanglement by the PCCS team, returned to the bay, accompanied by her calf. To date, the center has been responsible for the birth of 11 new calves to the right whale population.

Richard Delaney, president of PCCS says, “Our town is fully supportive of the work we do. We’re educating people every day through our Center and on the popular whale watching tours to value the whale in our society. **Today we’ve modified the same tools that were used to catch whales in order to save them. By turning around the point of the harpoon that was used to catch them we can now cut the ropes and free them.”**

PMPM Executive Director John McDonagh added, “We hope visitors will enjoy our museum’s engaging experience and take from these factual and personal stories the broader story of our world’s changing relationship to the whale. It seems fitting that man is striving to save what it once destroyed and that Provincetown, in concert with nature, is playing an important role in this.”

Images attached:

Forgotten Port logo of seamen and giant whale; Cape Cod Oil Works Stripping of Whale; Right Whale #4040 being disentangled; Charles R. Morgan, the last wooden whaleship in the world

Other images available on request: Entrance to exhibition showing Whale Fluke used for disentanglement training; D. C. Stull Cutting up Blackfish; Display of Oil Lamps, scrimshaw, whalebone; Edward Curtis photo of “The Captured Whale”; Ships figurehead on Cook’s store; Captain John Atkins Cook; Crew of John R. Manta; Manta’s Wharf; Joseph R. Manta under full sail, Harpoons and lances;

About The Pilgrim Monument and Provincetown Museum:

The Pilgrim Monument commemorates the first landing of the Mayflower Pilgrims in 1620 in Provincetown Harbor where they wrote and signed the Mayflower Compact, the first written declaration of a democratic commonwealth. At 252-feet, 7.5 inches tall and 353 feet above sea level, it is the tallest all-granite structure in the U.S. and includes 60 ramps and 116 steps. The Monument is designed to resemble Torre Del Mangia, a 14th century tower in Siena, Italy, and is of the Italian Renaissance order of architecture. The Museum collects, preserves, interprets, researches, exhibits, and publishes archival historical materials and exhibit materials depicting important events of Provincetown history. Open Daily 9 – 5 April 1 to Memorial Day, then 9 – 7 to Labor Day, and 9 – 5 to Nov. 30 Admission is $12 adults, $10 seniors, $4 children 4 – 12, 3 and under free.

For more information, visit [www.pilgrim-monument.org](http://www.pilgrim-monument.org) or call 508-487-1310 Follow PMPM on [Facebook](http://www.facebook.com) and [Twitter](http://www.twitter.com).