

# New Bedford and Silmo Packing Company's role in bringing coffee syrup to the world

*When was the last time you had coffee syrup?!  
(thebestthingeverandthensome.com)*

Throughout the country – or the world for that matter – there are regional delicacies that can rarely, if at all, be found elsewhere. They make our little corner of the world special or unique. Something we call our own. The Midwest has Lutefisk. The Pacific Northwest has the Geoduck. Illinois has the Horseshoe Sandwich. New York City has Bialys. And on and on and on.

We have quite a number of our own regional delicacies and it just depends on how you want to cut up the region. Are we New England? The South Coast? Greater New Bedford? You could even chop up neighborhoods and find some differences. Cacoila, linguica, chourico, stuffed quahogs are just a few. But let's talk about a debated and beloved one: coffee syrup.



*Tell me that  
doesn't look  
good!*

*(thebestthingever  
andthensome.com)*

Coffee syrup is one of those regional specialties that we have in the South Coast that the rest of the country has either never heard of or has have heard of, but never tried. These people are deprived...nay, dare I say depraved!

If you have never had coffee syrup in your life, you have been brought up wrong. Abused. Neglected. Call your parents now and tell them that you need to talk or you'll notify the Department of Social Services. It won't matter that you are now middle-aged. They will sympathize and support you once you mutter the words "I've never had coffee syrup."

The first time I realized the concept of regional delicacies was on a trip to Florida when I was about 10 years old. We stopped at a local diner for lunch and like always I requested coffee syrup with my grilled cheese. After a pause and a puzzled look, the waitress managed a "What do you mean? You want a coffee with milk in it?" How do you explain a concept that is as normal and natural as tying your shoes? How do you convey what is an iconic drink of extraordinary magnitude? Doesn't everyone have coffee syrup...every day? My ten year old mind was blown.

Poor deprived waitress. Hopefully, she turned her life around.

Strangely enough, outside of New England there is one other place on the planet where coffee syrup is a regional delicacy: Australia. Go figure.

So when did this nectar of the gods get created? When did this item that all our friends and family members who have moved away, ask us to send them in the mail? (Just last month I sent a package to Arizona.) Who is responsible for spreading such joy across New England? Well, that is up for debate. The answer depends on where you are from. Rhode Islanders and

Massachusetts...ians...ers... both lay claim. In fact, it was made the state drink of Rhode Island in 1993.



*So good, that you have to get it by the jug.*

The Italians and Portuguese both say they came up with the idea. Since the Italians aren't a large community in the South Coast, their voice has been obscured by the louder Portuguese "voice". The Italians claim that they have been making it since 1895 in Providence and there may be some credibility to this claim: a version of coffee milk was a favorite of kids across Italy since the 19th century. This early concoction was a very thrifty and frugal way of not wasting the coffee grounds that the adults were drinking. While you couldn't make more strong coffee from used grounds, you could make a treat by straining water and sugar through the used coffee grounds.

The only problem with this claim is it is based solely in anecdotes and there are no historical records of it being manufactured. While there is no reason to disbelieve the anecdotes – they are likely true – the first historical record of it being produced and sold is right here in New Bedford is when the Silmo Packing Company opened its plant in 1932. The building and perhaps the company was there since 1920. Located at 1339 Cove Street – where the Inner Bay restaurant is today – the company was started by Portuguese-Americans Louis Silva and Carlos Desouza Morais. You more clever readers, just found out how Silmo got its name.



*The only ingredients  
you need to get  
straight to happy,  
happy.*

After Silmo opened its doors and started shipping its coffee syrup all over the South Coast and beyond. They cornered the market until 1938 when Italian-American, Alphonse Fiore's company Eclipse Food Products of Warwick added it to their list of product offerings and began to mass produce it. The more popularly known Autocrat wouldn't start selling it until the 1940s, in spite of the fact that it had been around since 1895.

Silmo had tried to compete with the other companies and even underwent a name change, becoming MilkMate – which they ran out of 97 Cove Street. Unfortunately, they could not compete and in 1996 closed their doors for good. The rest, as “they” say is history. Poor cliché, but fitting.

So the answer to who brought the world coffee syrup is both, the Italians and the Portuguese, Rhode Island and Massachusetts, right?

You know what? Fie on that! New Bedford brought the world coffee syrup. If you disagree, show us your proof! Raspberries!

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# Who Remembers...Top Seven (Almost) Forgotten Services?

Here is another installment in our *Who Remembers?* series. You can browse previous articles by using the search bar on the right or by clicking [here](#). These articles are strolls down memory lane. In some cases the buildings are still there, but new businesses have replaced them. In other instances, the buildings or even the properties have been razed. Instead of a building, it may be a TV show, personality, or commercial that no one longer exists. Either way, it can't stop us from taking the Memory Lane stroll!



*There are very few places where one can get their shoes shined! (returntomanliness.com)*

As always we would rather this be a discussion. No one knows this area better than those who grew up here! Please, leave constructive criticism, feedback, and corrections. We'd love to hear your anecdotes. Please share!

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How fun it is to wax nostalgic about things gone past. To pore over images that evoke vivid memories and often powerful emotions. I've often not thought even passively about something, yet the mere mention of it or a glimpse of a photo brings back a flood of memories – taking me right back to the very timeline when they were commonplace. It's as close to time traveling as we have, isn't it?

I have so many things I would positively love to share, but sadly we lack the images. Scores of articles would have passed if I had pictures to accompany them. Alas, recalling days of old is much harder to do without images to serve as a mnemonic device – there isn't a more powerful and effective method of recall. Hint, hint! If you have pictures of greater New Bedford's past, please consider sharing them with us, so we can offer many more of these strolls down memory lane.

In the past – pardon the pun – we have discussed landmarks, images and occupations that have been (almost) forgotten. This time around I'd like to share some services that have been almost forgotten. Of course, being 44 years old, there are services that have I never even heard of, or simply weren't a part of growing up. That doesn't mean you can't share yours. By all means, do so!

## **Milk Delivery**

Before chocolate milk, strawberry milk, and banana milk, there was...milk! Extracted from a 4 legged beast called cow, this strange liquid would be bottled in glass, sealed with a tin foil cap and dropped off at your doorstep or ...gasp the milk chute, by sunrise. You simply had to open your front door or milk chute and there it was.



*No jokes, please. Ok, maybe one. Or five.*

Before my time, you could leave out your own bottles or containers and the milkman would charge you according to the volume.

Wanted some cream, cheese or butter? No problem. Just leave a memo. When you were done, you rinsed, then placed the empty bottles back in the crate for the next day. Easy as pie. If you were up at the hour that the milkman made deliveries, it wouldn't be uncommon to ask him to drop something off at a friend's house down the road.

The occupation is mostly remembered today for being an abundant source of infidelity jokes. I'm willing to bet there are kids today who have cracked a milkman joke or two in their time – yet don't actually know what a milkman is or did. Well, unless you share this article with them, that is.

## **Doctor's House Calls**

Here is a service that has almost come full circle. Yes, there was a time where you and your doctor had a semi-formal, in some cases, casual relationship. You could call him "Doctor" or even by his first name.



*House Calls – an idea that perhaps could should be revisited!*

In the 1960s nearly half of visits with a doctor were done right at the patient's home. There was a time when this was absolutely normal. Sadly, nowadays it sounds a bit odd. In an era, where a hospital itself can be a breeding ground for bacteria, and even a dangerous place in light of overworked, fatigued doctors, it seems that this idea could use some revisiting.

Of course, there are certain injuries or ailments that require modern technology and a large staff. However, there are some illnesses that would benefit all if the house call was brought back. In fact, it seems strange if you think about a very ill person, hopping into a car and driving themselves to a hospital where they sit in a waiting room spreading germs. Almost counter-intuitive.

A service that has almost come full circle? Perhaps, not quite. Maybe a partial circle. There has been a slight comeback in this service as some doctors are reconsidering and even practicing the concept – for reasons beyond the scope of this article.

## **Cobbling**

No, this is not the software or the culinary art of producing fruit-filled pastries. A cobbler was the fellow who would



actually handcraft shoes. Before mass production and Asian sweatshops, there was the lonely cobbler.



*Today's method of shoe "repair"? Throw them away and buy new ones!*

This man would repair your shoes, extending their longevity and it wouldn't be uncommon to have the same pair of shoes for many years. Look sharp too!

This is perhaps the REAL "world's oldest profession." From the time that mankind needed to walk about and hunt, he needed something to protect his feet to allow him to chase prey or escape predators. This makes the loss of this profession and service a loss for humanity. If you know who to ask and where to look, you can still find a cobbler.

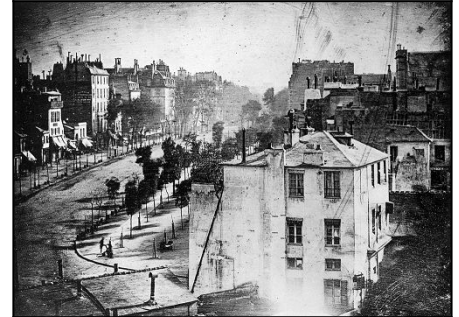
These days, the cobbler has been made mostly irrelevant and people prefer simply casting the shoes away and buying a new pair. Another science, craft or art-form lost to time.

## **Shoe Shining**

Shoe shining or boot polishing are both still found in places like New York City, however it is a service that is an endangered species. At least in America. In many parts of the world, like India or Afghanistan, it is the sole source of income for women.

In the day of shoelaces, sneakers, and tennis shoes there is

very little need for a shoe shine. Today's fashion is primarily an informal one that seldom requires a pair of "dress-up" shoes. Even if a person owns a pair of shoes that could use a proper shoe shine, they are worn so little that, a little self-buff every 5 years does the job.



*The oldest photo in existence of a human being shows a gentleman having his shoes shined. Taken in 1853, this photo was on a busy street in Paris, but the long exposure time (10 minutes) eliminated the moving traffic.*

## **Paperboy**

When I was growing up the newspaper delivery was the realm of one person: the teenager. Chosen delivery vehicle? The trusty BMX. Every teenage boy earned spending money to fund his comic book addiction or stamp collection. It was one of the last rites of passage for boys.

These days, because of inflation, cost of living and dwindling social security, many adults have a paper delivery route to make ends meet. With the retirement age being extended, people are undertaking a paper route as a non-labor intensive way to

make extra cash.

## **Elevator Operator**

I actually experienced this last week. The first time in decades. Many people in this new generation would think “Why would I need a person to push a button for me? How lazy!” Whippersnappers!

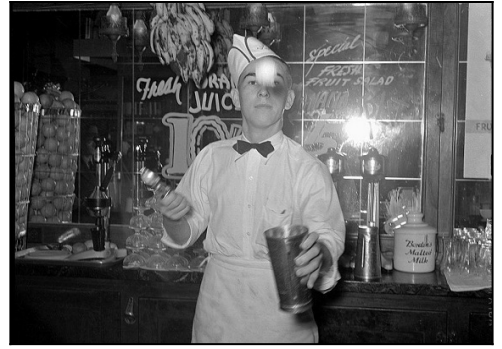
However, that really was not the primary job of an elevator operator in spite of the occupation’s name. There was an era when elevators would not automatically stop and would require manual timing. However, they were also part-greeter, part-tour guide. Superlative founts of information and a living directory – especially useful in tall buildings and in department stores.

Nowadays we have dissected the elevator operator and require many occupations and devices to do what they did. We have separate tour guides, greeters, information desks, directory placards, and customer service booths.

There is also the seemingly preferred method of exiting an elevator and looking about with a puzzled look, before popping back in and trying again.

## **Soda Jerker**

A soda jerk would serve libation at a soda fountain at an apothecary or drugstore. Say what?



Once upon a time, the drugstore was the place to pick up your mail, some groceries and your medicine. Of course, if you were a kid, you looked forward to mom running these errands, because every drugstore had a soda fountain. One could pick amongst a number of flavors for your soda or ice cream float.

The soda jerk, was often a teenager or young man who would pull or “jerk” the lever or spigot to mix the soda (carbonation) and water which were on two separate taps – after putting in the flavored syrup of your choice. Some soda jerks attracted clientele by their showmanship or flair that they would exhibit while preparing the soda.

The last place I recall being served by a soda jerk at a soda fountain was at **Woolworth’s Five & Dime**.

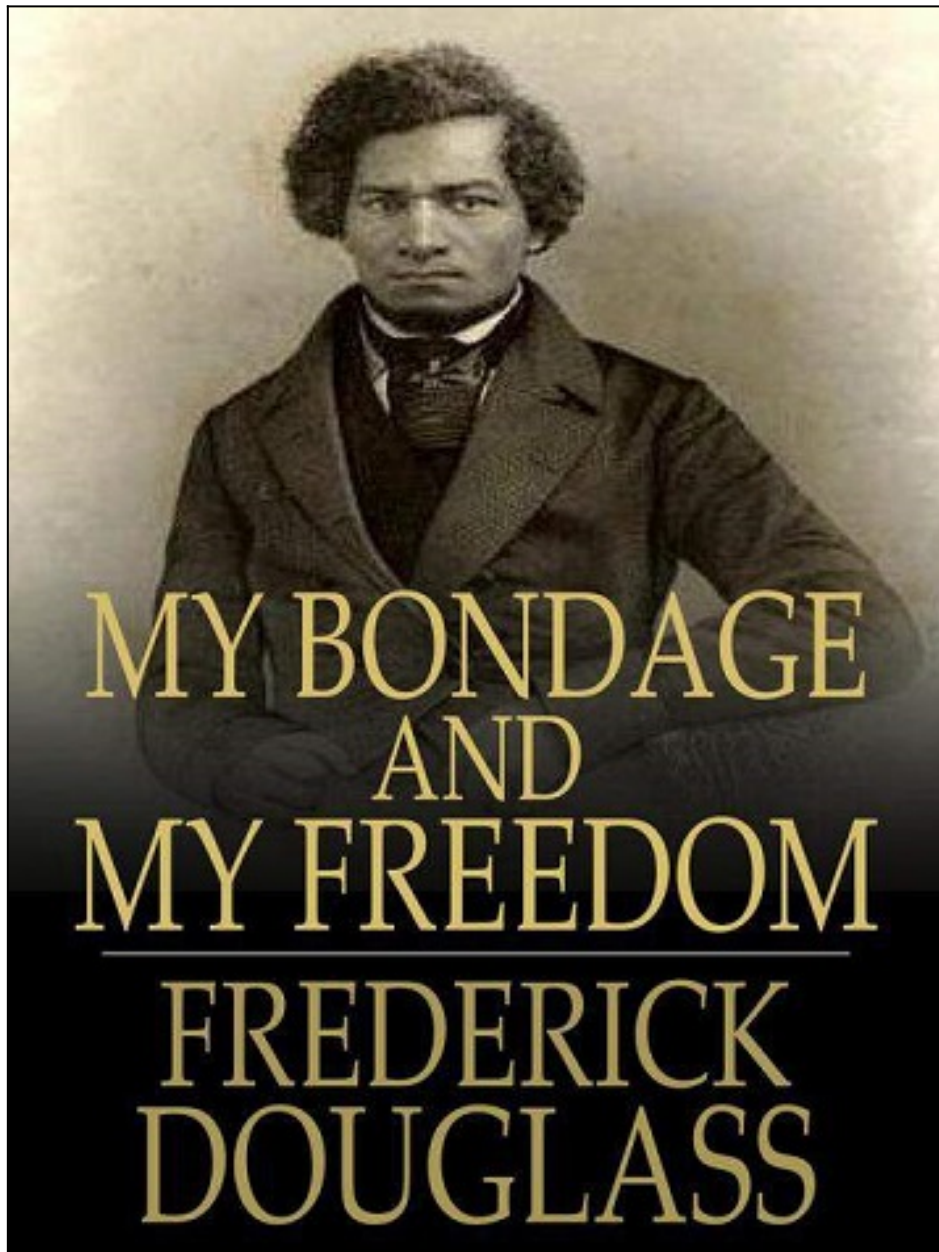
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*Honorary mention should be made of the milliner or hatter, haberdasher, telephone operator, and street sweepers. What era did you grow up and what services to recall and miss?*

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# Frederick Douglass and the city of New Bedford – Pt. 2



*Douglass's book My Bondage and My Freedom describes the scenes he saw on his first afternoon in New Bedford.*

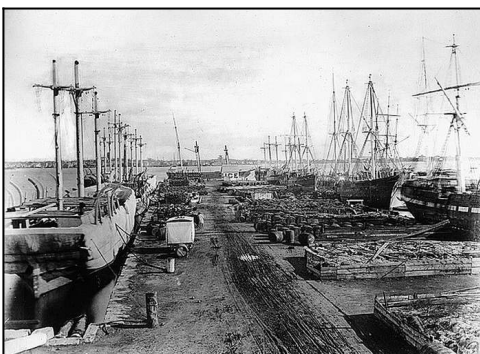
Most of the following information in this second part of the **Frederick Douglass article** is taken from his autobiography, My Bondage and My freedom.

Douglass eloquently and beautifully wrote down his hard story.

His story is free of manipulative drama but full of soul. He wrote that suffering did not ultimately bring him to despair – it brought him to hope for a future when a person would not be bound under oppression because of their race. Douglass’s hope was so strong that he became part of the solution to slavery, spending most of his life in pursuit of freedom for his race. His story is one worth reading.

When Frederick and Anna left New York after they got married, they first went to Newport, RI. Here, they met two abolitionists who told them about New Bedford, which was one of the significant destinations of the Underground Railroad. Within just a few weeks of Douglass escaping slavery and getting married, he and his wife settled into New Bedford with a completely new landscape for life in front of them.

The Douglass’ were welcomed into the home of Nathan and Polly Johnson, African American abolitionists living at 21 Seventh Street in New Bedford. It was here that Frederick and Anna were encouraged to take the last name ‘Douglass.’ When Douglass arrived in New York, he changed his last name to Johnson to protect his identity, but he changed it a second time when Nathan Johnson suggested the name Douglass.



*A typical wharf scene that Douglass would have encountered; Merrill's Wharf 1869. (Spinner Publications)*

Douglass’s book *My Bondage and My Freedom* describes the scenes

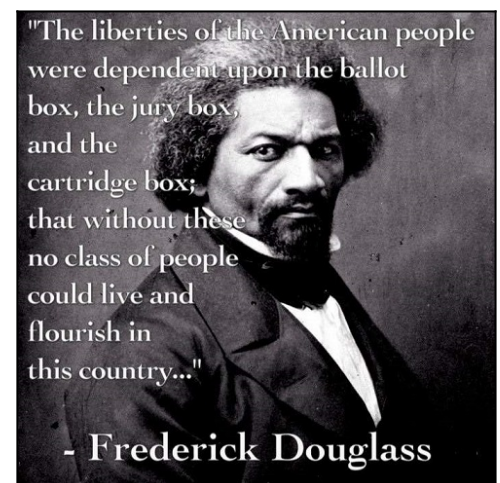
he saw on his first afternoon in New Bedford. He went down to the docks and as he watched the men at work he was surprised by what he saw. "On the wharves I saw industry without bustle, labor without noise, and heavy toil without the whip...there was no loud cursing or swearing...everything went on as smoothly as the works of a well adjusted machine" (351). He was also taken back by the wise use of animals to help with work. He took note that an ox worth eighty dollars was doing "what would have required fifteen thousand dollars worth of human bones and muscles to have performed in a southern port...everything was done here with a scrupulous regard to economy, both in regard to men and things, time and strength" (352).

Nathan Johnson assured Douglass that in New Bedford, black and white children went to school together, that a black man could hold any office in the state, and that no slaveholder could take a slave from New Bedford. This sealed Douglass's assurance of his safety and he immediately set out to look for work. He found his first job three days after arriving in New Bedford and described his experience in these words: "It was new, hard, and dirty work, even for a calker [sic], but I went at it with a glad heart and a willing hand. I was now my own master – a tremendous fact – and the rapturous excitement with which I seized the job, may not easily be understood, except by some one [sic] with an experience something like mine...that day's work I considered the real starting point of something like a new existence" (354).

His delight in finding New Bedford to be a place of such prosperous industries and economic wealth gave him hope of the new life he could live being his own master; he would have no one over him to take the money out of his hands that his own mind, sweat and muscle had earned. To him, this was a true manifestation of liberty. For years he had to endure watching every cent he worked for trickle out of his hands and be funneled to another person just to make their own life a little bit sweeter than it already was.

New Bedford held even more surprises for Douglass. Douglass's sense of wealth and poverty came from his experience of life in the south. There, if a person had money, it was because they owned slaves – it was the work of slaves that brought money into the south. If white people didn't own slaves, they were poor. Douglass described the white non-slaveholders as “the most ignorant and poverty stricken of men, and the laughing stock even of slaves themselves – called generally by them, in derision, ‘poor white trash.’”

Douglass wrote of his amazement in finding the laboring class of New Bedford living in houses “elegantly furnished – surrounded by more comfort and refinement – than a majority of the slaveholders” in Maryland. Of Nathan Johnson's home Douglass wrote: “He lived in a nicer house...was owner of more books, the reader of more newspapers, was more conversant with the moral, social and political conditions of the country and the world, than nine-tenths of the slaveholders in Talbot County, Maryland” (350-51).



*Douglass became the first African American nominated for Vice President of the United States.*

While Douglass made it perfectly clear through his writing that New Bedford was not fully free from discrimination and



segregation (he found prejudice in workplaces and churches), he always ultimately remained grateful for the freedom he had found and the refuge he had in living in a state that did not allow ownership of slaves. Seeing discrimination in New Bedford did not set him back, though; he used it as a propeller to pursue total freedom for his race.

A few months after the Douglass' arrival in New Bedford, a young man brought Douglass a copy of the *Liberator*, an abolitionist newspaper edited by William Lloyd Garrison. Douglass described the *Liberator* as "a paper after my own heart. It detested slavery...made no truce with the traffickers in the bodies and souls of men; it...demanded the complete emancipation of my race." Through this paper, Douglass began to know the heart of the editor, Garrison. "Of all men beneath the sky, the slaves, because most neglected and despised, were nearest and dearest to his great heart" (360). From this point on, Douglass began attending all the anti-slavery meetings held in New Bedford, not yet realizing his own important future role in the fight against slavery.

In 1841, Garrison and others put together an anti-slavery convention in Nantucket. Douglass had taken no time off or vacation from his work since escaping slavery nearly three years before this. For the first time, he took a vacation to attend the convention. To his complete surprise, once he was there he was asked to speak. He described remembering very little about what he said except that he was shaking from nerves at the thought of speaking to a large group of people (1,000 were gathered).

At the end of the meeting Douglass was asked to become an agent for the Massachusetts anti-slavery society. He hesitated, feeling he was not prepared to take on such a position, but ended up accepting. He wrote that he was often introduced as having "...my diploma written on my back" (363).

This was the very beginning of Douglass's launch into his work

for the abolition of slavery. While living in New Bedford opened up for Douglass a new way of life and new opportunities, he also left his own mark in New Bedford. He, along with other slave fugitives, stamped New Bedford as being a haven for slaves during the rocky time in our country's history when battles were raging over the different ideals people held regarding race and slavery.

Douglass went on to become a well known orator, speaking nationally (as well as in Ireland and Great Britain) against slavery, sometimes even risking his life for this. He endured insults and threats, was often tired and lonely, but he never forgot his end goal. Douglass also became an advisor, political ally and friend to six presidents. He worked with and was a friend to abolitionists, women's suffrage leaders, such as Susan B. Anthony, and authors, such as Ralph Waldo Emerson. He was a writer, publisher, speaker, preacher and political activist; from his selfless work others after him have felt the impact of the blessings he brought to the framework of America.

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## **Frederick Douglass and the city of New Bedford**

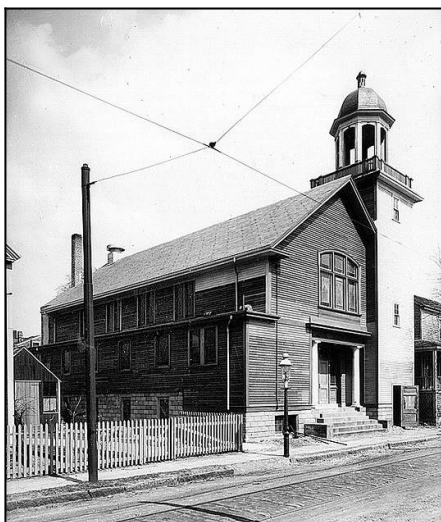
*New Bedford's prominently abolitionist stance played an important role in Frederick Augustus Washington Bailey's life.*

"Your wickedness and cruelty committed in this respect on your fellow creatures, are greater than all the stripes you have laid upon my back or theirs. It is an outrage upon the soul, a war upon the immortal spirit, and one for which you must give

account at the bar of our common Father and Creator.” An excerpt from Frederick Douglass’s book, *My Bondage and My Freedom*.

Ever since I was a teenager I have been interested in the history of warfare. So, when I saw that one of my class options at UMass Dartmouth this fall was War and Military Culture, I was excited to take it. The books we have been reading shed war under two different lights – war is waged to either spread evil or to stop the spread of evil. For example, in our own country, the north and south both put up a four-year-long mighty fight over the issue of slavery.

One side was for it and one was against it. One side saw nothing wrong with forming their own measurement of how much value a certain race should hold – to them some races were better than others. This thinking led to the abuse and oppression of slaves that was so horrific that any words I write will fail to accurately portray their intense suffering. The other side believed that the worth of any human life, created and given by God, was of equal value – race had nothing to do with the soul of a human being.



*The church that Frederick Douglass attended – the AME Zion Douglass Church*

*on Elm Street, was  
organized in 1850.  
(Spinner Publications)*

This past week, reading about the Civil War led me to think about Frederick Douglass's story, the role New Bedford played in his life, and the role he played in the abolition of slavery. His is a very inspiring story; it will be hard to write briefly, so this article will be in two parts. This first article will cover his biography from his birth to his arrival in New Bedford.

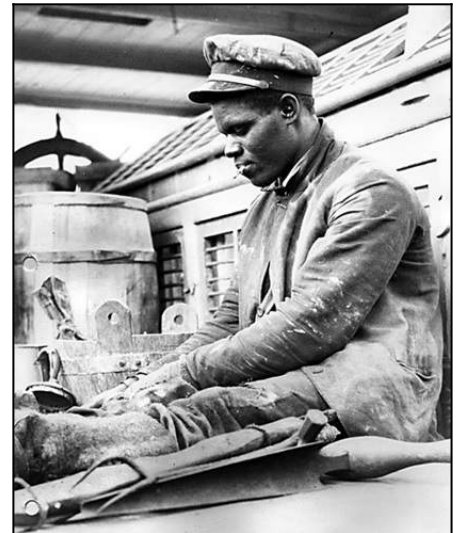
Frederick Augustus Washington Bailey (later known as Frederick Douglass) was born into slavery in Talbot County, Maryland, around the year 1818. He never knew the exact date of his birth but eventually chose to celebrate it on February 14th. At an early age Douglass was separated from his mother, a common practice in that time and place, and brought to live with his maternal grandmother.

By the age of 12, his mother – who he never saw much – had died, he had been separated from his grandmother, and he had been moved to two different plantations. This second plantation belonged to Thomas Auld, who often hired Douglass out to other slave and plantation owners. Thomas first gave Douglass to his brother, Hugh Auld. It was here that Douglass began to learn how to read from Hugh's wife, Sophia. In Maryland it was against state law to teach slaves to read, though, so when Hugh found out what his wife was doing, he forced her to stop. His concern was that if Douglass learned to read, he would become dissatisfied as a slave and want his freedom. Yet, Douglass secretly continued to learn to read from white children in his neighborhood.

Around the age of 12 Douglass discovered *The Columbian Orator*, a collection of political essays, poems and dialogues which was widely used in the American classroom to teach reading and speaking. This piece of literature was what molded his

thoughts about freedom and human rights, greatly impacting his life and the role he eventually played in the abolition of slavery.

Still in his early teens, Douglass was taken from Hugh Auld's plantation and hired out to another man, William Freeland. Here, Douglass began a weekly church service where he also taught other slaves to read using the New Testament. Freeland never interfered with these lessons, which up to 40 slaves attended, but after a while the other local slave owners became angry. They didn't want their slaves to be educated. One week, armed with clubs and stones, they disbanded the meetings permanently.



*Douglass helped pave the way for rights for African nationals and African-Americans like this black whaler. (Spinner Publications)*

By the time Douglass was 16, he had been hired out to yet another man named Edward Covey. Covey had gained a reputation as a "slave breaker" and lived up to that reputation with his treatment of Douglass. His regular abuse and beatings almost ruined Douglass psychologically. Yet, at one point along the way, Douglass chose to fight back. He won that fight, putting

a final stop to Covey's beatings.

Under Covey, in 1836, Douglass's second attempt at freedom failed (he first tried escaping from Freeland). But one year later in 1837, meeting a free black woman named Anna Murray, Douglass again began to hope that he, too, could be free one day. On September 3, 1838, having received some money and a sailor's uniform from Anna and identification papers from a seaman, he boarded a train to the safe house of an abolitionist in New York. Later, he wrote of this time: "I have often been asked, how I felt when first I found myself on free soil...There is scarcely anything in my experience about which I could not give a more satisfactory answer.

A new world had opened upon me. If life is more than breath, and the 'quick round of blood,' I lived more in one day than in a year of my slave life. It was a time of joyous excitement which words can but tamely describe. In a letter written to a friend soon after reaching New York, I said: 'I felt as one might feel upon escape from a den of hungry lions.' Anguish and grief, like darkness and rain, may be depicted; but gladness and joy, like the rainbow, defy the skill of pen or pencil" (Life and Times of Frederick Douglass, p. 120).

When Douglass arrived in New York, he immediately sent for Anna and she met him there. They were married just a couple weeks later and chose New Bedford for their first home together, arriving on September 17, 1838. New Bedford, being known for its racial tolerance in general at that time (although not totally free from prejudices), was the springboard from which Douglass went on to impact the nation so heavily in his stand against slavery and the equality of races.

*Frederick Douglass and the city of New Bedford – Pt. 2*

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# Who Remembers...Eight (almost) Forgotten Technologies?

The old adage “Time flies!” becomes increasingly louder as we get older. What seems like a tired cliché begins to gain momentum and demands attention. Seems like last year I was changing my daughter’s diapers and all of a sudden I am having conversation about world affairs, geography, and DNA with my 13 year old daughter.

How did that happen?!

It’s a great reminder that often we go through our day on a sort of auto-pilot. Days merge into days, weeks become a blur and years pass in fast forward. Recalling nostalgia is a fantastic way to take a bit back from the speeding progress of time. A rewind or pause.

There is something odd about the entire process. These things we recall are often not even things we were fond of when they were prevalent. In fact, we may even dislike or despise them – yet, conjuring them evokes a smile or chuckle.

Here are five “technologies” or gadgets that we’ve likely forgotten. However, at their mere mention we declare “OH YEAH!!” Thus they are “(almost)” forgotten. Let’s have a little fun!

# The Payphone



*"Would like to accept these charges?"*

One day while driving my daughter asked me about what things were like when I was a kid. During the discussion I told her about the phone booth and payphones. I mentioned that if your car broke down, you would have to walk about and find a payphone, then pay 10 cents or make a "collect call." She genuinely thought I was pulling her leg. "Why would you do that instead of use your cell phone?" she asked. Every once in a while, I will come across a payphone stall (not a full fledged booth with the collapsing door) and will point it out so she can see that it's not a practical joke. Even funnier is when I brought out an old phone from the attic, complete with spiral cord all tangled up. "Why would you need a chord on a phone?"

I remember a local call costing 10 cents, then eventually going up to a quarter before becoming obsolete. Does anyone remember it costing less than a dime?

## School Nostalgia

In the day of hollow plastic pencils with replaceable lead, it's becoming less common to come across the genuine article.



A yellow, No. 2 pencil (NOT wax) with a red rubber butt. When the pencil became dull, you would raise your hand (remember that?!) and ask to use the pencil sharpener.

The pencil sharpener would be a sturdy metal contraption that was bolted down onto the most solid object in the classroom. You would select the right size opening for your pencil, stick it in, and turn the crank with old-fashioned elbow grease.

There was the heavy and dangerous paper-cutter with its chopping blade. Nowadays, you would need 10 permits, a license, 3 inspections and a government agency bribe to have one in a classroom. Of course, only in New Bedford.

There giant rubber erasers and the brown paper bags to make as book covers, that were scribbled on and decorated with stickers. Also the small plastic chairs, that every boy learned early on – do NOT attempt a cheek sneak with one of these cheers. Instead of “silent and deadly,” you’ll get “louder and not so prouder.”



*611 if you don't like this article.*

## **Wired remote control**

In a day and age when everything is wireless, it's easy to forget when everything was physically connected and wireless wasn't so commonplace. The wire for the television remote resembled the telephone wire. Tripping over the wire while

someone was fumbling with the remote became a seeming past-time for many of us. The great thing about it? It never disappeared into the black hole that remotes (and guitar picks and socks) seem to disappear into. You never had to turn the couch upside down, tossing cushions willy-nilly in an attempt to find it. You just needed to follow the yellow-brick cord.

## **8-Tracks, Walkman & Albums**

Today we have digital music that streams. Rewind, fast forward and skip to a favorite track in a second flat. Hop from artist to artist at the click of a button. Hundreds and thousands of songs at an instant reach. However, for many of us it was a matter of bulky media or guesswork. 8-tracks were just phasing out for me, so it was the album and the cassette tape. Wanted to skip to a favorite song? Put in the right side of the cassette, then fast forward or rewind then play and hope you were close. Rinse and repeat. Maybe after 45 seconds you'd be ready to enjoy your song.

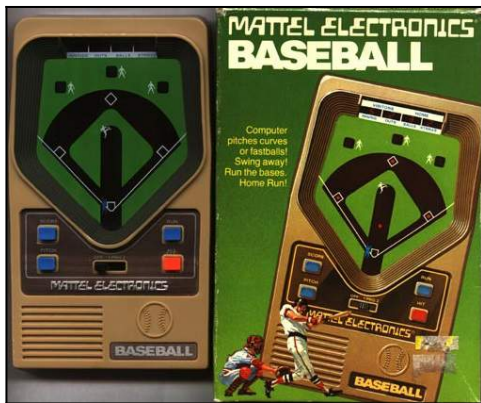
Albums were easier because you could site the tracks. Just do a count and drop the needle. However, albums could be ruined with a scratch and often played with a bit of background static or white noise. I know some actually enjoy that aspect of albums.

## **Pager or Beeper**

Nowadays, teenagers – perhaps even younger – have the latest and greatest iPhone for \$400 and up. However, “back in the day” if you were cool you had a pager clipped to your belt. Pull out your phone, text your kids or grand-kids and tell them “14” and “17\_31707\_1” or “123.” Tell them how you would tell your girlfriend or boyfriend “45” and “607.” Sure, they will probably tell you how uncool and unhip you are, but at least you'll have a laugh.

# Floppy Disks

While these days Terabyte and Petrabyte are tossed around, kilobyte was “it” at one time. The media of the day were Floppy Disks, which could hold a whopping 175kb of data when they first arrived for the public in 1972. Storing a large image would have been laughable, let alone vast libraries. Music files didn’t even exist, so we won’t even go there. You could store some simple text files, or small programs using the BASIC language. Apparently the computing community still thinks fondly of these as even today the floppy disk icon is used to download files.



*The original gameboy!*

# Mattel Handheld Games

Perhaps my favorite item on this list. Mattel handheld games were the original “Gameboys,” albeit you could only play one game as these were not run by cartridges. These games were perfect for boring waits at the doctor’s or dentist’s offices, vacations on the toilet, and for when you were grounded and banished to your bedroom for hours. All the major sports were represented: basketball, baseball, soccer, football and hockey. However, there Battlestar Galactica, Formula Racer, Bowling and Armor Battle were popular favorites – which you could always try by swapping a game with a good friend for a week or two. In all there were sixty handheld games to choose from.

## Drive-In Theater

I think there is a statute of limitations and that it has expired. You can confess now without penalty. If you hid in the back seat under a blanket, in the trunk or back of a van to “gip” the entrance fee to get into the drive-in, raise your hand. I have fond memories of running around the lot freely, utilizing the playground, and sitting on the hood of the car. There was a genuine intermission. Anyone remember intermissions?! The movie would stop, everyone would race to the concession stand and resupply. You would typically have 10 minutes if I recall correctly.

The Fairhaven drive-in was the one I went to the most. I wish they would bring it back, I would certainly go! I’m sure I’m not alone. However, I won’t hold my breath. If you would like to take a stroll down memory lane, there still exist drive-in theaters within driving distance. There are theaters in Leicester, Mendon, Wellfleet, and North Smithfield, Rhode Island.

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*What were your memories like from this list? What gadgets or technologies do you miss the most?*

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## Seamen’s Bethel helped boost morale and spirits

During the 18th and 19th centuries, the whaling industry in America boomed, and eventually New Bedford became the world’s

center of whaling. At the height of the whaling industry's economic impact in New Bedford, there were more than 700 whaling ships out on the oceans of the world, and New Bedford was the home port to more than 400 of those ships.

The oil from the whales, bringing an incredible amount of wealth to New Bedford and making it one of the richest cities in the world during the 19th century, was used to light lamps during this time period, and earned New Bedford the title of "the city that lit the world."

But with wealth and titles comes a cost – the voyages that men went on to bring New Bedford to this level of economic prosperity sometimes lasted years, and it was a hard, dirty, long and tiring job. Some of these men, when they returned to New Bedford, were known to seek out brothels and saloons or gamble away all the money they had made out at sea, spending it in just a matter of days. So, in 1830, the leading citizens of New Bedford met to discuss ways to help these men.

Part of their plan was to offer the seamen church services before they left for their voyages. The services were held either on the waterfront or in the Town Hall, but this was not a good long term solution. In 1831, Seamen's Bethel was built (at a cost of \$5,000 dollars), and in 1832 it was dedicated as a non denominational church for the men of New Bedford who went out to sea.

This chapel, still open and operating as a non denominational church today, eventually became a sort of historical record of those who spent their time on whaling ships. Mounted on the walls inside the church are cenotaphs. The word "cenotaph" is a Greek word which means "empty grave." When men were lost or died at sea, the families at home had no way to bury them, so they could pay to have a cenotaph placed in the church. This way, loved ones could come and pay their respects to the one they lost. A cenotaph looks like a cemetery headstone, and it contains information about the man, including how he died.

These tablets tell brief stories of how difficult life at sea was. Many men fell overboard, were bitten by sharks, drowned or caught and suffered from diseases like yellow fever, malaria, and consumption.

Seamen's Bethel also made its way into history through Herman Melville's novel, *Moby Dick*. Melville went to services held at Seamen's Bethel before he sailed out of Fairhaven in 1841 on the whaler *Acushnet*. He did not leave many direct accounts of this 18 month voyage, but it is probable that some of the events described in *Moby Dick* portray some aspects of his time at sea. The cenotaphs of Seamen's Bethel, specifically, are mentioned in his novel.

Each year the New Bedford Whaling Museum hosts a *Moby Dick* Marathon. This coming January it will be a weekend event which will include a pre-marathon dinner, a *Moby Dick* themed lecture, and a quiz to test the knowledge of the Melville Society Cultural Project, followed by the reading of *Moby Dick*. Certain chapters of the novel will be read in the Seamen's Bethel.

Seamen's Bethel is located at 15 Johnny Cake Hill in New Bedford, across from the Whaling Museum, and it is a part of the New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park. It is open to the public every day from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., Memorial Day through Columbus Day. This chapel is a small part of New Bedford's whaling history and a reminder of the men who were lost at sea.

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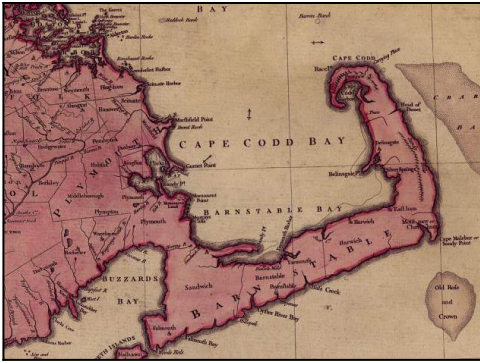
# Massachusetts's Blue Laws garner a laugh today, but were serious "crimes" to settlers

*Are you a witch? There are still laws on the books that will get you banned! (Joseph E. Baker, 1892)*

Blue Laws have reached an almost urban legend level status – sometimes making it difficult to separate fact from fiction. It's not uncommon to hear a few mentioned during a social. In fact, they make great ice breakers and spur on conversation. Those laws that the early settlers passed will cause our friends and family chuckle, but there was a time when they were no laughing matter. The vast majority of these laws were created by puritans who wanted to enforce a religious standard – an enforced morality if you will.

Many, if not most, revolved around Sunday – the Sabbath day. As most Americans know, theist or otherwise, Sunday is the day of rest. No activities were to be undertaken on Sunday. The early European settlers took this day quite seriously, and it wasn't uncommon for a nosy neighbor to report another neighbor for pulling a mule out of the mud. A penalty would follow, often as minor as a fine, but perhaps as severe as a flogging or some pillory time.

Not very neighborly.



*1755 Map of "The Most Inhabited Part of New England," published in 1755 by Thomas Jefferys. (Library of Congress)*

Generally, most were more "legitimate" violations such as not showing up for church, gambling, or swearing. Public drunkenness was severely frowned upon. Filling up on some grog and passing out under a tree's shade could easily lead to missing Sunday service. It could of course, also lead to a row or two. Since being drunk would have a marked effect on attendance, one of the first Blue Laws to be enacted was the prohibition of alcohol sales on Sunday period.

As some of you may recall, this archaic law persisted until 2004 – one could not purchase alcohol off-premises. You could go to a bar, but you weren't grabbing a six-pack and burgers to watch the game. To this day you cannot purchase alcohol on Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day, and Memorial Day. A leftover of the puritanical legislation.

So why do we still have these laws? Why haven't they been struck from the "books"? If it is technically breaking the law to violate one of these, will a "bad" cop actually cite or arrest me? Where did the term come from?

The term Blue Law was first mentioned in 1781, some decades after they existed. Reverend Samuel Peters' used the term in his book "General History of Connecticut," but we don't



actually know if he coined the term or used an existent one. In this book he describes these as “Blue Laws; i.e. bloody Laws; for they were all sanctified with whipping, cutting off the ears, burning the tongue, and death.” Serious stuff, indeed.

The urban legend, an incorrect one, is that these laws were published on blue paper, hence the moniker. There is no evidence or historical mention of this anywhere. It’s simply untrue. No one actually knows with certainty, but what we do know is that “Blue” is a term used to often to symbolize something lofty, aristocratic, or puritanical. So “blue” in this sense, would refer to the “high” morality of the laws.



*This is where you'll end up if you dare to have your gorilla ride in the backseat. Front seat is totally OK.*

For example, Merriam-Webster defines a “**bluenose**” as “a person who advocates a rigorous moral code.” Google defines it as “a priggish or puritanical person.” Of course, we are all familiar with the term “**blueblood**” and its reference to nobility. The word **abluent** means “Washing away; carrying off impurities” according to thefreedictionary.com and “**true blue**”

means *“extremely loyal or orthodox.”*

I think you get the point. Dull etymology lesson over.

Now, that we've cleared the dull, let's have some fun discussing some of these laws.

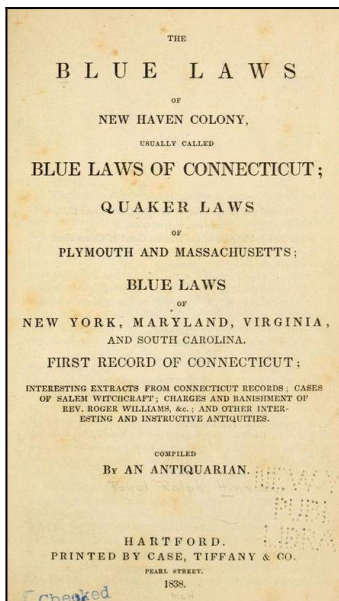
Does your husband snore? If he does it with the windows open, he's busted. Pillory for him. Have a friend in the hospital that you were going to bring a nip to? According to Chapter 270: Section 5. that will get you "...a fine of not more than fifty dollars or by imprisonment for not more than two months." He/she is going to have to tough it out and hope the \$40 per Ibuprofen does the job.

Thinking of adding some Gran Marnier to some chocolate for a dinner party? You're going to do some time, you crook. Massachusetts forbids chocolate to contain any more than 1% alcohol. Wasn't it Patrick Henry that said "Give me spiked chocolate or give me death!"?

Remember that whole Salem Witch Trial blight on Massachusetts's history? We learned our lesson after twenty people, most "witches" were murdered, right? Nope. If you are a "witch" or even a Quaker for that matter, you will be promptly banned. I guess, that's a heck of a lot better than being burned at the stake, crushed with stones, or drowned. What a moral way to punish someone for their immorality!

There are some interesting laws about kids. Did you know that kids get some special privileges under Blue Law legislation? If you are at a baseball or football game and an official or player really gets your goat, you will be cited or flogged for swearing at him. No, seriously. Just tell your son or daughter (must be under the age of 16) the swears and have them yell it. It's totally legal. Also, a child can walk up to a police officer puffing a cigarette and there's not a darn thing he can do about it. However, when the kid runs out of cigarettes, the cop can bust him buying a new pack. The kid can smoke,

just can't buy. Go figure.



*Blue Laws weren't solely restricted to Massachusetts.*

These days it's pretty common to have a goatee, especially if you shave your head. I see a lot of goatees and I'm pretty sure none of the ...er...goatee-ees, have the special license fee that is mandatory. Imagine getting pulled over – "Driver's License, registration, proof of insurance...and special license for that goatee, please."

Are you a church-goer? If you don't carry your rifle to church, you're in it deep, pal. But, if you leave church and use that rifle to go hunting, you're in it even deeper. We're talking stockades for you, because **hunting is illegal** on Sundays in Massachusetts. When I hit the road on Sundays this hunting season, I plan on making a lot of citizen's arrests to help generate some revenue for the Commonwealth. We need some extra funding to fix these potholes.

Let's discuss some of the more risque prohibitions. Early Puritans were quite concerned about what other people did in the privacy of their bedrooms. Are you a woman who prefers to be on top? A day in the county jail should straighten you out,

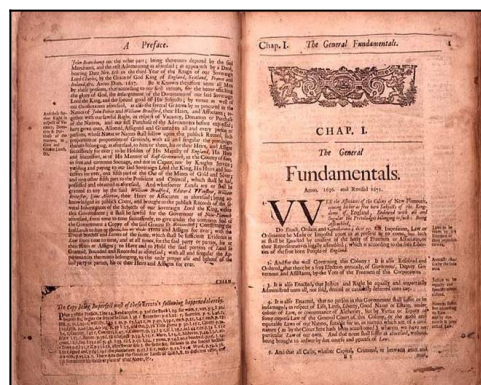
you vixen. If you cheat on your spouse, you get "...state prison for not more than three years or in jail for not more than two years or by a fine of not more than five hundred dollars." Of course, no one commits adultery in the entire state of Massachusetts since there is no record of a single adulterer in our prison system.

Divorced, yet still living in the same house for the sake of the kids perhaps? If you slip up and have any extra-curricular activity it's considered adultery by the state. Off to the state prison for you two. Poor kids.

Until 1974, fellatio was illegal. Surely, this was a law that everyone abided by until November 1, 1974. That's when everyone went bananas and enjoyed fellatio for the first time ever.

Aren't married? You're not having sexual intercourse, of course. We wouldn't do that Joe, because we don't want to be "punished by imprisonment for not more than three months or by a fine of not more than thirty dollars." Such pious kids you are.

Puritans were not only very concerned about your bedroom activities, but they would bring the proverbial hammer down for kissing in public. You lot are in deep trouble. You rascals.



1685 "Book of the General Laws of the Inhabitants of the

*Jurisdiction of New  
Plimouth."*

A certain Captain Kimble was so ecstatic at seeing his wife after returning from a three year whaling voyage, that he lost all control and semblance of decorum and kissed his wife. How rude. The two hours that he spent in the stocks for his "lewd and unseemly behavior." Hopefully that insured that he didn't lose control again.

Did you say "**Oh my god!**" today? Yeah, you're going to "...jail for not more than one year or by a fine of not more than three hundred dollars." Don't worry, you'll have a good time since you'll be surrounded by all your friends and family.

Not that I've ever had much of an appetite at a wake, but if you aren't like me, be careful you don't eat more than three sandwiches or you will be pilloried. If you were thinking of bringing your gorilla with you, make sure he's in the front seat. Because, having in the backseat would be illegal.

So will you be cited or arrested by a "bad" cop for violating a blue law? Very unlikely. Even if you did – this brings us to why they are not struck – they are a violation of the Separation Clause (in spite of the McGowan vs. Maryland ruling) and therefore unconstitutional. The government cannot be used to enforce religious tenets, let alone enforce the centuries old morals of a group of puritans.

Having said that, I'd imagine that these aren't struck, because like everything that involves the government it's a long, drawn out process and an expensive one to get them to empty an ashtray in a conference room let alone get anything productive done in terms of legislature. The fact, that they aren't an issue – no one is enforcing them – makes them seem irrelevant. Let's hope no police force or officer decides to go rogue!

If a miracle happens and the state decides to clean up these Blue Laws and strike them from the books, I'd like them to consider leaving one very important and serious Blue Law on the books. In fact, I'd like to see some stiffer penalties involved, even perhaps bringing back the pillory, stockade or even guillotine:

"Tomatoes cannot be used in clam chowder."

Witchcraft, in my opinion.

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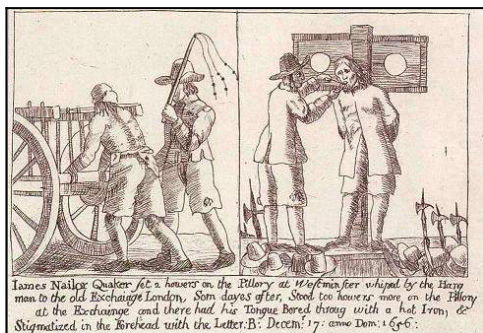
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## **Meeting Houses – One of New Bedford's First Churches, Community Centers**

Throughout the city of New Bedford, you will be able to find many churches, meeting places and houses of worship. These buildings are common enough that it is easy to pass by without taking much, if any, notice of them. Yet, churches, or meeting houses as they were sometimes called long ago, were an important part of the beginnings of New Bedford. Much of the rich cultural and historical events that have taken place in New Bedford over the years can be traced back to small groups of people who got together because of their common faith, and then put that faith into action by changing things around them for the better.

Fast forward a few hundred years to the current city of New Bedford – do we know anything of these churches? Do they still exist? Who began them and what impact did they have?

One of the very first of two churches built in New Bedford was erected by the Friends – we know them as the Quakers now. In 1699 they built their first meeting house on Russells Mills Road.



*Quaker James Nayler (1618–1660) “being the pilloried.”*

Now, Russells Mills Road is in Dartmouth, not New Bedford, but in the 1600's there was no separation between these two places. New Bedford, Fairhaven, Dartmouth, Westport, and a small part of Tiverton and Little Compton were originally purchased as one tract of land, which means, originally, the meeting house was a part of New Bedford.

While the first building is no longer standing, anyone driving along Russells Mills Road today can see where it was. The Apponegansett Meeting House marks the exact location of the first building in this area that was the official meeting house of the small group of Quakers who met there over three hundred years ago (the current building was put up in 1791).

The Quakers were a group of Christians who emigrated from England to America in the late 1680's. They, like the Pilgrims, believed that all had the right to read the Bible freely, in their own homes, and should not be controlled by the king of England. When they emigrated to America, in part to practice this freedom, they ended up heavily impacting the many areas where they settled, including New Bedford.

They did not believe in doing good works for morality's sake, rather it was their faith that compelled them to do good for others. A few of their most basic beliefs are that the Bible is truth, each person has access to God through Jesus Christ and not through a hierarchical system of clergy, Jesus' life is to be emulated and His teachings obeyed, and that people are created equally.



*Meeting Houses like this one in Westport were more than just a place of worship – they were community centers. (Spinner Publications)*

Because of the beliefs they held, they were known to treat women well, to offer work equally to any who were able, and they were highly instrumental in the abolition of slavery both in England and America. New Bedford specifically became a haven for slaves in the mid 1800's when the Underground Railroad passed through, and this is partly attributed to the Quakers' racial tolerance seen throughout the area, in the way they lived their lives, and through their outspoken opposition to slavery.

New Bedford and the surrounding areas have some incredibly inspiring land marks, such as the Apponegansett Meeting House, that serve as reminders of the good that has come from groups of people willing to make the lives of others better.



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# **Of Constables, Sheriffs and Watchmen; History of New Bedford policing force**

Today's police force is a powerful organization that has many department locations, modern technology, and government backing and funding. However, a lot of effort, logistics, and lawmaking went into developing the efficient, large force we have now. The police force we have in place today is one that we take for granted in the sense of its size, coverage, and power. The police force of yesterday was underfunded, lacked authority, and was a ragtag bunch of men.

The "feet" of today's police force stand on the shoulders of these great men who took to policing the towns and cities because they wanted a safe haven for their families to live and prosper. They may or may not have understood that a safe environment meant businessmen would find the region attractive enough to set up their ventures. That they would hire employees and draw more people. That an economy would emerge.

These were unknown "side effects" of providing safety to friends and family. Its not because they lacked foresight, but these early, industrious men were simply very practical. Their feet were on the ground. There was an immediate and present issue: brigands, bandits, and criminal minds who had ill-will.



*Left to right: William Almond, Walter Almond, Warren N. Rhodes, Daniel Deneen, James Ivey, Jeremiah Daley, Samuel Duncan McLood, Arthur Howland, Jeremiah McCarthy, William Fowler, Edward Earley, Thomas Fay, James McDonnell, Frank W. Sylvia, & Arthur E. Jones. (Spinner Publications)*

The New World represented a massive opportunity to those on the other side of the Atlantic. A place free from repression, freedom to practice your particular religious bent, and land with monumental, untapped natural resources. Alas, this very economic opportunity also attracts the ill intended. When **Old Dartmouth** in general and **Bedford village** specifically began to grow into larger populated areas, it was an organic part of the process to have some type of law enforcement.

The first historical mention of any sort of law enforcement in the New World is the New York Sheriff's Office which was founded in 1626. That's pretty darn early on in the nation's history. Regionally the first mention of a policing force, official or otherwise, is in 1630 at Boston.

In 1665, Old Dartmouth had representation at Old Colony Court, Plymouth by one of the original proprietors of the Dartmouth

land deed, John Russell – likely, but not proven, the son of Ralph Russell. This is the same family that gave Russell's Mills its name.

John Russell served in this capacity from 1665-1683, excepting the years 1666 and 1673 where another of the original proprietors, John Cooke took over. Yes, the very same John Cooke that arrived to the New World aboard the Mayflower and lived in Fairhaven near present day Oxford School. Other representatives to follow – names well-known to anyone who follows local history – were Joseph Tripp and Seth Pope.

The first law enforcement officers were sheriffs, constables and nightwatchmen – modeled after the existing English law enforcement organizations. These three groups had their specialties in providing services, security and safety to the towns and cities.

The sheriffs covered large expanses of territory to deliver legal documents, commonly serving summonses and subpoenas. These documents were generally for evictions, collecting taxes, and court appearances. Interestingly the word "sheriff" is a corruption of "shire-reeves."



*Boston police rattle from 1850. (nleomf.org)*

A shire – a term familiar to anyone who has read or watched *The Lord of the Rings* – is a small tract of land in England or Australia, somewhat equivalent to our "county." While we don't use the term in America much today, it was used early on in British America and we see its remnant in New Hampshire. A "reeve" was a senior official that could serve in a manor, district or...shire.

The constables' duties differed somewhat in that while they could make arrests, they were especially on the watch for health hazards, sanitation issues and bringing folks to court – often for religious “offenses” like cursing or working on the Sabbath. The role of constables today can differ greatly from state to state. Some have little to no law enforcement power and simply serve documents, and in other states like Mississippi or Alaska they have greater law enforcement powers.

Any town that grew in size, would develop a small policing force that consisted of mainly volunteers – a sort of local militia. These nightwatchmen were the precursor to what would become the police department. The word “police” comes from the Middle French *policer* first used some time in the 1580s and means to “watch over,” or “guard.”

In this sense, the first night watchmen did exactly that: they patrolled the streets to watch for suspicious activity, and especially for fires which were relatively common. Especially pivotal to security of the town and safety of its denizens was the night watch – those with criminal intent were most active under cover of darkness. They would alert denizens with a cry, whistle or wooden rattle and would make arrests where appropriate.

While the the watchmen were primarily a volunteer force, sheriffs were appointed by the governor, and the constables were either elected or appointed. The sheriffs and constables wouldn't necessarily receive a salary, but typically receive *per diem* pay – let's say upon successfully delivery of a document or ensuring a person's appearance at court.



*1916 Willis Street  
station West of  
Purchase Street  
(Spinner Publications)*

This lack of pay for the watchmen created a social dilemma of its own. The watchmen found themselves serving fines and arresting the poor – often people they knew. The job of keeping the city safe had evolved into arresting and fining the poor – not a task they had signed up for, and certainly not one worth doing for no cost.

As Bedford and Oxford villages burgeoned because of the whaling industry, a large economy grew to support it. As a seaport many visiting sailors from afar would arrive daily. Being a police officer in these conditions became increasingly more dangerous and the workload grew. Combine all these factors with no pay, and it was a no-brainer that something had to give.

Precedence was made in 1794 at Philadelphia where a warden – an early version of the police chief – was appointed to hire the watchmen. Both would be paid by the city with taxes – a concept that many towns and cities would subsequently incorporate.

This funding not only made the burden of finding staff easier, but meant that in some cases, the watchmen could utilize an official building as opposed to using a library, school, bank or even grocery store.

The same year that Philadelphia began to fund a policing force, New Bedford did the same under the very generally monikered "Bedford Association." Their primary role was to be on the watch for fires, and protect businesses. It wouldn't be until 1824 that the Bedford Association would be called by the equally unimaginative "Nightwatch."

As whaling and other industries boomed, the increase in economic well-being meant there was an increase in law enforcement funding...and an increase in the darker activities. In 1847, New Bedford was incorporated and constabulary positions and duties were added to the "Nightwatch."



*New Bedford Police  
Department Ambulance.  
(Spinner Publications)*

Finally, in 1876 the New Bedford Police Department would be officially instituted with a staff of 26 regular officers, and 83 part-timers. Its first police chief was Henry Hathaway. Today there are four departments operating in the city.

While we still have sheriffs and constables today, the Police Officer has taken on far more duties and responsibilities than its earlier incarnation, the watchmen. They have more power, are better armed, more mobile and responsive, and no more wooden rattle!

New Bedford has always had a dark history and still does today. Without the "Watchmen" the city of New Bedford would probably be a lawless, chaotic city and a far more dangerous

place than it is. While many citizens have a distrust of the Police Department due to the actions of a small minority of bad police officers, all can agree that they would be grateful for their presence in a time of need.

The **New Bedford Police Department** is full of officers that put their lives on the line on a daily basis for the safety and well-being of its citizens. It's a service that many take for granted, but a visit to many other countries on earth would lend an alternative perspective. Many nations have no police presence, entire police forces owned by criminal organizations, or a police force that is powerless or uninterested in protecting the people and businesses. Today's force provides New Bedford with a large measure of safety, is incredibly responsive, and play an integral role in a first world society. In fact, without their presence we could not have a first world society and businesses would not feel New Bedford is an atmosphere that they could prosper in.

So, while the duties, uniforms and technology have changed, the role of New Bedford's "Watchmen" has not. They provide safety for their all people, allow businesses to prosper in a safe environment, and are there when you need them.



*Police Office & Watch House on Second Street*

*in 1856. (Spinner Publications)*

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All of the photographs, except where noted, are due to the generosity of [Spinner Publications](#).

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# The history and tradition of New Bedford's Portuguese Feast

*In the 1910s the Feast of the Blessed Sacrament was a parade followed by a few hours of festivities on a Sunday (Museum of Madeiran Heritage)*

## **Portuguese religious tradition, culture and community meet at the Feast of the Blessed Sacrament**

The Feast of the Blessed Sacrament is such a city icon that it's referred to as **the** Portuguese Feast. There are the grand buildings of Russell Warren, the Sea Captain homes, and the Whaleman Statue. There was the Paul Revere Sign. There's the Fishing Industry and the Waterfront. All these things are conjured when someone says New Bedford. The Portuguese Feast is in league with them.

Everyone knows New Bedford is also known as the Whaling City. Some know that it was once known as the "City of Light." It could easily be dubbed as the City of Portuguese. Well, that's



unimaginative. Perhaps, the City of Malassadas? Cacoila City? Lil' Lisbon?

OK, I won't quit my day job. You get the picture.

New Bedford is synonymous with Portuguese Culture. No one can imagine New Bedford without it. Who wants to go the rest of their lives without cacoila, linguica, malassadas, pops, quezadas, or boiled dinner? I don't want to live in a city where there are no Botelhos, Perreiras, Costas or Silvas in the phone book. No Fado, no Feast of the Blessed Sacrament, no Portuguese Clubs, no avos?

NO THANKS. Sorry, I mean "NOA OBRIGADO."



*Feast of the Blessed  
Sacrament founders  
Manuel Santana Duarte,  
Manuel Santinho,  
Manuel Abreu Coutinho,  
and Manuel Agrella  
(Museum of Madeiran  
Heritage)*

While there isn't a soul that hasn't been to the *Festa* at least once, there are a lot of people who don't know *why* there is a Feast of the Blessed Sacrament. Who's bright idea was it?

Who was the genius that merged the best of America and Portugal in one of the city's favorite events that draws up to 300,000 people? Let's give thanks to the group that thought to put beer, wine, meat on a skewer, and live music right here in New Bedford.

Can we do a short trip through the history of the Feast without being boring? You bet we can. Should we? We sure should! It's not just the history of the Portuguese Community. It's the history of America. It's your history. It's *our* history.

A sizable portion of Portuguese – who have been known for centuries as some of the **world's best navigators, pilots, and shipbuilders** – came directly to New Bedford attracted by the burgeoning whaling industry. What some do not know is that many did not originally have intentions of living in New Bedford.

A whaling voyage could take up to four years and it wasn't uncommon for a ship to set sail with a very light crew. Traveling to ports all over the world for supplies, repairs or respite, the captains of these vessels would try to grow his crew size. Because of the history, culture and seagoing experience of the Portuguese and the position of the Portuguese owned islands in the Atlantic, stops were frequently made in the Azores and Madeira.

Many Azoreans, Cape Verdeans, Madeirans and mainland Portuguese would seize the opportunity, but were unaware that these voyages were not only many years long, but that the ships were heading back to New Bedford and not delivering everyone back to their homes. Many Portuguese were brought back to New Bedford and were expected to find and make their own ways back home.

Many of them arrived and immediately saw the economic opportunities that New Bedford offered. Not only could the

seafaring peoples make a living off the sea, but they could do so without long voyages on whaling vessels. The whaling industry needed logistics support, i.e. coopers, carpenters, smiths, laborers, etc. In addition, there were unrelated jobs available in textiles warehouses, labor, and agriculture. Enough to tempt many to stay in New Bedford and with the better financial conditions and modernity of the New World, they could send for their families to relocate.

So now that we know why the Portuguese Community established roots in New Bedford, why the *feira*? Well, just because the relocated Portuguese decided to stay in America, didn't mean that they didn't still deeply love their country. At this point in world history there were greater opportunities for a better quality of life here in America and specifically New Bedford. Their passion for their country and culture didn't wane.

Each group of Portuguese celebrate their heritage. For example, the *Dia de Portugal* is a celebration of all Portuguese communities and the Feast of *Senhor de Pedra* is specifically the Azorean community's celebration. The Feast of the Blessed Sacrament is a Madeiran celebration rooted in religious tradition – Roman Catholicism in this case. The “Blessed Sacrament” being the bread and wine that forms the Eucharist or Holy Communion.



*The Feast is founded on Roman Catholic tradition of Madeiran immigrants. (Museum of*

## Madeiran Heritage)

Madeirans Manuel Santana Duarte, Manuel Santinho, Manuel Abreu Coutinho, and Manuel Agrella, founded the Feast in 1915 because they deeply missed the little *festas* they enjoyed in the small villages they were from back home. From these four founders the feast grew to the point that there are hundreds of *feisteros* who help organize the event – all who can trace their lineage back to Madeira.

While the Feast has greatly evolved since its first celebration in 1915, it has retained its name demonstrating the importance of the religious roots of the community and the first organizers. The first *festas* were just a small gathering of folks around *barracas* or stands, for a few hours on a Sunday afternoon. Imagine that?!

It's a genuine tribute to the warm Portuguese culture that they happily welcome everyone to celebrate in their festivities – Catholic or not! It is this tolerance, and warmth that has contributed to the *feira* growing into the massive celebration that it is today. While many people simply go to the Feast, because they understand that it is a place to meet old and new friends, eat mouth watering food, and enjoy a few libations, we should at least acknowledge that the feast is one based in religious tradition, culture and history of the Portuguese Community – without whom we would not have the feast.

If you are interested in learning more about the Portuguese or Madeiran culture and/or history of the Feast of the Blessed Sacrament, you will be pleased to know that on the feast grounds is the [Museum of Madeiran Heritage](#), jam packed with vintage photos, a timeline of the feast and those involved, and many interesting objects of historical importance.

Whether you are of Portuguese descent who wants to learn more about your heritage or someone who has no Portuguese ancestry

and just want to learn more about the feast, the role of the Portuguese community, or the city's history you will thoroughly enjoy exploring the museum. During the feast, the museum will be having a small *feira* of its own: you can enjoy some musical entertainment – yes, Fado – wine, coffee, espresso and some Portuguese pastries at the Museum Cafe until 10:00pm each night. Admission is free. Want to know more about schedule of activities and entertainment? Stay tuned.

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*Are you of Portuguese descent and can trace your family back many generations in greater New Bedford? There are missing portraits of five Feast of the Blessed Sacrament presidents. The Museum of Madeiran History needs your help in filling in the missing presidents:*

1. **Joao De Souza** (Jardin) – Served in 1917. Born at Santa Cruz, Madeira. Lived at 929 Victoria Street.
2. **Jose Antonio** – Served in 1920. Born at Santa Cruz, Madeira. Lived at 276 Davis Street.
3. **Guilhermo Silveira** (Gonsalves) – Served in 1930. Born at Santa Cruz, Madeira. From Oakland, California.
4. **Joao Pedro Vieira** – Served in 1944. Lived at 206 North Street.
5. **John Teixeira** – Served in 1946. Lived at 32 Alpine Avenue, Fairhaven.

*If these names are familiar to you and you have images or know how to find images of these individuals, please contact us at [nbgarts@gmail.com](mailto:nbgarts@gmail.com).*

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Website: [portugueseifeast.com/](http://portugueseifeast.com/)

Facebook Page: [facebook.com/FeastOfTheBlessedSacrament](https://facebook.com/FeastOfTheBlessedSacrament)

