

A state-of-the-art link for past and present

Soon after a 46-foot sperm whale beached itself on Nantucket Island in January 1998, residents volunteered to help strip the whale of its blubber, in hopes that the skeleton could be cleaned and used in the Nantucket Historical Association's Whaling Museum. It didn't take long, though, before the blubber got the best of the volunteers' power saws, clogging the moving parts.

The solution to finishing the job came from the museum itself: 150-year-old whale-cutting tools.

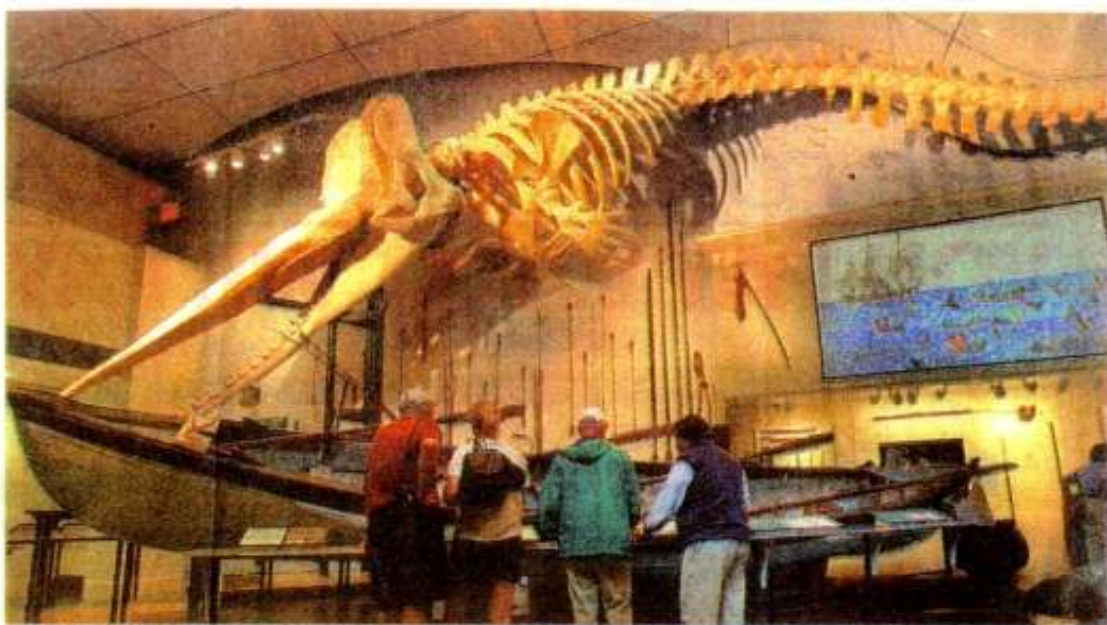
Today, that whale skeleton is suspended in a dramatic pose next to a whale boat at the recently reopened Whaling Museum. A 43-foot whale skeleton that the museum had on display for over three decades was given to the local high school.

The renovated museum, which opened in June after having been closed for 20 months, features climate-controlled exhibit space, theatrical lighting, and a new observation deck overlooking the historic town of Nantucket and its harbor. The project cost about \$12.8 million.

Architects faced a quandary in creating a state-of-the-art, 21st-century museum whose exterior would fit seamlessly into Nantucket's 18th-century architecture. Museum officials constructed a new building to connect two preexisting structures, the Peter Foulger Museum, which was built in the 1970s, and a candle works that was built in 1847, said Frank D. Milligan, executive director of the Nantucket Historical Association.

The combined structures now total about 28,500 square feet, almost double the space of the separate structures.

"The response to the new building has been astounding," he said. "We're getting unbelievable



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Renovated Nantucket landmark offers modern amenities inside but honors island's traditions on outside



NANTUCKET HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION



feedback."

Aside from the sperm whale skeleton, which is posed next to a whaling rig, the museum features a two-story beam press in the candle factory. When the factory was operational in the mid-1800s, the beam press was used to squeeze spermaceti out of whales,

which could then be used to make candles and lamp oil. Museum officials say the candle factory is the only one in the world that still has its beam press in place.

Architect Martin Sokoloff was hired for the project, which was made even more delicate by the strict requirements imposed on

any new structure by the Nantucket Historic District Commission.

To stay true to Nantucket's architecture, the museum borrowed elements and designs from other buildings on the island to make its own building look authentic. Chimneys placed on top of heating and air conditioning vents

Whaling Museum

13 Broad St., Nantucket (left, after \$12.8 million renovation; and above, before work began)

Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday, Saturday
10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Thursday
10 a.m. to 9 p.m.

Sunday
Noon to 5 p.m.

Ticket prices
\$15 for adults
\$8 for ages 6-17



AP PHOTOS (LEFT, ABOVE)

A 46-foot sperm whale's skeleton and the portrait gallery, where the Historical Association's Cecil Barron Jensen was guiding visitors, are main attractions at the museum.



The interior of the old candle works, with its beam press.

and the front entrance were inspired by other historic buildings, said Bruce A. Percelay, a Boston real estate developer who was chairman of the building committee. Other elements on the rooftop observation deck were inspired by the Jared Coffin House, he said.

"This is probably the most

prominent new building that's been built on the island in the last 100 years," Percelay said. "Change on Nantucket is not something that's received with open arms."

Sokoloff agreed, adding that exterior elements "received particular scrutiny." Although the exterior would fit right in with an 18th-century whaling port, the interior contains all the features of a modern museum. Increased and climate-controlled exhibit space will allow the museum to display up to 20 percent of its collection at any one time, up from just 10 percent before renovations.

The museum is also now handicapped accessible, which was a feat considering the modifications required to connect the buildings and their age, Milligan said.

"Things that are built on Nantucket are built for generations," Percelay said. "It was a huge team effort, but we accomplished our goal."

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