



Michael Taylor

One of the first thing you will notice when you enter the City of New Bedford is a building with a panorama whale scene. Certainly appropriate, since after all we are the Whaling City. But why and how did it ever get there?

This is the story and my small contribution to the adopted place I have come to love and admire.

In 1977 I was Master of a bulk carrier class vessel which had been chartered by a large American shipping company to carry mobile housing for expat project construction around the world. They needed a Manager to arrange vessel contacts abroad and to supervise loading and discharge operations for their charter vessels, wherever required.

Unable to find suitable in-house personnel I was requested to leave my ship and be brought over to the United States to fill the post.....I was never to return back to my home country, England.

As time passed my career in shipping and international business landed me here in New Bedford working at Maritime International, a cold storage and port operation located on MacArthur Drive on the Cities waterfront. First in the capacity of Manager and then Vice President the job required making frequent trips abroad to far away places as Australia, South Africa, South America, Europe and countrywide here in North America.

Whilst soliciting fresh and frozen cargoes for our New Bedford Terminal I always took the liberty to explore the towns and Cities which I visited and in many of those places I came across large walls painted with whales, dolphins and many sea creatures. Why did my City, the one time Whaling Capital of the world, lacked such imposing art?

When entering Boston, you are greeted Orcas, Gloucester with whales, Portland more whales, Sydney Australia with a humpback and the list goes on and on but nothing here in New Bedford. Traveling and seeing at least so many of these murals was getting just to much for me and I needed to find out why?

Mayor Rosemary Tierney had appointed me to be the first New Bedford representative on Governor Cellucci's Seaport Council with the intent of improving our ports maritime facilities, principally with dredging of the harbour to accommodate larger cargo vessels. Now I had some political insider clout and an opportunity to use some influence politically. First it became important to learn about the artist Robert Wyland and how all these other places had obtained their painted walls. Who paid for them and how did they all obtain the required wall space? It soon became very obvious that New Bedford had not even tried to obtain one of these large art works.

Becoming Vice President of Maritime International I had more freedom with our owner, David Wechsler and his board to put forward the idea that our West Terminal freezer building, with its white sides and prominent location, facing route 18, might be a great piece of publicity not only for New Bedford but for our warehouse operation.

Mayor Tierney was replaced by Mayor Kalisz in 1998 and he, along with the Tourist Office, proved to be a great supporter of the idea and soon gave his permission to use the City name in any discussions that might be needed with the artist Wyland. It had no doubts helped that the Mayor himself had broken ground on the very building (using a harpoon and standing in the bow of a make shift boat in front of a sperm whale I had painted on the ground) that I had in mind for the Wyland painting project! Another great supporter, Senator Mark Montigny, would also turn out to be an influential help in the solicitation of local assistance.



A lot of time in the late '90s was spent on the West Coast. From Seattle we brought frozen fish blocks into New Bedford by rail and where his orcas are to be seen. More orcas in Vancouver and in San Francisco with gray whales provided finally a chance to visit a Wyland gallery and put forward my proposal.

After first explaining to staff at the Pier 39 San Francisco location my idea for a mural on one of our freezer buildings, I was given the chance to speak with the artist. He also questioned why the whaling city had not been on the list. Staff explained that in order to be considered that we first needed a prominent location with the owners permission.....that was easy! Secondly they would need the City cooperation and use of their department equipment....I presumed I had that from the Mayor and said so. Lastly a supply of suitable free paint..... this part I would have to work on!

Back in New Bedford one item was bothering me. All the murals I had seen were on flat surfaces but our West Terminal is a corrugated metal structure. This over a period of time would become questionable item. Luckily we had some samples of the construction materiel that was used and so forwarded them to California to be checked as to their suitability.

In 2003 I decided that I would retire and no final decision had to come from Wyland. My assistant at the Terminal, Roseanne, was now to be in charge. It was not until 2005 that a final date was agreed and along with the Mayors team and volunteers with paint locally supplied that work started. Almost seven years since since the original concept.

Painting all four walls, 700 feet, of the building took about a week and on October 20th, 2003 Robert Wyland attended by the Mayor, Senator Montigny and other Council and City Members as well as our Terminal owners and staff, my dream project was declared open.

Sadly, for this part of my story, I was out of the country at the time and was unable to attend but at least got a mention.

It has now been 15 years that those whales have greeted people and it is with some pride that every time I pass I can say to myself that those are in part my whales!