

The Spot on Nantucket Where Everyone Takes a Selfie

Around the corner from Main Street is one of downtown Nantucket's most popular spots to be photographed: the Compass Rose Mural.

NANTUCKET, MA, USA, July 10, 2024 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Along the Washington Street side of the building at 16 Main (the current location of the island's Ralph Lauren store) is one of downtown Nantucket's most popular spots to be photographed: the Compass Rose Mural.

Many visitors stop to read the various locations and remark on their distances from [Nantucket Island](#). They wonder how the cities and islands were chosen for the mural. And a few astute observers smile when they find the misspelling.



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The compass rose has appeared on nautical charts and maps since the 1300s. The term "rose" comes from the figure's compass points resembling the petals of the flower. Originally, it was used to indicate the directions of the winds (then known as a "wind rose"). It evolved to show cardinal directions: the main compass points of north, south, east, and west. Beyond its practical applications, the compass rose has taken on symbolic meanings in various cultures. It represents guidance, exploration, and the spirit of adventure. It's often used decoratively in art, jewelry, apparel, and tattoos.

Nantucket's Compass Rose was designed by photographer and entrepreneur H. Marshall Gardiner, who, in the 1930s, commissioned Walter Ayers (which explains the intentional misspelling) to paint the mural on the side of his gift shop named Gardiner's Corner.

H. Marshall Gardiner arrived on Nantucket Island in 1910. He is widely known for his depictions

of our community, the island's natural beauty, and life on Nantucket and for his use of the gelatin dry plate method of photography, quite modern for his time. His hand-colored postcards and photographs are widely collected: one of his most recognized image is of the Rainbow Fleet rounding Brant Point. Gardiner first opened his photography and gift business on Federal Street and later moved it to 16 Main Street.

He designed the mural in 1936, based on the compass rose used by mariners and navigators, and he included on it destinations of personal significance, such as Mackinac Island, Bermuda, and Daytona Beach. According to some reports, other locations on the mural were inspired by chats Gardiner had with George Grant about his voyages in the Pacific. Grant's mother, Nancy, was among the few Nantucket women who accompanied their husbands on whaling trips, and George was born in a port in the Pacific. He worked on Nantucket whaleships from a young age, and when he returned to our island, George Grant went on to become one of the first curators at the Nantucket Whaling Museum.

The compass rose portion of the mural originally, and now again, commemorates Gardiner's shop. From the late 1960s through 2003—the years that Nantucket Looms occupied 16 Main Street—a wooden compass rose sign commemorating the Looms was placed in the center, over Gardiner's Corner. That sign still hangs in the current location of The Looms, at 51 Main Street.

In the fall of 2006, Ralph Lauren (the shop currently at 16 Main Street) partnered with the Nantucket [Historical](#) Association to restore the mural. And in 2007, the shop introduced a line of "wearable souvenirs" in honor of the beloved landmark: Ralph Lauren donates the proceeds of these sales to the Nantucket Historical Association.

The Nantucket Compass Rose Mural is again in need of a touch-up, and representatives tell us they are working to accomplish that.

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Insider's Guide to Nantucket

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