This book originated in a visit Davis and Gallman made to the Manuscript Room of Baker Library at the Harvard Graduate School of Business. Both were then, as they are now, research associates of the National Bureau of Economic Research and members of the NBER Development of the American Economy group. They had an idea for a line of research to be conducted under the aegis of DAE, a line of research on technical change and productivity improvement in the nineteenth-century United States. They planned to take it up in a year or two, once they had met other commitments, and they went to Baker Library on a scouting expedition, to see what the available data were like on two or three industries in which they had an interest—since to carry out their plan would take many data of a wide variety on each subject industry. Neither of them had any idea of doing a study of whaling.

They pursued a general search and Davis took abundant notes on one of the industries they were considering. Some time late in the first day, or early in the second, they laid hands on Joseph Dias's manuscript on whaling (see chapter 3), which contained many of the data they thought they would need for a good productivity study. Could the gaps be filled in? Probably, they thought, so they decided to do a brief study of whaling—a kind of pilot project, something to be finished in a relatively short time, before they began their major work. Something roughly on the lines of chapter 8 in this book is what they had in mind. The whales, however, turned out to be a group of tar babies. It was impossible to let them go. The plan of a paper exclusively devoted to technology and productivity expanded into a short monograph, and then into a very long book on the economic history of American whaling.

Along the way the group of investigators grew. First Teresa Hutchins, then a graduate student at the University of North Carolina, joined the group, participated in turning the Dias data into an automated data set, wrote a dissertation on whaling, and took part with Davis and Gallman in writing a number of
papers. Eventually, however, she was drawn away to other projects and opportunities.

By then a fourth participant, Karin Gleiter, research associate at the Carolina Population Center, had joined the group. Among other responsibilities, she took over the data set, located many new sources, and produced a much more extensive and richer empirical basis for the project than it had formerly had. Her odyssey among the data is described in chapter 3.

During the research for and writing of this book we have accumulated many debts. The NBER provided seed money, on the basis of which we prepared a grant request to the National Science Foundation. The request was successful, and the NSF became the principal source of funding. We are deeply grateful. Assistance also came from the Division of Humanities and Social Sciences of the California Institute of Technology and from the Kenan Foundation.

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Versions of several chapters were given at meetings at Washington University of St. Louis, the University of Illinois, the University of Chicago, the University of Michigan, Brown University, Yale University, the University of Rochester, the Triangle Workshop in Economic History, the International Economic History Pre-conference at Bellagio and the Conference at Berne, the International Cliometrics Meeting at Santander, and the International Whaling Symposium at Sandefjord. At each meeting we received helpful suggestions, for which we are grateful. David Galenson read chapter 8 with his usual care;
Stan Engerman and Claudia Goldin read the whole manuscript and offered insightful comments; the manuscript reviewers for the University of Chicago Press provided us with most helpful suggestions.

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