



COUNCIL ON AMERICA'S MILITARY PAST - U.S.A.

PRESERVING, INTERPRETING AND SHARING OUR MILITARY HERITAGE

presents

The Persistent Pandemic Preservationist April 2021

Editor's Note:

Welcome! This is Number 4, Volume II of a monthly newsletter featuring historic sites across the country responding to the challenges of the COVID-19 Pandemic. The intent is to stay in touch with old and new members, and to share information that is interesting and useful, in the hope that we will create a community of practice among those preserving the nation's military past. Each issue will focus on one or more sites. The original Persistent Preservationist was an excellent newsletter produced by esteemed CAMP member Col. Hal Youmans, USA (Ret).

This issue features the Maritime Museum of San Diego. I am happy to be able to present a story that is a little different in that this museum's artifacts float and require as much maintenance as any ship — maybe more so because many of the ships are made of wood.

Special thanks to Museum VP Susan Sirota and Marketing Director Theresa Smullen, who were kind enough to answer my questions and supplement the information I found on the web.

Stay safe, everyone! — Nick Reynolds, Editor

Sail Ho!

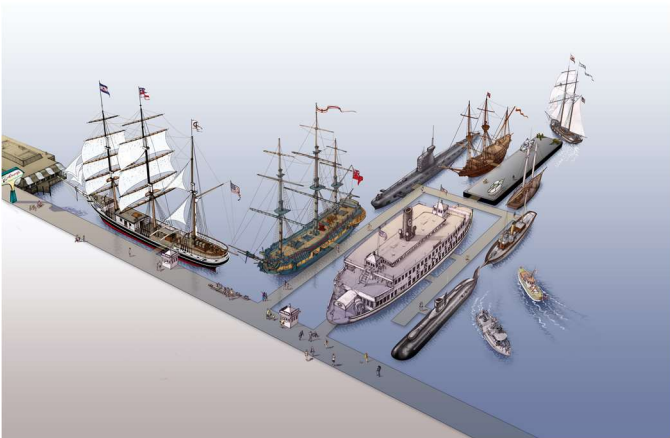
The non-profit Maritime Museum of San Diego (MMSD) has earned the pride of place that it has occupied in this port city since 1948. Adjacent to the airport, a few blocks from another major attraction, the aircraft carrier USS Midway, it features one of the world's finest collections of historic warships, sailing vessels, and unusual watercraft that attract individual visitors and event planners alike. MMSD has been tested by the pandemic, but thanks to government support, cutbacks, and volunteers, it will survive.

A virtual visit to sdmaritime.org is almost as exciting as a real visit. Among the displays are a recreated 24-gun Royal Navy frigate (one of the stars of the film *Master and Commander*); a Viet Nam era Swift boat; an American and a Soviet submarine. Alongside the craft are wonderful civilian vessels like the *Star of India*, the world's oldest active sailing ship dating to 1863, the 1898 steam ferry *Berkeley*, and even a Spanish galleon. The museum does not simply display these vessels but restores and operates them. This entails maintenance imperatives that are more pressing than those of museums on land. It is not possible to simply lock and leave ships in the water; they demand more attention than the average building.

Before the pandemic, the museum had a staff of 83 full-time employees, and thanks mostly to regular entrance fees and revenue from events, was operating in the black. Since the pandemic struck, it has closed and reopened according to government guidelines, and had to lay off about 80% of the workforce. However, the museum has been able to shift the burden of operations to dedicated and skilled volunteers who turned to maintenance and restoration work. MMSD is currently open on a limited basis that allows visitors to take a one-way outdoor walking tour through history, strolling upper decks and going from ship to ship. They are even able to enjoy a historic bay cruise. Museum President Raymond Ashley, who is both a history PhD and a Spanish knight, commented that it was a carefully calibrated reopening, weekends

only at first, and now Monday through Sunday, “providing visitors and locals with more times and opportunities for a healthy break, and safe tour experience ashore and on the Bay.”

A strict regimen of precautions is in place: temperature checks and wellness screenings for visitors and workers alike; a universal mask requirement; occupancy limits; and disinfecting surfaces between visitors. Weekend gates are now approaching pre-pandemic levels, but weekday attendance remains low. Museum Vice President Susan Sirota estimates that it may be two years before the museum fully recovers.



Overview of Museum (Courtesy MMSD); Star of India, San Salvador, California in line (Mark Albertazzi photo).

A fun fact about the museum is that President Ashley’s knighthood is for directing the construction of a replica of the galleon San Salvador, the vessel that arrived at San Diego in 1542. The museum based the construction on painstaking research in the fields of early modern Spanish and Portuguese maritime history, as well as maritime archeology. Experts scoured volumes of historical narratives, examined all the available images of early-sixteenth-century sailing vessels, and surveyed the remains of contemporary shipwrecks. To create the vision, the museum engaged professional boat builders as well as the scores of regular volunteers.

CAMP is a non-profit, 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization whose members are interested in the identification, restoration, preservation, and memorialization of old military installations as well as their history and traditions. All persons sharing these interests are invited to join. CAMP publishes an academic journal (The Journal of America’s Military Past) and a newsletter on recent developments in historic preservation (Headquarters Heliogram), and holds an annual conference. Find out more at: www.campjamp.org.