

Mystic Seaport: The Museum of America and the Sea

Overview and History

Mission: Mystic Seaport is a museum that strives to inspire an enduring connection to the American maritime experience.

- Many similarities with Britannia including that the site was developed around a former shipyards; there was never an actual “seaport” on the site
- 19 Acre site receives over 400,000 visitors annually; mystic is the largest tourist destination in CN
- 22,000 members, 140 full-time, over 100 part –time staff and 1,000 volunteers
- Society incorporated in 1929 by 3 individuals with a passion for preserving maritime heritage – a lawyer, a doctor and a local silk manufacturer
- They began recruiting members and collecting artifacts and the site opened to the public in 1934
- It grew over time with the various buildings brought in (or recreated) from throughout new England; designed to be a typically 19th century New England seafaring village

Operating Model

- Operated by a non-profit society and registered charity; received project based grants from time to time from government and government agencies but no ongoing operational funding
- Have a national board – many members from NYC – primarily a fundraising board where members are expected to contribute \$25,000 minimum annually to the organization
- Operating budget is about \$20 M
- Funding is essentially 1/3 each endowment fund disbursements (\$ 42 M), 1/3 annual fundraising and 1/3 self generated revenue(admission, program fees, day moorage, photo licensing)
- Gift Shop and two restaurants that are operated by private companies under contract

Collections

- Collections Policy; Mystic Seaport acquires, preserves, and utilizes materials and items relating to American maritime history to create a broad public understanding of the relationship of America and the sea.
- In addition to the policy, they have a Five Year Collections Plan (2011-2016) – grew out of strategic plan.
- The Collection Plan actively supports the Mission and Vision by guiding the staff in acquiring, preserving and utilizing collections – dealing with collections challenges – ie: what was collected before not the same as what they may want to collect now. Four collections categories:
 - The General Collections
 - The Photography Collection

- The Library Collection
- The Watercraft Collection (largest watercraft collection in the US)

Major Content concentrations:

- Whaling
- Fisheries
- Voyages of exploration
- Maritime national expansion
- International trade
- Coastal trade
- Ports
- Inland waterways
- Maritime communities
- Native peoples and the sea
- Yachting and boating
- Maritime art (including contemporary, decorative and folk art).
- Music of the sea
- Marine folklore
- Popular culture
- Shipbuilding
- Boatbuilding
- Naval architecture
- Navigation
- Marine salvage
- Naval history primarily through the 19th century
- The people involved in all the above activities
- Nineteenth-century social life and customs where they pertain to interpretation and activities in the Museum village.
- Local history (CT, RI, MA)

Current collections priorities are:

- Accept only the best examples into our collecting areas to maintain integrity and maximize space utilization. Provenance of materials shall be an important consideration.
- Strategically borrow pieces, rather than purchase, for exhibit and research, when appropriate, to safeguard scarce financial resources
- Increase access to, and understanding of, the collections through the Internet, digital and print publication as well as film and television

Exhibits

The Shipyard:

- Working Shipyard – 17 full-time shipwrights actively restoring their own fleet of vessels

- Have also built reproductions (most famous is the Amastad)

Historic Vessels

- Largest collection of historic vessels in the US
- The Schooner “Australia” is an interesting use of a ship exhibited as a “relic” – the decay of the vessel can actually demonstrate how it was constructed
- Most recent significant restoration project is the Charles W. Morgan
- 1841 Whale ship ; arrived in Mystic in 1941 and declared a national historic landmark
- Restoration project took 5 years and \$1.8 M ; completed using as many traditional materials and techniques as possible
- Staff estimate that she is ¼ original and ¾ new
- The whaleship was re-launched July 21, 2013 and left Mystic Seaport May 17, 2014 to embark on her 38th Voyage to historic ports of New England.
- The nearly three-month long journey seeks to engage communities with their maritime heritage.
- When the vessel returns to Mystic Seaport in August 2014, she will resume her role as an exhibit and the flagship of the Museum.

19th Century Seafaring Village

- Life in Typical New England Seaport; rope-making factory, blacksmith shop, and other businesses, various residencies, etc.
- Some buildings moved to the site, while others are recreations
- Interested modification on the rope factory – reduced to 1/3 of its original length

Exhibit Galleries

- Variety of permanent and temporary exhibits on maritime themes including small boat collection, maritime art, masthead collection
- Temporary exhibits (current one was Neptune's Orchestra – Music and the Sea)

Children's Museum and Playground

- Integrated throughout the site

Programs

- Daily schedule of programs includes
 - Hands-on activities, demonstrations including sail rigging, sea-shanties, short dramatic plays, build a boat, make a candle, and more
- Full range of educational programs for school groups
- Water-Based
 - Tours on several historic vessels including a coal fired steamboat, sail boats, power yacht
 - Hourly rental of small rowboats and sailboats (\$10-\$15 per hour)
- Day moorage
- Special events and seasonal programs include; wooden boat show, plein air painting, sea music festival, lobster days, antique motor show, model yacht regatta, Halloween, Christmas programs

Retail and Restaurants

- Gift Shop and two restaurants that are operated by private companies under contract

Shoreline Trolley Museum and other Attractions

- Took the opportunity to visit other sites including the Shore Line Museum and USS Nautilus
- Volume of heritage sites in the area provide a draw for everyone
- Richmond as a whole is part of a wider tourism region that provides a variety of unique attractions within an hour drive
- Opportunity exists to retain, build on and package our West Coast history

Outcomes

- Site was developed into what it is over 80 years; nothing like this is built over night
- Outcomes for Britannia Shipyards and Steveston Waterfront:
 - Best practices from Mystic have been integrated into the Britannia Shipyards strategic plan including:
 - Working with other groups in program and exhibit development and delivery (Including not just the BHSS, but also recently SS Master Society, private companies like Canfisco with the Western Star, Holocaust Education Centre with travelling exhibit)
 - Restoration of Britannia Shipyard Ways to make the shipyard functional again
 - Unique mix of exhibits, programs and special events
 - Increase in Water-based programming (including this year Paddle wheeler tours from New Westminster)
 - Working with post-secondary education institutions – including using Mystic's resources to build courses and programs around