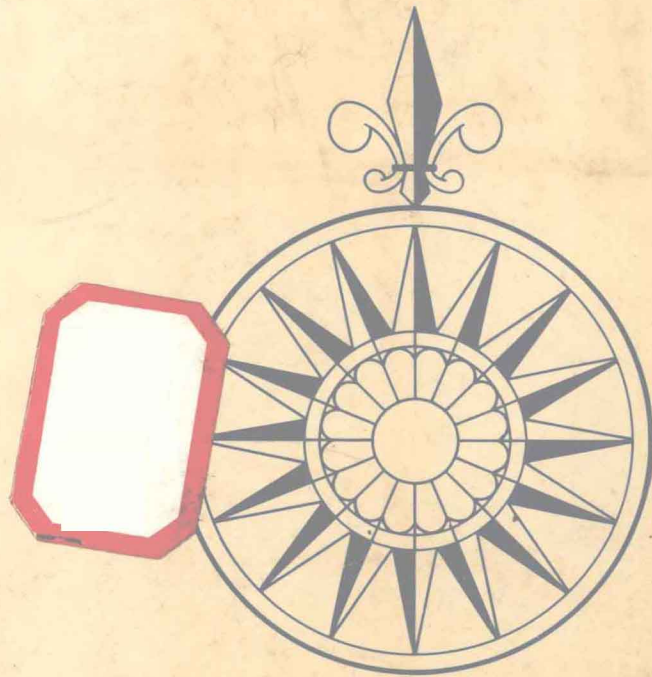


NORTH AMERICA'S  
MARITIME  
MUSEUMS:

*An Annotated Guide*



Hartley Edward Howe

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*Dedicated to the memory of  
Robert Howe Baker, 1927-1983,  
who loved the historic small craft of America  
and devoted much of his life to their discovery,  
restoration, and preservation.*

**NORTH AMERICA'S MARITIME MUSEUMS:  
An Annotated Guide**

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# INTRODUCTION

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**I**n its chapter on the materials of history, *The Harvard Guide to American History* notes that “In addition to the written sources of history, there exists a variety of nondocumentary sources of information and understanding in the form of three-dimensional survivals from the past—both man-made and natural. To view Ford’s Theater or drive through the Donner Pass, to examine a flintlock musket or the Spirit of St. Louis, to observe the tools and processes related to spinning and weaving yields a wealth of facts and impressions, available in no other way, about the events, people, and ideas of the past.”

*The Harvard Guide* might equally well have used as its examples “to stand on the quarterdeck of Old Ironsides, to savor the narrow streets and ancient buildings that survive from New York’s seaport district of sailing ship days, or to examine a whaleship and whaleboats with their gear, a sperm-oil press and the casks, of the whaling industry.” For no three-dimensional survivors of the past will yield richer and more vivid facts and impressions than those related to our maritime and naval history. Nor is their interest limited to history-writing scholars. Often strikingly beautiful, their past in many cases studded with dramatic incidents, ships and artifacts have broad appeal to everyone interested in our maritime heritage.

Today there are more such three-dimensional survivors of our maritime past preserved and accessible than ever before. As a result of dedicated enthusiasts and a striking growth in public interest in recent decades, not only maritime museums but ships of the past, both sail and steam, can be visited on every coast and many inland lakes and rivers of the United States and Canada.

This multiplication of sites has not been matched by the availability of information about them, however. The would-be visitor may have real difficulty in learning about a good many of them—or in some

cases even in becoming aware that they exist. Some of the most interesting sites are little known outside their immediate area, and not always there. To plan visits to such places requires poking through a raft of hard-to-find local and state guidebooks, writing tourist agencies, and in the end often depending on luck or guess-directions from a local gas-station attendant.

The purpose of this guide is to remedy the confusion by telling what ships and museums can be visited—and where. The guide is inclusive rather than selective, designed for the average traveler rather than the student with sharply focused historical queries. The entries are not concerned with critical analyses or collection inventories, rather they try to tell enough about each place so the traveler can decide whether he or she would like to visit it.

The guide also includes brief sections on the early maritime history of various regions, lakes, rivers, and ports. Necessarily highly compressed, these background notes give a taste of the riches of the past and will, one hopes, lead the reader to explore further. As veteran travelers know, the pleasures of visiting new places are enhanced in direct proportion to what they have learned about those places.

Early in the preparation of the guide the decision was made to broaden its coverage to include Canada. The decision proved a most happy one; not only did it permit the inclusion of a number of ships and outstanding museums, but Canada’s maritime and naval past offer a fresh perspective that often provides an interesting counterpoint to the American one.

As the preparation of the guide got fully under way it quickly became apparent that there were far more places of maritime interest in the United States and Canada than originally thought. “New” ships and museums kept turning up, from sources that included obscure press references, travelers’ reports, and suggestions made by staff members of other museums. The result is a guide with 261 entries, more than double the number envisioned at the outset. With such numbers involved, and sites scattered over a continent,

the original plan of visiting each place could not be carried out in any reasonable time span. Nevertheless, the great majority of the entries are based on the writer's personal visits, including practically all the reports on ships and museums on the ocean coasts of the two nations and a great many of those on the inland lakes. The remainder are described on the basis of their own information materials, backed up in many cases by telephone interviews with staff.

A brief summary will give an idea of the variety and interest of the entries. Ten or so tall-masted merchant sailing ships and barks and roughly about the same number of coastal and fishing schooners are on display in harbors from Lunenburg to Honolulu. Commercial steam is largely represented by lake steamers and river tugs, plus a huge transatlantic luxury liner and a Liberty ship, both berthed on the Pacific Coast. There are also a number of specialized government vessels such as survey ships, ice breakers, and lightships.

Early naval vessels are scarce: two famous frigates of the newly created United States Navy and one steam warship, all from the late 19th and early 20th centuries, are all that survive afloat. However, a whole fleet of more recent U.S. Navy ships (larger in number than many of the world's navies today) is on display in ocean harbors and inland lakes and river ports. Almost all World War II veterans, ranging from submarines to battleships, have been saved from the scrap heap and many have become war memorials. Together these ships provide a unique record of a climactic era of naval warfare.

There is another group of vessels of great interest on exhibition: some 16 modern recreations of historic ships of the 16th to the 19th centuries. If these recreations cannot claim to be three-dimensional survivors from the past, in the same sense as original vessels that have been preserved, nevertheless these reincarnations embody such scholarly research in their design and construction that they are of immense help in visualizing long-vanished ships and their roles in maritime history. Many were built in connection with anniversary celebrations of the European exploration and early settlement of North America. All are seaworthy vessels, and some have been sailed across the Atlantic like their namesakes of long ago.

There are also a number of replicas of 19th-century canal boats, boats that were important in the western expansion of America. None of the original craft survive.

Spectacular though they are, the ships are nevertheless only a part, and the smaller part, of the three-dimensional witnesses of the maritime past. Far greater in number and often equal in interest are the artifacts, the objects and relics of every kind that have been preserved in museums across the United States

and Canada. Ranging from the salvaged remains of entire small vessels to the personal effects of long-gone sea captains, from harpoons to ship models, these collections are of inestimable historical value and of broad popular appeal. The traveler will find them not only in North America's handful of large and famous maritime museums but in many smaller institutions too, where they are often more sharply focused on a port or region. Some of the most interesting exhibits are in the little-publicized maritime galleries of general museums. The maritime artifacts in the cherished collections of small local historical societies often have a special personal flavor that gives the visitor a unique sense of closeness to mariners and ships of the past. The traveler will also come upon interesting collections in such unexpected places as public libraries, art galleries, and great universities.

Some museums with important maritime exhibits are among the oldest in the country, but many were founded in recent decades and a number in just the past few years—another reflection of the burgeoning public interest in the maritime past.

Visiting a large portion of this diverse and geographically scattered group of ships and museums for the preparation of this guide was a demanding experience for the writer in terms of time and travel, but a vastly enriching experience in terms of seeing, enjoying, and learning. It is not only the ships and museums that are teachers either. As the traveler quickly finds, each coast, each port, has its own distinctive geography and history, beauty, and flavor to be discovered and savored.

At the same time, visiting a variety of diverse ports the traveler comes to recognize certain recurring events, problems, and experiences that help to provide a better understanding of our maritime past. Hinterlands were (and are) all-important to a port, it seems; the essential ingredient being not a fine deep-sheltered harbor but a hinterland that produced cargoes or customers. Witness San Pedro. Again, the fact that 19th-century ports from New Orleans to Newburyport found shipping hindered by bars of silt across the entrance channel perhaps gives a clue to a not so obvious interaction between farmland erosion and maritime enterprise. Some broad trends are hammered home. Almost everywhere the traveler finds that once flourishing shipyards saw their markets slip away when they failed to adapt, first to a shift in demand from wooden hulls to those of iron and steel, then from sail to steam. Even more universally the traveler finds that in roughly the same period after the Civil War, American ports saw their harbors increasingly taken over by foreign vessels as the number of American flag ships in world commerce dwindled.

Above all, increasing familiarity with the maritime

past of many coasts and ports makes one fact more than ever clear: in the great age of sail, ship and sailor were constantly at risk. The account of many a master mariner or famous ship closes abruptly with the words "lost at sea." With perverse pride, scarcely a section of the East Coast from Cape Breton to Cape Fear was not known to its residents as the "graveyard of the Atlantic." The rock-bound coast of the Pacific Northwest had a fearsome—and justified—reputation. The wild autumn gales that sweep the Great Lakes took a toll of hundreds of ships and thousands of lives. The disasters of whalers and the banks fishermen are legendary to this day. We enjoy the rich heritage of our maritime past; we must not forget the grim price that was paid by many of those who created it.

A word on the structure of the book is in order. The guide is organized entirely on a geographical basis. Three major divisions, the Atlantic Coast, the Pacific Coast and the great heartland of North America, are in turn divided as far as possible into regions that share common maritime backgrounds. Within regions, the guide reflects the pattern of the sections of the coast, bays, lakes, and rivers, following where possible the likely routes of the automobile traveler. Necessarily to some extent arbitrary, the sequence is clearly laid out in the table of contents. The index permits the reader to locate entries alphabetically and plan his own sequence.

Every effort has been made to incorporate up-to-date and accurate information about admission charges and the times and seasons that ships and museums are open to visitors. Readers should be aware, however, that such information is subject to change, not only from year to year but within a season. Travelers would be well advised to telephone ahead to check for possible changes, particularly in spring and fall when schedules tend to be uncertain.

Inevitably, this guide could never have been written without the help and cooperation of many people. To name them all would be impossible, but particular thanks must be given to the generous museum staff, both professional and volunteer, who

opened their cherished museums at times or seasons when they were usually closed to visitors, often driving from a distance and on extremely short notice to do so.

A special note of thanks is due to Wilmot Ragsdale who drew on his recollections as a Time/Life correspondent in World War II to tell readers what it was like when a German shell hit the battleship *Texas* off Cherbourg.

The permissions received to use a number of quotations from published works are very much appreciated. Specific acknowledgments and credits are listed elsewhere but the writer would like to give particular thanks to J. Bryan III for permission to quote from his book *Aircraft Carrier*, a vivid firsthand account of the carrier *Yorktown* in action in the Pacific. Mr. Bryan's fine book, which is happily still in print, deserves to be read in its entirety. This is true also of William Sclater's *Haida*, which gives an exciting account of the battle record of the famous Canadian destroyer.

Credits and acknowledgments for the photographs that illustrate this guide will also be found elsewhere in these pages. I am grateful to the many museums and ships that sent in pictures for consideration.

My list of acknowledgments would not be complete without grateful recognition of the cheerful patience and wise counsel of Dr. Eleanora Schoenebaum, Editorial Director of Facts On File Publications. As the guide doubled in size while deadline after deadline slipped quietly overboard, she never revealed dismay but continued to provide the positive support that did a great deal to bring the book to a successful conclusion.

And a very special note of gratitude is due the hands-on editor, Ms. Ellen Meltzer, who dealt valiantly and successfully with the innumerable details of preparation for publication.

And, finally, my warm thanks to Mrs. Eunice Healey whose concern for the proper presentation of the copy often led her to put aside other obligations to decipher, type, and retype battered drafts with skill and accuracy.

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# PART ONE

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## WHERE IT ALL BEGAN: ATLANTIC AND GULF COASTS

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# I. NEW ENGLAND (AND ITS STEPCHILD LONG ISLAND)

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*The Hub of the (Yankee) Universe: Boston*  
*North of Boston to the Piscataqua*  
*Where the Piscataqua Meets the Sea*  
*Way Down East*  
*South of Boston and Into the Old Colony*  
*The Old Colony II: Cape Cod*  
*The Old Colony III: The Whaling Towns*  
*Narragansett Bay*  
*Along the Connecticut Shore*  
*The Island Like a Great Whale*

**T**here's no better place to start the search for America's maritime heritage than in New England, for here much of that heritage was born. Driven by harsh economic necessity, New Englanders turned to the sea to lift them above bare survival on hardscrabble farms. To the shipyards that soon lined New England rivers came timbers from New England's great forests; out of the yards came everything from fishing smacks to great ships known around the world.

New England fishing fleets fed landmen in far-away islands and distant continents. New England whaleships lit the western world with spermaceti

candles. New England trading ships found new markets from Nootka Sound to the Spice Islands. New England merchants built sparsely beautiful houses on profits earned in Canton and Mauritius, in Sumatra and Jamaica. And from along the great harbors and tiny coves that line New England's rugged coasts came men who lived—and often died—afloat in the most dangerous and demanding of professions.

In New England, there is no better place to start than Boston—if not exactly the Hub of the Universe as its inhabitants once boasted, at least the hub of maritime New England. Where but in Boston does a carved fish, the Sacred Cod symbolizing dependence on the sea, hang in the state legislative chambers?

## *The Hub of the (Yankee) Universe: Boston*

Coming into Boston by air, it is easy to see what made the city a great port. To be sure, the growing city has nibbled away at rivers and inlets over the centuries, blurring the aboriginal edges as islands and marshlands turn into runways and office buildings. Nevertheless, the main outlines remain: a great outer harbor, sheltered from the Atlantic by a handful of rocky islets, an inner harbor with many indentations and four entering rivers, and 4,000 acres of sheltered anchorage. The Puritan immigrants who settled here in 1630 moved with determination and intelligence to make the most of these assets—and succeeded. In seven decades Bostonians turned the wilderness into the third largest port in the burgeoning British empire, exceeded only by the ancient cities of London and Bristol in the mother country.

From the beginning, the history of Boston long continued to be intertwined with ships and the sea. By the Revolution, the shipyards of Boston and smaller towns of New England were launching two-thirds of all the vessels built in the American colonies—and nearly one-third of all English-owned ships were American built. Boston waters drank the tea dumped to dramatize the Colonial grievances that led to the Revolution. The closure of Boston Harbor was Britain's way of punishing the unruly Americans. Here in Boston was built, and is today preserved, the most famous and beloved vessel of the United States Navy. Here was based the seaborne trade around the Horn to the Pacific Northwest, so much so that the Northwest Indians who sold their furs to American ships came to call all Americans, wherever they came from, "Boston men."

Here in Boston were financed, designed, built, and owned the most famous and successful of the great clipper ships. And here the movement for sailors' rights against the tyranny of the quarterdeck was born and fostered by an undergraduate who dropped out of Harvard to go to sea.

Once the premier port of North America, Boston has long since been outstripped by rivals down the coast, closer to the interior of the nation that provides cargoes for exports and markets for imports. The city's appreciation of her maritime heritage remains strong, however, and there is much to see.

Any tour of Boston's maritime heritage properly begins with a look at Old Ironsides, now berthed in the waters where she was launched almost two centuries ago.

"Ay, tear her tattered ensign down! Long has it waved on high, And many an eye has danced to see That banner in the sky;" declared generations of American schoolchildren. "Beneath it rung the battle shout, And burst the cannon's roar;" they went on, "—The meteor of the ocean air Shall sweep the clouds no more."

Oliver Wendell Holmes was stirred to write "Old Ironsides" by the announcement in 1830 that the frigate *Constitution* was condemned to be broken up as unseaworthy. Thanks in large part to public response to his poem, the meteor of the ocean air still sweeps the sky: Old Ironsides was saved and rebuilt in 1833. After a number of subsequent rebuildings she is still afloat in Boston Harbor not far from where she was launched in 1797.

The tall frigate—her masts are as high as a 20-story building—is a striking sight as she towers over the Boston Navy Yard in Charlestown, across the Charles River from old Boston. But the visitor will get much more out of his ship tour if he first visits the USS Constitution Museum, lodged in a handsome old granite yard building opposite the dock. Besides artifacts relating to the ship, the museum is outstanding for imaginative displays explaining how the *Constitution* was built, sailed, and fought.

Near the museum entrance, full-scale mock-ups of shipwrights at work on the *Constitution's* frames make clear how the ribs and planking of a late 18th-century wooden ship were put together. A reconstruction of the berth deck shows how the crew slept in hammocks slung from the overhead deckbeams. A seven-foot model of the frigate with all sails set, gives an easily grasped overall view that helps visitors understand what will later be seen on the ship herself.

A grim reminder of the harsh discipline felt necessary to keep the ship in fighting trim is a reproduction of the log of punishments administered while *Constitution* was on the Mediterranean station. Several unfortunates, courtmartialed for drunkenness or fighting, received three or four dozen lashes with the cat-o'-nine-tails. One unhappy man, convicted of treasonous correspondence with the British, was flogged through the fleet; no note indicates whether he lived through it. Nearby is posted, without comment, the Navy Regulations of the time; 12 lashes were the maximum theoretically allowed.

Highlights of the displays, many of particular interest to young people but not to be missed by anyone, include:

- a slide film of the problems faced by the ship's surgeons during the cruise in which *Constitution* fought the *Java*;



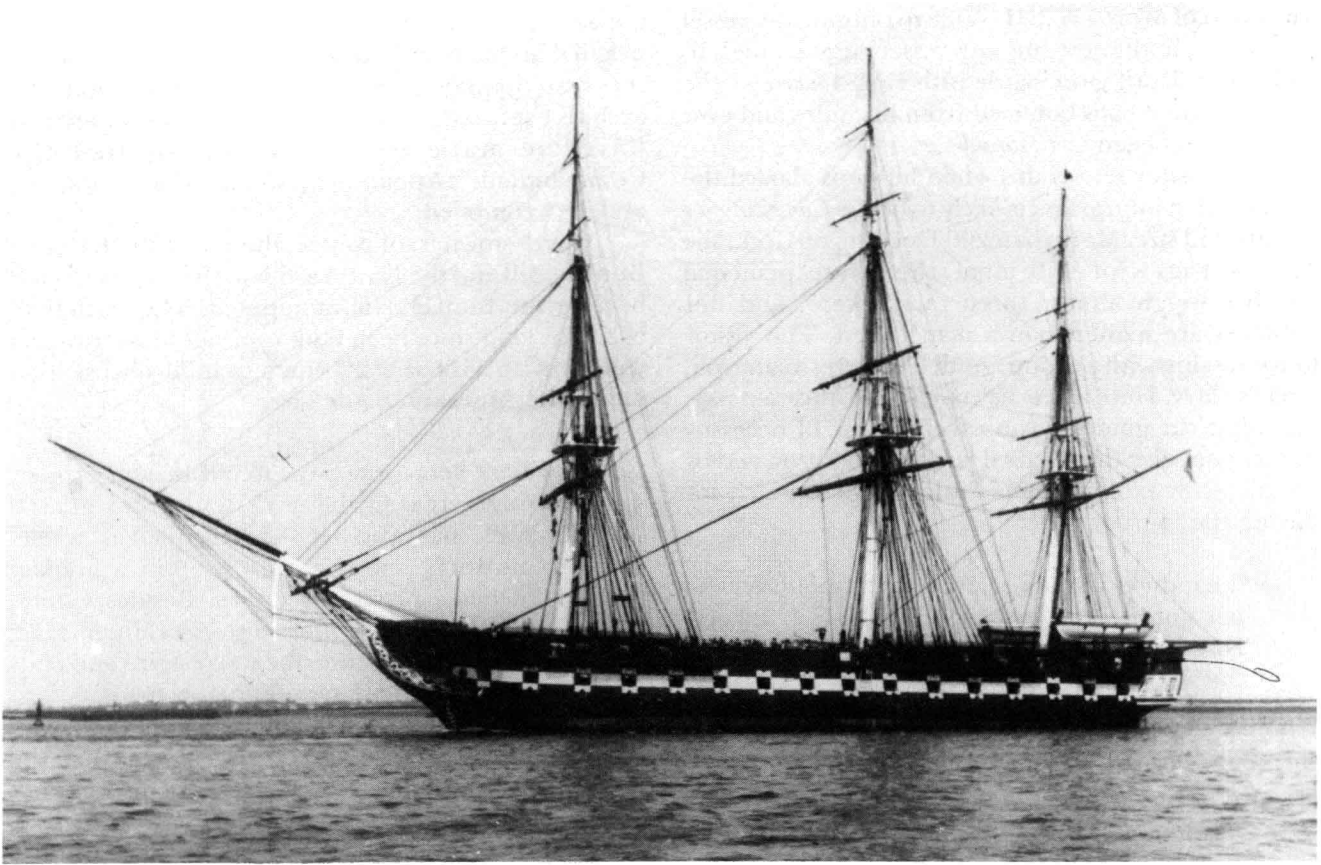


Figure 1  
The frigate *Constitution*, the oldest U.S. Navy ship in commission, takes her annual “turnaround” cruise down Boston Harbor and back to her berth at the old Navy Yard. Launched in 1797, Old Ironsides is probably the best known and most loved of America’s historic ships

- a complete fighting top, removed from the *Constitution* during renovation, into which the visitor can clamber and exercise his imagination;
- a large sail on its yardarm; halyards attached so the visitor can hoist it up a section of mast;
- a major wall display, identifying by name five actual members of the ship’s company—a surgeon’s mate, the sailing master, a Marine sergeant, an able-bodied seaman, and a ship’s boy—and explaining what each one did during a day at sea;
- an ingenious video quiz in which the visitor can put himself in the place of the commodore aboard the *Constitution*, commanding a squadron of several ships during a transatlantic passage to the Mediterranean. Typical problems—a storm scatters the squadron, supplies run low, and so forth—are flashed on the screen. The visitor can choose from several suggested responses, then press a button to learn whether he made the right decision.

**USS Constitution Museum** is at the Charlestown Navy Yard. Open all year. January through March, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.; April 1 to Labor Day, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Admission: \$2.00; seniors, \$1.50; children 6 to 16, \$1.00. Library open to researchers by appointment. USS *Constitution* Museum, Charlestown Navy Yard, P.O. Box 1812, Boston, Massachusetts 02129. Telephone (617) 426-1812.

Still a commissioned ship of the United States Navy, the *Constitution* is manned by Naval personnel. Although over the years the old frigate has been rebuilt so many times that only 10 percent of her timbers are original, the work has been done with such care and fidelity that a visit aboard is a journey back in time to the first years of the Navy of the young republic.

The *Constitution* won her fame during the War of 1812 when she successively defeated in battle three British frigates and a sloop of war. She was an unusual ship from the beginning. Larger and more heavily armed than the standard frigate of her day, she was designed on the same principle as the pocket