

CTPA Visits The Chicago Maritime Museum

March 18, 2015



CTPA members had the opportunity to visit the Maritime Museum now housed at the **Bridgeport Art Center, 1200 W. 35th St. at Racine**. Located on the "river level" there is enough history to whet your appetite on the history of maritime Chicago.

Our guide **Don Glasell**, the office manager of the museum, gave us the history of the museum and its current space. The museum began at North Pier (now River East) and then moved to the west side (Jackson and Racine) where they were located on the 6th floor, which made random foot traffic difficult. They have been at the current location since January 2015. With Dirk Lohan as vice president of the museum they

are looking forward to him working on the final exhibit areas as they have also acquired the space next door. Also they are hoping for an influx of private funds for the expansion and completion.

The Chicago Maritime Museum was established to tell the story of Chicago as a maritime city, a city founded at the strategic intersection of waterways, which was also at various times, one of the busiest ports in the world. With an extensive collection of artifacts, models, art, images and books, the museum interprets Chicago's maritime traditions and the impact of the area's waterways on local, national and global history.

The Bridgeport Art Center building was built in 1911 on the shores of Bubbly Creek. It originally housed the Albert Pick Company, the world's largest hotel supply company of silverware and dishes (also part of the old Pick-Congress Hotel) Then in the later part of the 20th century, the building served as the warehouse for the Spiegel Catalogue. Both businesses understood the importance of quick and efficiently moving inventory and used the building's docking location on a branch of the Chicago River to ship goods. Montgomery Ward used the waterway as well.

There is a place within the museum called the "intern area" for record keeping, research and a place to log materials. Also there is a shop for model making and repairing. At the far end of the museum is a conference room with more models and reference library of information.

The museum tells the story of Chicago's waterways from the south Bridgeport location to the



north. Some of the items on display now will not be in the completion of the museum. They still have quite few items in storage that have yet to be displayed. Also quite a few items that were at North Pier were lost.

Items that are on display include a rescue device of the 1800's, an early way to rescue those at sea; also a replica of an 18th century work light that works on the same concept as a blow torch, also used for rescue operations. There is also a 1,800 pound anchor that was manually raised and lowered.

It was in the 1880's that steam ships made an appearance, then in the late 1890's steam tugs were introduced. In 1886, there were four slips at the entrance at the sandbar by Ft. Dearborn that had the largest docking space moving mostly lumber and dry goods. The steam tugs and ships were frequently part of the ships that came through those waterways.

There were a few artifacts from the **Eastland**, a cup and saucer, and a dive suit of the time, still in its storage box. There were other Eastland artifacts that are not on display.

It was mentioned by Don that the Eastland had a history of instability; the life boats were added a month before the accident, when the wooden dance floor was replaced, it was replaced with concrete adding to the weight. The ballast system was not correctly adjusted at the time of the accident.



During WWII there were two aircraft carriers stationed in Chicago. At the time aircraft carriers were made from cruise ships; the top portions were removed to make the landing area. There were quite a few misses on landings and there are planes at the bottom of Lake Michigan. The USS Wolverine and USS Sable were two carriers used in Chicago. The USS Sable model is at the Glenview Hangar One Naval Air Station Museum. There is a model of the USS Wolverine on display at the Chicago Maritime Museum. See a photo of both carriers "parked" off Navy Pier at: <http://www.thehangarone.org/newlayoutindex.asp>

Where Riverview used to be located, on Belmont at the river, was the Henry Grebe Shipyard, which was one of the Chicago shipyards making boats for the war effort during WWII.

There is a replica of an old town sailing dinghy that was donated in 1954. The dinghies are still in use in Boston. They are canvas wrapped with many coats to water proof. They are prone to leaking.

Also at the far end just outside the door is "Bubbly Creek" where they are hoping to build a river walk deck area that will wrap around the building. They would like to use the deck as a place where kayakers could stop. A lot of kayakers do cruise through the waterway.

Currently there is no admission fee to the Chicago Maritime Museum. There are various membership levels (\$35 as a Regular to \$5000 as a Patron). With the \$35 membership, you get a \$20 book, *A Treasury of Chicago Maritime History*, and other Chicago Maritime Museum publications.



The Museum is open Monday through Friday 10am to 4pm and is not open on the weekends. Each third Friday of the month the Museum participates in the open house of the Bridgeport Art Center and is open 6pm to 9pm. Visit the website at

www.chicagomaritimemuseum.org, the phone is 773-376-1982. Again, Don Glasell is the office manager who is there each day and by appointment. Email Don at dongla1520@sbcglobal.net.

For those who do not know the story of Bubbly Creek, this is from the poster that is located at the Museum.

Bubbly Creek is the nickname given to the South Fork of the Chicago River's South Branch, marking the boundary between the Bridgeport and McKinley Park neighborhoods. The creek derives its name from the gases bubbling out of the riverbed from the decomposition of blood and entrails dumped into the river in the early 20th century by the local meatpacking businesses surrounding the Union Stock Yards. It was brought to notoriety by Upton Sinclair in his expose on the American meatpacking industry entitled The Jungle. While the gaseous bubbles have dissipated over the years, Bubbly Creek is still considered too contaminated for human recreation. However, the Army Corp. of Engineers is currently conducting a restoration feasibility study for the creek, which will consider resolutions such as selective dredging, capping and creating channel base flow.

After visiting the Maritime Museum, a few of us explored the gallery space and event space at the Bridgeport Art Center. The gallery spaces are open on the third Friday of the month (similar to the Flat Iron Buildings First Fridays) and the event space is huge with a great view of the city. Of course there is ample parking available.

There is also a space called **Wet Paint** where you can host your party and they will supply all you need for your BYOB event including glasses, utensils, platters, etc. The type of painting you want for the group from their painting library and the brushes paints, aprons, easels and step by step instructions. Looks like a fun group/ team building activity spot. They even do set up and clean up.

Notes and photos by:
Gina V Driskell, Co-Secretary

P.S. Co-Secretary Judith Randall noted that after the Maritime Museum visit she had fun with some CTPA friends who had arrived by car. They went to lunch at Schaller's Pump via the old Stockyards district, made a stop at Superior Candy's shop (1140 W Exchange), and also Filbert's Bottling on South Ashland (they made cherry cola and lime rickey soda). They also took photos of each other at the Old Stockyards Gate. Lots of history on the South Side!

Building photos by Donna Primas:

