

The Smithsonian's National Museum of American History today opens "On the Water: Stories from Maritime America," a new, permanent exhibition designed to engage the public in a dynamic exploration of America's maritime heritage. The 8,500-square-foot exhibition builds on the Smithsonian's unparalleled National Watercraft Collection of rigged ship models, patent models, documents and images to bring the sights, sounds and stories from the oceans, inland rivers and coastal communities to the museum's millions of visitors.

"The maritime influence on American history is one of the most compelling chapters in the national story," said museum director Brent D. Glass. "'On the Water' will transport visitors to places they have never been, allowing them to experience life on the sea through the experiences of real people and objects from one of the Smithsonian's oldest collections."

Using 360 artifacts and 390 images and graphics, "On the Water" explores life and work on the nation's waterways, discovering the stories of fishermen, shipbuilders, merchant mariners, passengers and many others. From 18th-century sailing ships, 19th-century steamboats and fishing craft to today's mega containerships, the exhibition reveals America's maritime connections through objects, documents, audiovisual programs and interactives. Visitors will discover the continuous and significant role maritime activity has played in American lives.

A companion exhibition to "America on the Move," which explores how transportation has changed America, "On the Water" is made possible by the A.P. Møller and Chastine Mc-Kinney Møller Foundation.

"On the Water" is organized into seven chronological sections and focuses primarily on maritime life in America from the 17th century to the present. Among the highlighted objects on display are highly detailed, large ship models, including the tobacco ship "Brilliant" and a cutaway of the modern factory trawler "Alaska Ocean"; artifacts on loan from the North Carolina Maritime Museum from Blackbeard's ship, the "Queen Anne's Revenge"; and a large, slowly rotating ship's propeller from the steamship "Indiana."

"On the Water" includes objects from across the nation-the inland waterways as well as the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans and the Gulf Coast-linking maritime activity to larger stories in American history, such as the maritime component of the California gold rush.

The exhibition experience is expanded online through the "On the Water" companion Web site, available at <http://americanhistory.si.edu/onthewater>, and through maritime history activities on the museum's "Smithsonian's History Explorer," an educational Web site that offers free, standards-based, innovative resources for teaching and learning American History.

"Smithsonian's History Explorer" is available at

<http://historyexplorer.americanhistory.si.edu>

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The National Museum of American History collects, preserves and displays American heritage in the areas of social, political, cultural, scientific and military history. After a two-year renovation and a dramatic transformation, the museum shines new light on American history, both in Washington and online. To learn more about the museum, check <http://americanhistory.si.edu>. For Smithsonian information, the public may call (202) 633-1000, (202) 633-5285 (TTY).