

REFERENCE ONLY

HISTORY OF LOS ANGELES MARITIME MUSEUM

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The impending conflict of World War II was becoming increasingly evident around the Port of Los Angeles in 1940. New multitudes of workers streamed across the harbor's Main Channel on the crowded ferryboats. Jobs were waiting at the shipyards and the new Navy base on Terminal Island. While ferry service had existed in the area since the late 1800's no permanent terminals had been built. The Los Angeles Harbor Department realized the need for such facilities and a regular scheduled service and by late 1941, two impressive "Streamlined Moderne" ferry terminals stood opposite one another, at a point on the Main Channel where shipping traffic was and is on view constantly.

The terminals served long and useful lives until the completion of the Vincent Thomas Bridge in 1963. At that time an agreement with the State of California forced the ferry service to be discontinued. The Terminal Island structure was razed almost immediately but the building in San Pedro served for many years as an overflow office building for the Los Angeles Harbor Department.

Gradually, as the Municipal Ferry Building began to deteriorate, historically minded citizens became concerned that it too would be razed. Application was made to the Los Angeles Cultural Heritage Board for Historic-Cultural Monument status and this was accorded in 1975. The San Pedro Municipal Ferry Building became Monument No. 146 in the City of Los Angeles Cultural Heritage Register.

Today this historic part of our Southern California maritime heritage has been given "a new lease on life" and serves as the home of the Los Angeles Maritime Museum.

In 1976 and 1977 the building underwent a federally funded renovation prior to its use as a museum. The museum opened in the Fall of 1979 and has become one of the premier Maritime Museums on the West Coast and by virtue of the wonderful, large structure is also the largest museum of its type in western America.

The structure, built specifically as a ferry terminal, was largely obsolete for museum use, being a maze of small rooms and rampways. Those visiting the building today are pleasantly surprised to see how the renovation has opened up and created large well lit exhibit areas. Much structural steel was used to strengthen the basic shell and a new exhibit ramp (Promenade) was built to allow easy handicap access to the second story. The old central vehicle ramp area became the museum's "Navy Deck", so named for the many

Navy items as well as many artifacts from the bridge of the U.S.S. LOS ANGELES. Other newly created exhibit areas include the following decks: South, Sailing Ship, Twentieth Century and two exterior areas which extend out over the water on either side of the Ferry slip affording a magnificent view of shipping activity.

For many years concerned individuals had felt the need for proper presentation of the maritime history of San Pedro Bay and other West Coast areas. When reviewing Maritime Museums of the West it was discovered that, while their exhibits were fascinating, there was little effort given to the stories of the museum's home ports. Councilman John S. Gibson whose 15th District encompassed the Port of Los Angeles, was aware of the need and when the future of the ferry building was in doubt, he felt it would be the logical home for the long awaited Los Angeles Maritime Museum.

After years of effort, the stately renovated structure stands ready to challenge the talents and ingenuity of San Pedrans, native and adopted, to present the living history of West Coast maritime heritage through interesting and innovative exhibits, educational programs and conscientious archiving of the essence of California's nautical heritage.

In the ten years since it opened, the Los Angeles Maritime Museum has made great strides in becoming a great Maritime Museum in one of the world's great ports. Changing exhibitions have stimulated continued interest in the museum programs while permanent collections have established the museum's credibility among scholarly institutions. Professional staff, including a director, librarian-archivist and curators as well as trained technicians and clerical personnel bring the goal of international accreditation nearer to realization.

In the next century as Los Angeles and San Pedro focus on commerce with the Pacific Rim nations and the epicenter of this great region localizes in the harbor of San Pedro the Maritime Museum is certain to stand out as a centerpiece of the most important port in the world.

The Los Angeles Maritime Museum is located at the foot of Sixth Street in San Pedro at Berth 84.