

# Mystic Seaport Museum

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**MYSTIC SEAPORT MUSEUM, PO. Box 6000, Mystic, CT 06355-0990. G. W. Blunt White Library, Mr. Paul O'Pecko, Library Director, (860) 572-5367. Ms. Suki Williams, Research Film/Video Archives. Media Resources Division, (860) 572-5379. Ms. Marifranco Trivelli, Rosenfield Collection, (860) 572-0711, ext. 5014. The library is open to the public year-round from 10:30 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday, except for Christmas and other days designated as museum holidays. The library is also open on the first and third Saturdays of each month from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Researchers planning extensive research are strongly advised to call ahead.**

Designed as a living and working replica of the past, the Mystic Seaport Museum has been called a nautical version of Colonial Williamsburg. The Mystic is an educational institution designed to preserve and exhibit the maritime heritage of not just America, but the world at large. The costs of sustaining Mystic Seaport Museum are enormous. More than 500 people are employed during the peak summer months. And like Colonial Williamsburg, it has been supported by tourists. Nearly 70 percent of its \$12 million annual operating costs (1995) are generated by the hefty \$11 daily admission fee; the remainder is raised by private donations. The museum's staff includes more than 200 professionals from a wide range of disciplines: researchers, artists, historians, shipbuilders, musicians, conservators, curators, librarians, writers, interpreters, role players, and professors. A typical exemplar of this group is Glenn Gordinier who has three Mystic roles. A doctoral student of Jeffersonian maritime history, he is the facilitator for the study of material culture, and he portrays a real-life, 19th-century sailor, whaler, and (eventually) ship's captain, Josiah Gardner.

From a research and writing standpoint, the heart of Mystic is the G. W. Blunt White Library. The library specializes in American maritime history with

in-depth sections on related trades and crafts, economics, literature, and ocean sciences. The library holds 50,000 books and periodicals, 600,000 manuscripts, 9,000 maps and charts, and 60 oral history and sound archive holdings. There is a remarkable blend of the availability of primary materials with relevant secondary sources of information. For example, among the manuscript collection are 1,200 ships' logs and journals, ledgers, and diaries dating from the start of the 18th century.

For the sports historian the museum provides some relatively untapped sources as it is home to the Archives of American Yachting and Boating. In 1995 the museum hosted a yachting history symposium entitled "Elite and Open: The Social Evolution of American Yachting." The three-day conference examined yachting as a cultural mechanism, which incorporated social activities, social opportunities, social measures, and social barriers. Other topics included:

... the development of working-class and middle-class yachting and boating in this century, the dramatic participation of women at the highest levels of the sport in recent years, and the waves of ethnicity that have come to yachting in America.

The G. W. Blunt White Library has some 3,500 books on yachting and yachting history on its shelves, as well as 50,000 manuscripts and 55 manuscript collections directly related to yachting. The material culture collection at Mystic is as impressive as the written record. There are almost 300 classic yachts and pleasure boats in the archives' collection as well as 400 models, 400 trophies and plaques, and more than 100 paintings. In 1987 Mystic's special exhibits focus was on the yacht America, which, in 1851, won the trophy that came to be called the America's Cup.

To assist the researcher with a focus on maritime sport, the Rosenfield Photographic Collection, acquired by Mystic Seaport Museum in 1984, has nearly one million pieces that document sea sport from 1881 up to the present. Morris Rosenfield established a photographic business in 1910 and eventually was joined by his three sons. They established a unique reputation through their extensive and technically innovative work capturing the nip and tuck of America's Cup racing. M. Trivelli, the Rosenfield cataloguer, has noted:

As a family of photographers they quickly became a part of the America's Cup tradition. The respect they received from some of the greatest yachtsmen of the day gave them unusually close access to the races, and the result is a remarkably dynamic and often intimate view of the sport.

The nation's finest collection of maritime artifacts is animated and energized in a multidimensional learning environment. Mystic is also home to a center for film and video material, currently more than one million feet of archival footage, and more than 4,000 videotapes. Several of the latter lend themselves to being promising complementary sources for the teaching of sports history. (See, for example, *To Win At All Costs: The Story of the America's Cup 1851-1981* and the 1984 Emmy Award-winning *The End of an Era* which chronicled the 1983 success

of Australia II as she defeated Dennis Conner's Liberty and so captured the America's Cup from its seemingly secure resting place at the Newport Yacht Club.)

In the summer of 1996 Mystic Seaport Museum turned itself into a campus as the National Endowment for the Humanities set up a summer institute for college faculty. Sponsored by the Frank C. Munson Institute of American Maritime Studies, the workshop was entitled "America and the Sea: Maritime History and Culture Since 1776." While sporting activity, not surprisingly, lies on the margins of this vast seascape, it is important to chart what may be "fresh waters" for sport historians with an interdisciplinary background and an interest in the interface of leisure and recreational or physical activity at sea, and athletic challenges in an unusual domain. Some of the possible research topics that emerged as a result of institute study are recreational life on the emigrant sailing ships (or whalers or naval vessels) of the 19th century; additional insights on Sir Thomas Lipton who, unsuccessfully led five challenges for the America's Cup; studies of the gold medal exploits of pioneering life-saving experts such as Newport's Ida Lewis; the origins and development of single-handed circumnavigation of the globe (Joshua Slocum and the Spray at the end of the 19th century up to New Zealand's Naomi James who, in 1979, took 271 days and 19 hours to become the first woman to accomplish the feat); others such as the Titanic, the Lusitania, and the Queen Mary as cultural containers and recreational capsules; speculative reviews on nautical ultra-challenges and the beginnings of "extreme" sport; the actual sea voyages of American Olympians as they sailed off to try and win medals at the 1920, 1924, 1928, 1936, and 1948 Olympics; and leisure life and long-distance competitive sailing.

The point to be made here is that maritime history and culture offers a rewarding and fruitful avenue for future writing on the history of sport and physical activity. One final item of importance: Mystic Seaport Museum has been publishing books on maritime history for 60 years. Three recent titles of special interest to sport historians are *A Century Under Sail* (1988), which draws on the holdings of the Rosenfield Collection *Oars for Pleasure Rowing* by Andrew B. Steever (1992); and Thomas C. Mendenhall's *The Harvard-Yale Boat Race, 1952-1924, and the Coming of Sport to the American College* (1993).