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**INDEPENDENCE SEAPORT MUSEUM TO UNVEIL NEW ENTRYWAY
AND INTRODUCTORY GALLERY EXHIBITION
ON MARCH 22, 2024**



Philadelphia, PA (February 27, 2024)—When the doors open to the public on Friday, March 22, at the Independence Seaport Museum (ISM), visitors will step inside through a newly designed and welcoming entrance that will be more accessible to the community. Facing southward onto Philadelphia’s Spruce Street Harbor Park and toward ISM’s two historic ships, *Olympia* and *Becuna*, the new entrance will more closely link the physical museum building with its ships and the riverfront area, thus making it easier for the public to access the building from its previous, north-facing point of entry. Beyond the new ticketing area that museum-goers will pass through upon entering the building, a reimaged, 1,900-square-foot introductory gallery space housing a new, permanent exhibition featuring approximately 150 objects—many of which have never before been exhibited—awaits guests of all ages.

“This is a substantial change for the museum as we continue to work in making our building and world-class collections accessible to the community. Facing not only our historic ships but also the many attractions in Spruce Street Harbor Park, we hope this new entrance will show an entirely new face to the community,” said Peter S. Seibert, Independence Seaport Museum’s president and CEO.

ISM’s new entryway enables better visibility of the museum and significantly improves public access to the building for those visitors arriving on foot or following a tour of the historic ships. Designed by A K Architecture and constructed by KMC Partners, both of Philadelphia, the new entrance, which cost

approximately \$500,000, was made possible by the Delaware River Waterfront Corporation (DRWC). The new introductory gallery space was funded by the generosity of museum supporters.

“What an exciting and pivotal moment for the museum and everyone involved in bringing this new entrance and exhibition to fruition,” said Peter Ernst, chairman of Independence Seaport Museum’s Board of Port Wardens. “Not only does this allow for a new, inviting experience for our visitors and members alike, but it provides ISM with a launching point as we continue to plan for a future that highlights the importance of our local waterways and our deep connections to them.”

As guests enter the building, they will arrive in a new ticketing lobby featuring kiosks from which tickets can be purchased (advance online ticket purchases will still be available). ISM’s staff will be available to answer questions and assist visitors with using the kiosks. This new system is designed to enhance and streamline the entry process.

Beyond the ticketing area, visitors will experience a new introduction to the museum through an exhibition mounted in four newly designed galleries, each focused on a different theme of ISM’s collections: Philadelphia’s American Revolutionary naval history, the pop culture mania for Admiral George Dewey who commanded America’s naval forces in the Pacific during the Spanish-American War of 1898, the recreational use of the waterway, and the Delaware River’s shipyards that have been an integral part of our nation’s maritime history. Included in the exhibition are perennially favorite objects, others are new acquisitions and still more are treasures from the museum’s permanent collection that have rarely, if ever, been on display.

Among the highlights of the exhibition and one of the oldest objects to be on view is the signal book, dated 1777, owned by Admiral Richard Howe of the Royal Navy. This exhibition marks the first time it will be on view. During the summer of 1777, Admiral Howe and his brother, General William Howe, abandoned Britain’s official strategy of separating New England from the remaining colonies and, acting without authorization from their superiors, decided to seize Philadelphia and attempt to capture the Continental Congress. The brothers launched a two-pronged attack by sea and land; although the British Army occupied Philadelphia, the Navy was stalled by American defenses in the Delaware River as Congress escaped west to York, Pennsylvania. (Eventually, Admiral Howe was able to join his brother in Philadelphia. After their underwhelming campaign in Philadelphia and with military defeats in New York, King George III ordered the Howe brothers to return home.) Signal books, such as this example, were top secret documents used by ships’ captains to communicate with each other within a navy. They provided the secret code for understanding the messages “spelled out” by signal flags on a ship. Admiral Howe gave this book to captains of his fleet in August, 1777, as they arrived at Delaware Bay to begin their siege on Philadelphia, some 100 miles up the river.

The new introductory exhibition also will give visitors an opportunity to see familiar objects from new perspectives. One such important work is a rare ship's figurehead carving entitled *Mary* (also known as *Peace*), circa 1815-1820, which is attributed to William Rush (1756-1833) who is regarded as America's first sculptor. (Only two other Rush figureheads are known to survive; most were lost when the ship they were on was broken for scrap or sunk.) For 50 years, Rush worked as a master ships carver in Philadelphia, and, with his apprentices, he carved a wide range of wooden figures, including church statuary, ships' figureheads, furniture and trade signs. Sculptures such as this example were carved out of massive, aged pine logs by a team of wood carvers under the direction of a master craftsman, painted and then installed on the front (or bow) of a ship and embodied the ship's name serving as an advertisement when the ship was in port. For a 200-year-old carving, little is known about its many journeys or the ports it graced. Early references refer to the figure as *Mary*; sometime in the 20th century, she was renamed *Peace* due to the presence of a dove and a lamb in the carving. The carving was discovered in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, about 80 miles west of Philadelphia. When visitors to Independence Seaport Museum see *Mary* in its new location, they will be able to examine her in an entirely new way: she will now be mounted as she would have been when she first sailed the seas on a ship's bow.

Another featured object to be seen in the new introductory exhibition for the first time is a rare piece of memorabilia dedicated to Admiral George Dewey (1837-1917) who, as Commodore, was ordered to lead the American Pacific fleet in an attack on Spanish ships harbored at Manila Bay in the Philippines at the outbreak of the Spanish-American war. On the morning of May 1, 1898, Dewey's fleet sank eight Spanish ships without loss to his American squadron. As a result, he was promoted to the rank of Rear Admiral, and within the year, Congress promoted him to Admiral of the Navy, a position created for him; he was the first and remains the only person appointed to that rank. Dewey was celebrated as a hero to all Americans. Following the Battle of Manila Bay, Congress created (and then awarded) a special medal with Admiral Dewey's portrait displayed on the front and a sailor on the back. It is one of only four United States military campaign medals ever produced with the portrait of the commanding officer on the front. Tiffany and Co. was hired to design and produce the medals. Each of the 1,848 that were made was personalized with the name and rank of each man in the squadron for presentation, and they were given to all the crew members of the nine ships, including *Olympia* (which visitors can tour at ISM), who fought in the battle regardless of rank, race or nationality. Dewey, a very humble man, wore his medal backwards so that the portrait of a sailor, rather than his own, would always be facing out. Five such medals will be on display in the new exhibition at ISM. The example featured here was given to Commander Benjamin P. Lambertson (1843-1912) who was a native of Carlisle, Pennsylvania. Later a Rear Admiral, Lambertson was directed during the battle to take surrender terms to the soldiers in the fortress of Cavite overlooking Manila Bay. Dewey gave clear instructions to his gunners that if Lambertson did not return quickly, they were to shell the fort into submission.

River Scene on the Delaware at Beverly, New Jersey, a circa 1850 oil on canvas by the British-born, American painter George Robert Bonfield (1805-1898), is also among the highlights of the new exhibition at ISM. When Bonfield was a child in England, he was attracted to the sea and made sketches of ships and views of Portsmouth Harbor. As a youth, after the family immigrated to Philadelphia, Bonfield worked for a local marble dealer carving inscriptions and ornamentation on gravestones. Occasionally, he worked in Bordentown, New Jersey, at the estate of Joesph Bonaparte, the brother of Napoleon Bonaparte, who, it is said, encouraged Bonfield's interest in art and provided him with access to his collection of Dutch and French marine paintings. Bonfield went on to study with Thomas Birch, one of the first American artists to specialize in marine and landscape paintings, and by the 1840s and 1850s, Bonfield became one of America's foremost marine painters at a time when such subjects were popular with Philadelphia merchants. Influenced by seventeenth-century Dutch seascapes, Bonfield painted romantic scenes in a freer, painterly style rather than the more topographical style of other painters of the day. This peaceful scene depicts an uncommonly seen place on the Delaware River near Beverly, New Jersey, which is located north of and across the river from Philadelphia, and shows rural and pastoral facets of the river compared to more industrial views represented by his contemporary print makers. Beverly, New Jersey, was a summer resort community for many Philadelphians, including Bonfield, and local steamers brought families there from Philadelphia, Camden, New Jersey, and other cities along the river. This painting, a major work by this important regional artist, demonstrates his mature style, as evidenced by his attention to detail and fine brushstrokes, such as in his handling of landscape elements by the hazy light of the setting sun. The Delaware River has been and continues to be a popular subject for artists to capture, and Bonfield was among the most talented of these regional painters.

For those who are long-time supporters of Independence Seaport Museum and those visiting for the first time, all will find its new point of entry more conveniently located. Once inside, they will delight in and learn from the new exhibition that spotlights some of the most exciting aspects of ISM's vast collections.

About Independence Seaport Museum

The Independence Seaport Museum (ISM), founded in 1960 as the Philadelphia Maritime Museum, encourages visitors to discover Philadelphia's river of history and world of connections. Stewards of the Olympia, a nineteenth-century cruiser, and the Becuna, a World War II-era submarine, ISM is home to interactive and award-winning exhibitions, one of the largest collections of historic maritime artifacts in the world and a boatbuilding workshop. Accredited by the American Association of Museums since the 1970s, it is a premier, year-round destination adjacent to Spruce Street Harbor Park on Penn's Landing. Visit daily from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and see our full schedule of programs and events at phillyseaport.org. Visit <https://www.phillyseaport.org/admissions-hours-of-operation/> to learn about ticket packages and guided tour options.

*Image: *Signals for Ships of War*, created under the direction of Admiral Richard Howe (1726-1799), Royal Navy, 1777, publication location unknown, notations and drawings completed in Pennsylvania, near Chester, Museum Purchase, 1990.200; *Figurehead Mary*, William Rush (1756-1833), circa 1815-20, wood and paint, Museum Purchase, 1983.001; *Medal Commemorating the Battle of Manila Bay*, Tiffany & Co., 1899, New York, bronze, Gift of Benjamin L. LaGarde, 1998.022.003; *River Scene of the Delaware at Beverly*, New Jersey, George Robert Bonfield (1805-1898), circa 1850, New Jersey, oil on canvas, Gift of James McCelland, 2021.017.