

National Capital Commandery

A Visit to the Mariners' Museum

On 11 March 2023 four companions, William Steagall, Peter Pennington, Phil Puckett, and Christian D. Orr, visited the Mariners' Museum at Hampton Roads, Virginia, about 180 miles south of Washington, DC. This day was the occasion of the 161st anniversary of the Battle of Hampton Roads, the first clash of the ironclad warships in the War Between the States.

The Ironclad Revolution exhibit chronicles the evolution of ironclads. The award-winning exhibit features the turret and hundreds of artifacts recovered from the wreck of the USS *Monitor* that was excavated off of Cape Hatteras in the 1970s and 1980s. An immersive film studio invites visitors to experience the historic 1862 battle between the *Monitor* and CSS *Virginia*. Some months later the *Monitor* sank in violent gale. Two side-by-side life size replicas show: first, how the turret looked when it was brought to the surface (covered with silt and containing human remains!) and second, how it looked when it was first constructed with its Dahlgren guns on a turntable track. The exhibit also contains recreated *Monitor* interiors such as ward rooms and crew quarters. Outside the exhibit, on the second floor, visitors can walk the deck of the full-scale model of the *Monitor* and ring the ship's bell.

The Museum offers a variety of exhibits documenting the history of the maritime world; not only the wartime eras, but the Age of Sail, and the advent of sea-going commerce and passenger ships. The ship model gallery has models of the great ocean liners as well as US Navy ships. The Miniature Ship Exhibit that displays 35 detailed models by the craftsman August Crabtree.

The Mariners' Museum is a thrill for anyone who loves naval history. William Steagall remarked that museum visits are the way our companions enjoy comradery "when it's too cold to play outside." In February Capital Commandery companions visited the Cold War Museum in the Washington, DC Navy Yard and in January it was the National Museum of the US Marine Corps in Quantico, Virginia.

Submitted by Judy Pearson, Ph.D.