



August 2022

VOLUME 14, NUMBER 3

In This Issue

[Robot adds human touch to underwater exploration](#)

[Community gathers to celebrate *Clipper* captain's centennial](#)

[Make a pledge for maritime heritage](#)

[New film highlights efforts to preserve beloved Detroit ferries](#)

[World War II tug comes home to Florida](#)

[SS Central America relics on display prior to fall auction](#)

[Federal grants to aid small shipyards](#)

[What's happening in ship history?](#)

[The Summer issue of *PowerShips* has landed](#)

[What you're missing on social media](#)



The Summer issue
of *PowerShips* has landed

Robot adds human touch to underwater exploration

A new piece of technology is bringing the phrase hands-on research to an entirely new level.

Although the ability to use submersible robots to explore shipwrecks deep below the surface of the ocean has been around for decades,

Stanford University's OceanOneK robot offers a touch-based feedback system that allows an operator on the surface to feel the water's resistance and even "touch"



items picked up by the unit. It also offers eight multi-directional thrusters and stereoscopic vision that allow it to be operated in sensitive environments.

"This is the first time that a robot has been capable of going to such a depth, interacting with the environment, and permitting the human operator to feel that environment," said Oussama Khatib, director of the Stanford Robotics Lab. "It has been an incredible journey."

The OceanOneK has already explored several wreck sites around the Mediterranean, including World War II P-38 Lightning aircraft, the submarine *Protee*, the second-century Roman ship *Aleria* and the Italian steamship *Francesco Crispi*. It was also able to dive to a depth of 1 kilometer (3,280 feet) thanks to a number of adjustments to the original OceanOne, which could only reach a depth of about 200 meters (656 feet). Researchers used a special foam made of glass microspheres to give the robot buoyancy and help it withstand the pressure at increased depths. They also filled the robot's arms with an oil and spring mechanism to cushion the electronics inside.

Although it is a new technology, it is already reaping rewards. The precision of the OceanOneK allowed archeologists to retrieve ancient vases from the *Aleria* that date back to the Roman Empire, and the crew was able to extend a boom camera into the fractured hull of the *Francesco Crispi* without disturbing the ruptured edges. The creators added that robots like these could create

Issue #322 of *PowerShips* magazine is available now, featuring the following stories:

- Away to Sea on P&O: Pt. 1
- Japan's Mitsui O.S.K. Lines
- A Resort At Sea: Delta Line
- The First Steamboat Race

Whether you're new to SSHSA or your membership has lapsed, it's not too late to come on board! Sign up or renew today by [clicking here](#) or calling our headquarters at (401) 463-3570. Don't miss out!

What you're missing on social media

If you don't follow us on social media, you may be missing out on a lot of exciting things going on at SSHSA. Click the icons and links below to check us out on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#), [Tumblr](#) and [YouTube](#) to stay up to date on all things #shiphistory.



exciting new opportunities for marine science and underwater engineering.

[Click here to read more from Stanford News.](#)

Caption: The OceanOneK robot undergoes testing prior to being deployed to wrecks throughout the Mediterranean this year. The humanoid submersible offers unprecedented access to operators at the surface. (Photo: RoboticsLab Stanford, courtesy of YouTube)

Community gathers to celebrate *Clipper* captain's centennial

There was really only one place that made sense for SSHSA member Capt. Bob Priefer to have his 100th birthday celebration – aboard the ship he has been taking care of for the last 80 years.

The crew of the SS *Milwaukee Clipper* invited the entire community on board for Capt. Bob's special day earlier this month. He has been working aboard the ship since 1941, starting off as a dishwasher and climbing the ranks all the way up to the bridge. He captained the ship from 1960-1969 and was at the helm for its final year of full service on the Great Lakes.



SSHSA was also happy to join in on the festivities by recognizing Capt. Bob as an Ambassador of Goodwill with a certificate presented at the event by longtime members Mr. and Mrs. James Plant.

Since the ship was pulled from service, Priefer has remained an advocate for the *Milwaukee Clipper*, which is a National Historic Landmark, part of the National Register of Historic Places, and SSHSA's 2004 Ship of the Year. She was built in 1904 as the *Juniata* and still maintains the 3,000-horsepower quadruple expansion steam engine built by the Detroit Shipbuilding Company.



SS *Central America* relics on display prior to fall auction

A group of unique items recovered from the so-called “Ship of Gold” is making some rare public appearances ahead of a planned auction in October.

The items were recovered from the wreck of the SS *Central America*, which sank in the Atlantic Ocean during a hurricane in 1857. Much of the headlines at the time (and since) have focused on the millions in gold that was reportedly on board and the economic panic that resulted. And while there are a few hints of gold in the items currently on display, they are largely personal effects of the more than 570 people on board, 425 of which perished.

The lot has been described by some as a time capsule of American life during the California Gold Rush. For instance, it contains a first-edition copy of *The Count of Monte Cristo*, a daguerreotype metal plate photograph of an unidentified young woman nicknamed “Mona Lisa of the Deep,” and a pair of canvas jeans that may have been made by Levi Strauss himself.

The existence of these artifacts has long been overshadowed by the recovery of a reported \$100 million in gold when the SS *Central America* was discovered in 1988. The discovery team, led by Tommy Gregory Thompson, was allowed to keep 92 percent of the gold (the rest was awarded to insurance companies that paid damages in the 19th century). But several investors and crew members sued Thompson saying that they never received promised investment returns, and Thompson has been in jail for the last seven years for failing to surrender 500 gold coins minted from the recovered gold.

Owned by the California Gold Marketing Group of Brea, California, the items are coming to auction after more than 20 years of storage because of a decades-long ownership dispute. They were displayed late last month at the National Antique Bottle Convention in Reno, Nevada, and are available for viewing at the Chicago World’s Fair of Money in Rosemont, Illinois, through Saturday, Aug. 20. The public’s last chance to see them before the auction will be at the HardRock Summit 2022 Gem and Jewelry Show in Denver from Sept. 8-11.

Capt. Bob was happy to share plenty of stories from his regular trips between Muskegon and Milwaukee, which includes rough weather and rescue operations that once included saving the *Milwaukee Clipper* owner’s dog.

There’s still plenty of work to be done on the historic ship and Priefer said he will pitch in as long as he can. Even though most people would be impressed just to get to 100, Priefer told reporters at the event that he isn’t ready to call it quits yet. “I’m shootin’ for a 110, what the heck.”

[Click here to see an interview with Capt. Bob courtesy of WZZM 13 in Western Michigan.](#)

Caption: The SS *Milwaukee Clipper* welcomed everyone aboard to celebrate Capt. Bob Priefer's 100th birthday. Priefer has worked with the ship since 1941 and was its captain for a decade. (Photo: WZZM 13, courtesy of YouTube)

Make a pledge for maritime heritage

SSHSA's Full Ahead! campaign is now in its public phase. We’ve managed to raise nearly \$2 million in gifts and pledges since we launched the comprehensive effort in 2020, thanks to all of our friends and members.

But the work continues. We are asking everyone out there who enjoys our publications, follows our social media accounts or frequents



www.shiphistory.org to please consider a donation or multi-year pledge to help SSHSA navigate rising costs, market uncertainty and whatever else awaits post-pandemic. Your contribution will help us remain vibrant and sustainable for decades to come.

Help us sustain and protect our maritime heritage for the next generation! Call, email or make your commitment online at www.fullaheadcampaign.org. We hope that the information is helpful, and invite you to contact us with any questions you may have.

[Click here for some great pictures from USA Today](#) highlighting some of the more than 1,000 unique items that were recovered.

Caption: A pair of jeans reportedly made by Levi Strauss was recovered from the wreck of the SS *Central America*. (Photo: USA Today, Jason Bean)

Federal grants to aid small shipyards

Last month, the U.S. Department of Transportation's Maritime Administration (MARAD) announced \$19.6 million in grant awards to 24 small shipyards in 19 states through the Small Shipyard Grant Program. The funds will help awardees modernize, increase productivity, and expand local employment opportunities while competing in the global marketplace.

"Small businesses are the lifeblood of the American economy, and small shipyards play a critical role in America's maritime industry, helping us get the goods we depend on every day," said U.S. Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg. "These grants will help modernize small shipyards in communities across the country, creating and protecting local jobs, strengthening America's maritime industry, and securing our economic future."

Since 2008, MARAD's Small Shipyard Grant Program has awarded \$282.2 million to nearly 300 shipyards in 32 states and territories throughout the U.S. They strengthen communities along and near our nation's ports and waterways. Many small shipyards are family-run businesses—and they are all enterprises in which small investments can make big differences.

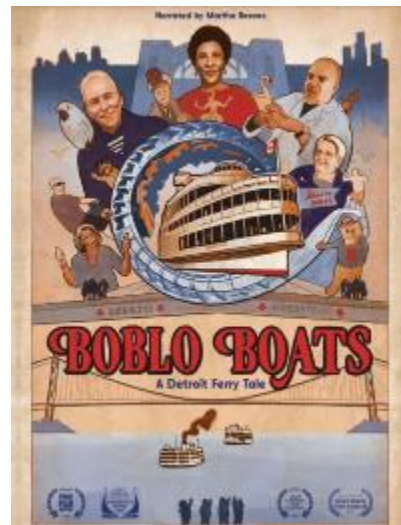
According to the Small Shipyard Grant Coalition, MARAD received 93 applications totaling nearly \$74 million for this round of funding. The grants can be used to purchase American-made manufacturing equipment or for training at shipyards with fewer than 1,200 employees. The goal is to help the shipyards make capital improvements to become more efficient and competitive in ship construction, repair and reconfiguration.

[Click here for a full list of grants awarded.](#)

New film highlights efforts to preserve beloved Detroit ferries

Two historic Great Lakes ferries are getting the Hollywood treatment in their home state of Michigan.

Boblo Boats: A Detroit Ferry Tale is getting a two-week theatrical release in select Detroit locations beginning on Sept. 16. The documentary highlights the history of Boblo Island amusement park and the struggles to save the two sister steamships that carried thousands of people there over nine decades, the SS *Columbia* and the *Ste Claire*.



SS *Columbia*, SSHSA's 2017 Ship of the Year, is presently owned by a New York-based nonprofit. They plan to resurrect *Columbia* into a traveling museum and event space and are currently based in Buffalo. Meanwhile, the status of the *Ste Claire* is discussed, including the challenges to keep the hull afloat after a devastating 2019 fire.

The filmmakers are promising a unique experience that features the SS *Columbia* as a character voiced by Motown legend Martha Reeves. Rosy memories of Boblo Island are interspersed with the history of segregation in America's early amusement parks. That includes the efforts of Sarah E. Ray, an African American woman whose legal challenge not only forced the integration of Boblo Island but also played a key role in the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision that struck down the separate but equal doctrine in 1954, and the tale of Sugar Island, an amusement park purchased by African Americans in 1945 in retaliation against Boblo's segregationist policies.

The film utilizes several animation sequences to enrich the film and draw the viewer into Boblo Island. Ray's fight to integrate Boblo Island is depicted using stop motion animation with handcrafted puppets instead of the more conventional presentation of archival footage.

Boblo Boats: A Detroit Ferry Tale premiered at the 2021 Freep Film Festival and won the Hometown Talent Award. [Click here more information on where the film is playing, or to purchase tickets.](#)

Contact Us

Steamship Historical Society of America
2500 Post Road
Warwick, RI 02886
(401) 463-3570
www.sshsa.org

Matthew Schulte, Executive Director
mschulte@sshsa.org

Bryan Lucier, Membership and Outreach Specialist
blucier@sshsa.org

Astrid Drew, Archivist
adrew@sshsa.org

Aimee Bachari, Education Director
steam@sshsa.org

Michele Berard,
Senior Philanthropic Adviser
mberard@sshsa.org

Amy Rajack, Administrative Assistant
arajack@sshsa.org

Heather Kisilywicz, Assistant Archivist
archives@sshsa.org

Tessa Mediano, Assistant Archivist
library@sshsa.org

Alissa Cafferky, Project Coordinator
acafferky@sshsa.org

Jim Pennypacker, Editor
PowerShips
editor@sshsa.org

Richard Barwis,
Advertising Representative
richard@cornerstone-media.biz

(Photo courtesy of boblboatsfilm.com)

World War II tug comes home to Florida

The Jacksonville Port Authority's Talleyrand Marine Terminal facilitated the return of a historic, made-in-Florida World War II tugboat last month to the United States.

The tug, *Tiger* ST-479, arrived from Sweden aboard the Spliethoff multi-purpose vessel *Snoekgracht*. The Spliethoff crew lifted the 140-ton tug onto the St. Johns River using the cargo vessel's onboard cranes. Towing services provider Cross State Towing guided the 86-foot-long, 30-foot-tall tug to a private dock in Jacksonville.



The body of the tug was built in 1944 near DeLand, Florida, and its engine was installed in Jacksonville. During the war, the tug is believed to have been used as a multi-purpose vessel to conduct rescue missions and carry supplies from England to Normandy, France, following the historic invasion.

DeLand Historic Trust President Dan Friend worked with JAXPORT's Director of Specialty Cargo Rick Schiappacasse to ensure the tug's safe return to Florida. Private owners donated the vessel to the trust, which plans to use it as a national monument in Central Florida dedicated to the crews and builders of U.S. Army harbor tugs.

"This is an incredible survivor. It is the only one to ever come home to where it was built," Friend said. "We are just over the cloud, over the top, that this is going to come home. Rick was extremely supportive and provided information that was crucial to getting this done."

The *Tiger* is one of 29 tugboats built in a factory on Lake Beresford in DeLand. Friend told News 6 in Orlando that he created a website dedicated to the tugboats and received a call from a couple in Sweden saying that they had one and were willing to donate it if he could pay for the transport. An anonymous donor gave the group \$200,000 to bring it to Jacksonville, and the group is continuing to raise money for paint, transportation and monument costs while it works with local officials to find a permanent home.

[Click here for more information about the project.](#)

Caption: Workers at the Jacksonville Port Authority help offload the World War II tugboat *Tiger* into the St. Johns River. The boat had spent more than 70 years in Sweden until recently being donated to a Florida nonprofit. (Photo: Jacksonville Port Authority)

What's happening in ship history?

This is a brief listing, so make sure to check locally for what's going on in your area.

August 20

Tour of the J.W. Westcott Company facilities and boats
10:00 to 11:30 AM
\$30 for members, \$40 for nonmembers; [click here to purchase tickets](#)
Detroit Historical Society
Detroit, MI
www.detroithistorical.org

August 20 and 21

Antique Marine Engine Expo
10:00 AM to 4:00 PM
\$27 for adults, \$25 for senior citizens, \$23 for children ages 13-17, and \$19 for children ages 4-12
Mystic Seaport Museum
Mystic, CT
www.mysticseaport.org

August 27

Charity Boat Auction
8:00 AM to 12:00 PM
Free for members and children younger than 5, \$5 for nonmembers prior to 11 a.m. (regular admission rates apply after that time)
Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum
St. Michaels, MD
www.cbmm.org

September 3

Boarded! A New Pirate Adventure
10:30 AM and 12:45 PM
\$60 for adults, \$25 for children age 12 and younger; [click here to purchase tickets](#)
San Diego Maritime Museum
San Diego, CA
www.sdmaritime.org

September 10

Pints on the Pier
4:00 to 7:30 PM
Free
Maine Maritime Museum
Bath, ME
www.mainemaritimemuseum.org

September 13

The T2 Tankers That Helped Win World War II

6:00 to 7:00 PM

\$5 for in-person admission, donation suggested for Zoom attendance; [click here to register](#)

Houston Maritime Center

Houston, TX

www.houstonmaritime.org



Ahoy! is the quarterly electronic newsletter for those interested in maritime history. It is produced in February, May, August, and November and distributed by Steamship Historical Society of America to friends, members and any other individuals interested in maritime heritage.

Bryan Lucier, Editor, Ahoy!

SSHSA is a nonprofit 501(c) 3 organization funded by donations from members and friends. SSHSA is dedicated to sharing the maritime heritage of powerful ships, legendary passengers and hardworking crews. Gifts to SSHSA are appreciated and may be considered tax-deductible.

Miss an issue of Ahoy!? Click here for our online archive.

Renew Your Membership Today

SSHSA, 2500 Post Road, Warwick, RI 02886