

THE MIRROR

The Richmond Museum Association Newsletter

Richmond Museum of History & Culture

Spring, 2020

SS Red Oak Victory

RICHMOND AND THE SPANISH FLU OF 1918

The City of Richmond has successfully managed pandemics in the past. The Museum staff located a dossier of primary source material detailing Richmond's response to the Spanish Flu just over 100 year ago.

In March 1918, the first cases of Spanish Flu were reported by the U.S. Army as troops mobilized for transport to Europe to



engage in World War I. The Spanish Flu reached the City of Richmond by fall 1918 and the epidemic was heavily covered in the *Richmond Daily Independent* newspaper between the periods of October 1918 and Jan 1919.



CLOSED TEMPORARILY: THE RICHMOND MUSEUM OF HISTORY AND CULTURE AND THE SS RED OAK VICTORY SHIP

It is no secret by now that both the Richmond Museum of History and Culture and the Red Oak Victory ship are closed to the public for the foreseeable future. The closures are due to health concerns related to the novel coronavirus, COVID-19, which is sweeping the planet at this time. As of this writing, the closures will be in effect officially through May 3, 2020. We hope to be able to reopen soon thereafter.

As we grapple with the new normal that is sheltering in place and masks, let's take the opportunity to pause and gain inspiration from local history. The City of Richmond has weathered periods of tremendous hardship in the past, and our community will emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic stronger and more resilient.

Check out our website and social media pages for additional coverage of Richmond's response to the Spanish Flu.

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

by Lynn Maack

I am honored to be the new president of the Richmond Museum Association. I look forward to working with the Richmond Museum of History and Culture and the *Red Oak Victory* ship to help bring greater visibility and sustainability to both. It is heartening that we have competent and dedicated board members, staff at the Museum and crew on the Ship to keep us moving in a positive direction.

This issue of *The MIRROR* comes at a challenging time for everyone as the COVID-19 virus works its way through the world's population. Not unaffected, the RMA has seen fit to close its two venues—the Museum in the historic Carnegie Library building at 4th and Nevin and the *Red Oak Victory* ship in Richmond's historic Shipyard No. 3. The closings were initiated in the interest of the health of the visiting public and our staff and volunteers. Initially, both venues were set to be closed through April 6, but new rulings from the State of California have led us to remain closed through May 3. We hope to be able to reopen soon thereafter. Time will tell. And we will tell you when we do.

The closings are having a direct impact on both the Museum and the Ship. The *Red Oak Victory* suffered the loss of two on-board events so far, which means a loss of much-needed revenue to the Ship. The Museum is currently displaying its latest temporary exhibit, "*Between Two Worlds: Untold Stories of Refugees from Laos.*" The well-curated exhibit had a rousing grand opening on March 1, and now we are dismayed that we are unable to open the doors to show it. It's a loss to the Museum, a loss to the Laotian community, and a loss to the public. However, you can view the exhibit online at <https://richmondpulse.org/2020/03/12/exhibit-shows-untold-stories-of-laotian-refugees/>.

Now for some good news: The RMA welcomes our newest board members, Rebecca Riley and Marvin Collins! At our Annual Membership Meeting on February 29, the membership elected the four board candidates put forth by our nominating committee. Returning for additional terms are yours truly and Jeffrey Wright, and coming on board anew are Rebecca and Marvin.

Both Rebecca and Marvin have hit the ground running; Rebecca is taking charge of our Fundraising Committee, always a formidable task, and Marvin is leading the way on our Mural Committee, whose mission is to restore and display the mural by Victor Arnautoff, "Richmond Industrial City." Again, welcome to the board, Rebecca and Marvin!

Also at the Annual Meeting, the members adopted several amendments to the RMA bylaws that had been distributed in advance to all members, and fellow board member Karen Buchanan entertained everyone with her presentation of "Colorful Characters in Richmond History." Karen posed various trivia questions throughout her presentation and even handed out

prizes for correct answers! Thanks, Karen! (I won one....)

At the first regular board meeting on March 18, the board elected its officers for the coming year. I was elected president, John Ziesenhenné, vice-president, Vinay Pimplé, treasurer, and Karen Buchanan, recording secretary. Thank you all for taking on the responsibilities of your respective offices. Congratulations to us!

A Not-so-Subtle Plea for Donations

So the Museum and the *Red Oak Victory* ship remain closed for the time being. However, our need for donations continues unabated. In fact, the need has only increased with our inability to hold events and rent out space. Please consider donating to the RMA now. You can specify the Museum or the Ship, if you wish, or simply the RMA. The funds will go to the greatest need. All donations are greatly appreciated. Please visit our website at www.richmondmuseum.org and click DONATE.

Thank you for your help in these trying times.

Stay healthy, friends.

This Space is NOT Blank. [Ed.]

FROM THE DIRECTOR

Dear Friends:

I hope everyone is staying safe and healthy during this uncertain time. In light of still-rising COVID-19 virus-related hospitalization and mortality reports, the Museum will remain closed through at least May 3, 2020, in order to abide by the Bay Area-wide shelter-in-place orders.

As we all stay in our homes, the Museum is seeking new ways to serve our audience while the physical location at 400 Nevin Avenue is closed. We are working with various partners to create online programs that will provide our community with much-needed engagement and education. Please see our list of upcoming online programs on page 6. Also, please check our website at www.richmondmuseum.org for the most current information related to COVID-19-related closures.

We look forward to the time, hopefully soon, when we can once again open our doors to the public.



Take care of yourself and others during this time. Check in on your neighbors, especially the elderly and other high-risk individuals. We can still connect even if we are at a minimum of six feet apart.

Please stay home and stay well.

With gratitude,

Melinda McCrary

MUSEUM WISH LIST

The Museum, like all non-profit organizations, always seeks and greatly appreciates donations, monetary and otherwise. Here is a list of things we need to help us put on exhibits and events to bring you history you can enjoy:

- Wooden clothes hangers
- Compost
- Legal writing pads
- Unbleached muslin fabric
- Quilt batting

If you can donate these items, contribute to their purchase or volunteer, please email the Museum at info@richmondmuseumofhistory.org, or visit our website, www.richmondmuseum.org and click **DONATE**.

RED OAK WISH LIST:

The *Red Oak Victory* ship needs a lot of attention. We hope you can help. We appreciate all donations, large and small, monetary and otherwise. Here is a list of physical things the Ship needs; some of them are very specific—please visit the Ship's website at (510) 237-2933 to get details:

Fund the Ship for a Day (go to www.redoakvictory.us and click the Donate button

Starboard-side steel hull plate replacement (to donate, email us at info@redoakvictory.us to make arrangements)

Restore the insulation (lagging) on our high-pressure turbine

Clean and re-hang the curtains in the Theater

Upgrade the sound system in the Theater

Improved lighting for Hold 5

Replica light shades to replace those lost or broken throughout the Ship

New hatch-cover canvas for Hold 2

Spill kit

Emergency locker with lid, 3' x 4'

AA batteries

Seat cushions for the Theater seats

Safety cones

Paint, paint, and more paint!

To make a donation, go to the website at www.redoakvictory.us and click the Donate button. This will allow you to give to our **Fund the Ship for a Day** campaign and will also give you instructions on how to donate by check or credit card. If you wish more information about any of our on-going programs and how you can help, please email us at info@redoakvictory.us.

Thank you for your help and support for both the Museum and the Red Oak Victory!

FROM THE *RED OAK VICTORY* SHIP

by Fred Klink, Marketing Director, Red Oak Victory

Like all of the other historic ships around the country and the world, the SS *Red Oak Victory* has been quiet for the last month due to the COVID-19 shutdown. We are not allowed to bring visitors on board and only a skeleton crew is working to provide essential services to the Ship. The current shutdown is officially set to go through May 3, although we have every reason to believe that it will continue beyond that.

As a result of this shutdown, we lost over \$3,000 in revenue when a large group rental had to be canceled and a movie company postponed their filming schedule. We have also made the difficult decision to cancel one of our most popular (and profitable) annual events—the Mother’s Day Pancake Breakfast on May 10. At this time, we are planning to hold the other four Pancake Breakfasts (June 21, August 9, September 13, October 11), and perhaps add a fifth breakfast later in the year. We’re keeping our fingers crossed that we do not have to cancel any more events.

Even though our Ship is shut down to visitors, our monthly costs continue to accrue. It costs, on average, \$4000 per month simply to keep the *Red Oak Victory* tied to the pier. These costs cover some basic services such as trash, internet, bookkeeping and insurance. When we break these costs down to a daily basis and consider that we are normally open to the public for four days per week, we find that we need to generate \$250 in revenue per day to break even. When we are open to the public and have an active event schedule we generate well in excess of this daily amount when averaged over the course of the year.

But, as we all know, these are not normal circumstances and we are not open to the public and therefore we are not generating any revenue to cover the on-going costs of maintaining the Ship. This situation is the basis for a new fund-raising idea called ***Fund the Ship for a Day***, which we will launch in April. Donors can choose one of four donation levels:

- Fund the Ship for a Half-Day: \$125
- Fund the Ship for a Day: \$250
- Fund the Ship for a Month: \$1,000
- Fund the Ship for Any Amount

Donors may also designate a recurring, monthly gift to the Ship. Donations can be made through a PayPal account or by using a credit card. The donation page will be on our website (<http://redoakvictory.us/support-us/donate/>) and we will promote this donation program through social media and advertising on Facebook and other platforms.

So, even though you can’t visit us right now, you can do a lot to help the *Red Oak Victory*. Please consider donating to the ***Fund the Ship for a Day*** program as soon and as generously as you can.

Home is the Sailor, Home From the Sea

Fred Klink, Marketing Director, Red Oak Victory

In December 1944, a kid from New Jersey, fresh out of boot camp, reported aboard the USS *Red Oak Victory* (AK-235). The



Bob DiChiara on the USS Red Oak Victory, ca 1946

seventeen-year old didn’t know anything about service in the U.S. Navy as he reported aboard the first ship he had ever been on. Hardly anyone was aboard yet, so the sailor scouted around and settled into a pretty nice-looking cabin. Thinking this Navy life might be alright after all, he dozed off into a contented sleep.

Sometime in the dark of night, the unfortunate teenager was lifted bodily from his rack, flew through the air, and crashed heavily into the bulkhead. While this was happening, a loud, gruff voice shouted “What the hell are you doing in my quarters?!!!” The young sailor had unwittingly settled into the cabin of the most senior Chief Petty Officer on the ship!



Petty Officers of the Red Oak Victory bridge crew. Bob DiChiara is at far right.

a vital part of the *Red Oak Victory*’s bridge crew. After participation in the Okinawa and Philippine Campaigns, the young Petty Officer and the *Red Oak Victory* headed home in May, 1946.

That young sailor was Robert DiChiara, and he became a great supporter of the *Red Oak Victory* and a friend to many of
(Continued, next page)

Home is the Sailor (Continued from p. 4)

her modern-day crew over the past twenty years. He sent us many photographs and other memorabilia of his time on the Ship as well as sharing numerous stories such as the one related above. I personally spent more than an hour on the phone with Bob one time listening to all of his sea stories about World War II, the *Red Oak Victory*, and the other men and officers of the Ship. After that, we began exchanging emails which were often in Morse code—he was, after all, a Signaller!

Bob passed away in February of this year at the age of 93. He and I had last communicated in August, 2019 (in Morse code, of course!), and he expressed how excited he was that we were planning to get the *Red Oak Victory* underway again. In spite of the fact that he had only been on the Ship for 18 months, seventy-five years ago, it was obvious that old AK-235 held a very special place in Bob's heart.

It seems that Bob also held a very special place not just in the hearts of our crew but many others as well. His self-described "boating friend," Rhoda Bender, penned this memory shortly after his passing:

He truly loved his boat, "JoyBob," and spent every possible sunny weekend on it with the love of his life, Joyce. He took great pride in it and always enjoyed inviting friends over for a drink or a wonderful home cooked dinner (which he always cooked himself). He travelled a great deal on it, to Newport, RI, Block Island, RI, Nantucket, Massachusetts, Greenwich, CT, Stamford, CT, just to mention a few.

He took his family aboard the JoyBob to the Centennial July 4th celebration in New York harbor amid hundreds of other boats. He was always finding fun things to do and interesting places to go with his boat.

Bob was also a wonderful artist. He spent many peaceful hours with his paintbrush and easel and did beautiful work!

He was a devoted husband. He always took such fabulous care of Joyce and made sure that she was safe and well at all times. Bob was a fabulous friend with a ready joke and a smile for all. I never saw him sad or depressed and he cheered everyone with his wit and humor. Everybody loved him and he will be sorely missed by many.

All of us on the *Red Oak Victory* are saddened that we have lost not just a member of the greatest generation but also a member of our family. Rest in peace, sailor.

MOVIES ON THE SHIP

Unfortunately, the *Red Oak Victory* ship will be closed until further notice due to coronavirus safety concerns and social distancing requirements. Consequently, *Movies on the Ship* will not be shown for the remainder of this season.

Meanwhile, we'd like to show you what you're missing and remind you how much fun the movie program is so you'll be tempted to return when we reopen, because these movies may be shown later in the year. Stay tuned.

Join us as the National Park Service presents its "**Third Thursday Movie Program, Spring 2020**" on board the historic SS *Red Oak Victory*. The movies are shown every third Thursday night and are hosted by former Park Ranger Craig Riordan of the Rosie the Riveter WWII Home Front National Historical Park, who provides enlightening, behind-the-scenes tidbits for your entertainment.

The movies begin at 7:00 p.m., with boarding from 6:30. Admission is free, but we suggest a donation of \$10 per person to help preserve and maintain the Ship. Refreshments are available for a small fee.

Please note that the Ship is not ADA accessible. Visitors must be able to climb a gangway of about 40 steps, with railings, and steep steps, some more like ladders, once aboard the Ship. Also note that the movies are sometimes two hours or longer; please refer to times (and you might want to bring a seat cushion).

This season's movie theme is:

"On the Other Hand – a Lighter Look at a Very Serious Time"

April 16: "*Biloxi Blues*," starring Mathew Broderick (1:47). Based on the Neil Simon play, a young draftee, Eugene, from Brooklyn, works to survive boot camp.

May 21: "*Victory*," starring Michael Caine and Sylvester Stallone (1:57). A team of Allied POWs plays a soccer game against a German all-star team. The Germans are hoping for great propaganda; will it work out the way they planned?

CURRENT AND UPCOMING EVENTS

At the Museum

Current Exhibit -- via video; read on.

March 1 thru May 29, 2020: “Between Two Worlds: Untold Stories of Refugees from Laos.”

Curated by the Center for Lao Studies, this exhibit gives insight into the struggles and progress of the Lao people from their history through several centuries in Asia to the emigration of some to the United States post-Vietnam-war.

Unfortunately, this exhibit is closed to visitors due to the coronavirus shutdown, but you can “visit” it via video online at <https://richmondpulse.org/2020/03/12/exhibit-shows-untold-stories-of-laotian-refugees/>.



Upcoming Events - via Zoom

Saturday April 18, 2020 5:00 PM PST

Film Screening & Zoom Room Conversation
 Film Screening: Juan B. Alvarado Governor of Alta California (1836-1842) 20 minutes.

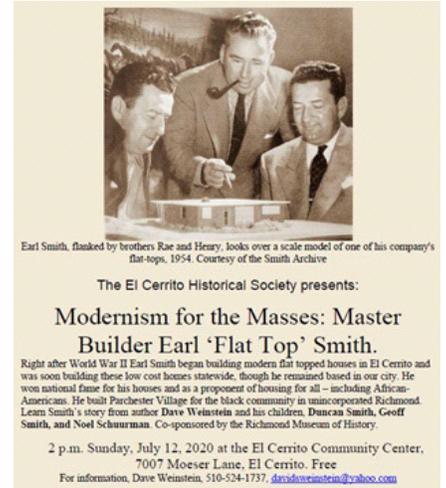
Join us on Zoom for a screening of an original documentary film on the life of Gov. Juan B. Alvarado by David Anaya. This program is co-sponsored by the San Pablo Historical and Museum Society. Join us on Zoom: <https://4cd.zoom.us/j/825993579>.



A Co-sponsored Museum Event

July 12, 2020: “Modernism for the Masses”

The Museum is pleased to partner with the El Cerrito Historical Society in presenting “Modernism for the Masses,” the story of Earl “Flat Top” Smith, who began building modern, flat-topped houses in El Cerrito after World War II and won national fame for his design for housing for all, including African Americans. He built Parchester Village for the black community in unincorporated Richmond in the late 1940s. Hear about it from author Dave Weinstein of the El Cerrito Historical Society at 2:00 p.m. on Sunday, July 12, 2020, at the El Cerrito Community Center, 7007 Moeser Lane, El Cerrito.



On the Red Oak Victory Ship

Pancake Breakfasts (if COVID-19 shutdown orders are lifted)

If all goes well, our famous Sunday Pancake Breakfasts will be returning in another month or so. Breakfast is \$12 for adults, \$5.00 for kids and includes pancakes, eggs, bacon, juice, coffee and, for a bit extra, mimosas.

After your meal, if you can drag yourself away from the view, you can take a tour of the Ship. On Pancake Breakfast days, we offer \$5.00 discounts per ship tour—self-guided tours (with booklet) are free; docent-guided tours are 10.00; docent-guided tours including the Engine Room are \$15.00.

Tickets will be available on-line and via phone; or just pay at the gate. Breakfast hours are 9:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Here is the hoped-for schedule:

- June 21
- August 9
- September 13
- October 11 - Fleet Week

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___ \$35 **History Ally**—Seniors aged 62 and over—Benefits include quarterly e-newsletter and free admission for one to the Richmond Museum of History and the SS Red Oak Victory

___ \$50 **History Enthusiast**—Benefits include one digital file of a photo in the permanent collection for personal use

___ \$100 **History Advocate**—2 adults/2 youth—Benefits above and one hour of staff research time

___ \$250 **History Guardian**—Benefits above and “Behind the Scenes” tour of permanent collection

___ \$500 **History Patron**—Benefits above and one ad in ***The MIRROR*** newsletter

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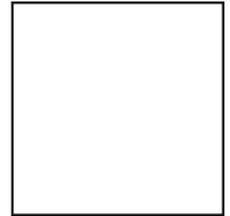
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Join at www.richmondmuseum.org or mail a check to RMA at:

Richmond Museum Association
 P.O. Box 1267
 Richmond CA 94802



P.O. Box 1267
Richmond, CA 94802

Join the Richmond Museum Association on social media! We are on Facebook under Richmond Museum of History and *SS Red Oak Victory* (two separate pages). We are also on twitter @richmondhistory.

*The **Richmond Museum Association** is a 501 (C) 3 non-profit educational organization. Gifts and donations are tax-deductible to the full extent allowed by law.*

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Red Oak Victory Ship

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Richmond Museum of History & Culture

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