

European Maritime Museums

NEW BEDFORD, MASSACHUSETTS - Maritime museums can be one of the most interesting places for someone who enjoys maritime history. There is no question that it takes a special person to plan a trip, especially to Europe, to just visit maritime museums. However, Robert Hauser and his father, Albert, did just that when they visited six German marine museums.

Robert Hauser is the conservator at the Whaling Museum in New Bedford. His specialty is the preservation of paper materials, including log books, charts, documents and prints.

Hauser explained about the trip, saying, "The object was to go over with my father who was in the U.S. Coast Guard service and came from Germany in 1927. He wanted to go back and look at maritime sites and maritime museums in Germany. I wanted to go because of my maritime interests and the work I do at the Whaling Museum and to see what preservation efforts were being done in Europe."

With a little research they found six locations that they wanted to visit. "Working from the most important, most complete maritime history of Germany one will want to go to the Germany Shipping Museum, which is in Bremerhaven," explained Hauser. "Here you have sail and power and the different examples of ships they have preserved from a 19th century bark, *Die Seute Deern*, which translated means "The Sweet Girl" to a submarine and destroyer. I also found in there information about the whale ship *Progress*, which was from New Bedford in 1850. They did demonstrate wood preservation of a hull of a 12th century "carrack." I also had an interest in the figurehead collection and found many types of figureheads, from figureheads used on freighters to battleships."

Probably the most interesting and the place I would go back to immediately," added Hauser, "was the Viking-Haithabu Museum in Schleswig. It was about some archaeological work that went back to 1900. In 1985 they put together a museum

with all their findings. From the settlement, which dates back to 800-1100 A.D., they had reconstructed from their archaeological findings a facsimile of the Viking vessel. It was still under construction but was on exhibit under an exhibit gallery. They had information on how they lived and the lay-out of the site. Someone who has been in the museum profession, not an archaeological museum, but a regular museum having to deal with exhibits, will find this incredibly well put together."

As for German maritime history during World War II, the Hausers found the Technical Maritime/Submarine Museum/Memorial in Laboe. Hauser said, "It was really more than submarines; it encompassed the entire maritime history of the first World War to the Second World War. It was a very different point of view from what we might perceive. The memorial seems to take a lot of pride in the technical accomplishments of how the ships were built and what they could do rather than in the actual events of the ships and their outcome. They had some very large scale models, one of which must have been upwards of 25-feet in length of the *Bismark*. They were just great examples of model shipbuilding. They also had the submarine *U995* which we went into."

"One of the most unusual museums we visited was the Wreck Museum in Cuxhaven," said Hauser. "Almost anything that was brought up that had some curiosity about it found its way to this museum. There was really no history that they focused on, they did write a little story on what they found. As a result there was some surprises. For me there were some figureheads that I did not expect to find there. They had 1,500 artifacts from sunken vessels and their claim was that 3,000-4,000 vessels were wrecked in the North and Baltic Seas. You were always frustrated because you couldn't get the full story. Sometimes they wouldn't even tell you where they came from. It probably could have been sorted out if you spent any



Robert Hauser standing in front of the German Warship figurehead at the German Shipping Museum.

length of time there."

"The Lightship Museum (in Lubeck) was important to my father because he was in the lightship service and was involved in supply and maintenance from Maine to New York," said Hauser. The lightship was 145-feet length overall, 200 tons, carried a crew of 12 and was built in 1908. She was in service until 1963 when it was

replaced by an automatic light structure.

Unfortunately, the Hausers never made it to the Altonaer Museum in Hamburg. This is an excellent marine research facility that houses 40,000 books on all aspects of the marine world. "This evidently cannot be missed if you are

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involved with any type of scholarship," said Hauser. "I can't speak for its exhibits, but I understand it is an excellent research facility."

How do the West German maritime museums compare to ones here in the U.S.? Hauser said, "I would say vessels that they maintain are better cared for than those here in the U.S. which tend to be mostly private. The size of the vessels in the German museum you had the sense that they could put to sea. At the German

National Maritime Museum there was a conscious effort to save vessels that filled in parts of history. It was also centralized. We may have achieved the same effects only we have everything spread out. Also, I don't know where we have anything comparable to their war maritime museum."

"It helped me in understanding some of the foreign maritime museums," said Hauser, "but admittedly it was a very quick review of things. It was basically a pilot trip for maybe a more serious trip later."