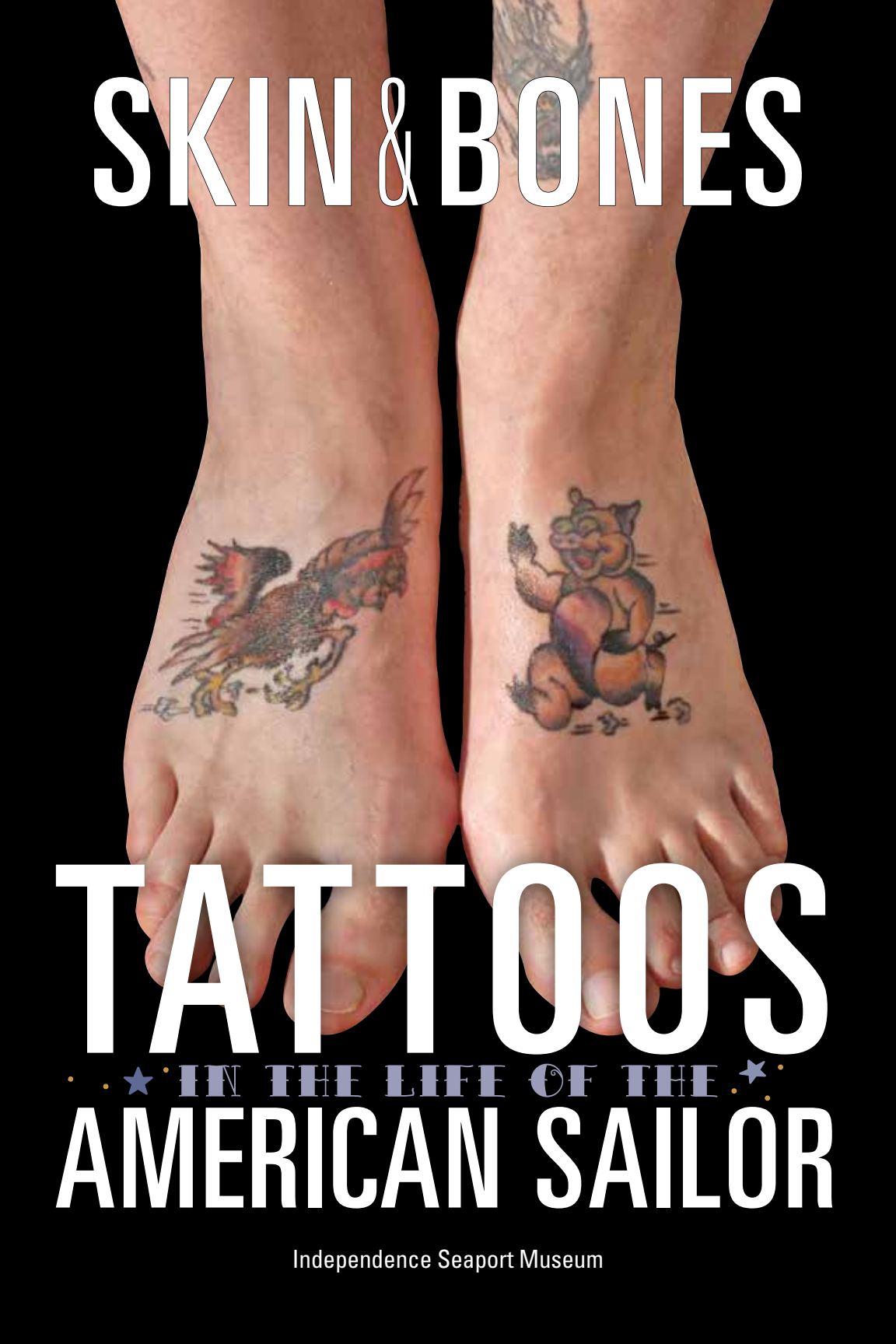

SKIN & BONES

TATTOOS

IN THE LIFE OF THE AMERICAN SAILOR

Independence Seaport Museum

SKIN & BONES

TATTOOS

IN THE LIFE OF THE AMERICAN SAILOR

Craig Bruns, Curator

Independence Seaport Museum
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
April 14, 2009 – January 3, 2010

Mystic Seaport Museum
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Front Cover Illustration: The tattooed feet of U.S. Coast Guard Chief Warrant Officer Richard Sambenedetto, Jr., of Philadelphia, keeping alive the long-held sailor belief that a pig and rooster on their feet will prevent drowning at sea.

Back Cover Illustration: The tattooed hands of Richard Sambenedetto, Jr.
Front and back cover photographs by Tom Gralish, 2008.

Hope Corse, Michele DiGirolamo, Sue Levy and Marty Jones, Philadelphia, Editors
Hanna Manninen, Philadelphia, Designer
Independence Seaport Museum, Philadelphia, Publisher

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FOREWORD

J. Welles Henderson, founder of Independence Seaport Museum, Philadelphia, collected three pieces of tattoo flash in 1962, well before the tattoo renaissance of recent decades made tattoos fashionable and ubiquitous. Henderson was merely following his passion for all things maritime and recognized the importance of tattoos in his perpetual quest to document the life of the sailor.

When Independence Seaport Museum Curator Craig Bruns realized the idea for an exhibit featuring tattoos in the maritime world, he was only partially aware of the amazing stories and body of material culture he was about to discover. As he researched, prepared for the exhibit, and built relationships in the tattoo community he embarked upon a comprehensive journey that has resulted in what tattoo historians have pronounced a groundbreaking exhibit. Independence Seaport Museum has become the first Philadelphia cultural institution, and perhaps the first museum, to have a historically based exhibit exploring the symbiotic relationship between the tattoo community and the seaman.

In Bruns' exploration of this relationship, he discovered the origins of the tattoo in the United States and how the symbolism and meaning of tattoos have a direct connection to a sailor's duty and responsibility. Bruns aptly demonstrates how boredom aboard ships created a necessity to make things – valentines, scrimshaw, and tattoos. Tattoos became a secret language, a symbol for community, marks of brotherhood, devices perceived to offer protection, memory for significant events, or an initiation rite. These themes continue today for those in military service as well as the larger community...

Bruns found that the art of the tattoo runs deep in Philadelphia maritime history. The exhibit, and the catalogue, opens the door to the wealth of stories, artifacts, and the colorful cast of characters that make up the maritime tattoo story.

Researching and interpreting any aspect of the sailor's life is important to Independence Seaport Museum's mission, so an exhibit about sailors and tattoos is a perfect fit. Warm and sincere thanks to Craig Bruns for his tireless research and innovative presentation of the *Skin & Bones* exhibit and catalogue.

A cooperative effort from the staff enabled the exhibit to be created. Several Seaport staff members, including Collections Manager Sue Levy, Director of the J.Welles Henderson Archives and Library Matt Herbison, and former staff member Courtney Smerz diligently assisted the project. Director of Development Michele Blazer secured funding for the exhibit and Director of Communications Michele DiGirolamo lent her editing skills to the exhibit text panels and catalogue.

Drawing, detail, tattoo flash, Sailor Eddie Evans, *circa* 1960. Colored pencil and ink on board. Independence Seaport Museum: Gift courtesy of J. Welles Henderson [00.791]

Much appreciation is also due to the many institutions and people who supported the exhibition.

Local artist Paul Cava and Kathy Foster, Curator of the Department of American Art at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, offered crucial support for the exhibit.

There were many lenders of artifacts and information, without whom the exhibit could not have been staged. In addition to those listed on the following page, some must be singled out for special mention, beginning with C.W. Eldridge of the Tattoo Archive, Madame Chinchilla and Mr. G of the Triangle Tattoo & Museum, and Barbi Spieler and Anita Duquette of the Whitney Museum of American Art.

Contributors to the research that fueled the exhibit include Nick Schonberger, C.W. Eldridge, Troy Timpel of Tattooed Kingpin, and *Hori Smoku* filmmaker Erich Weiss. Contributing their own stories, which helped illuminate Philadelphia's tattoo history, were tattooists Edward R. Denny, aka Sailor Eddie, Jr., and Edward Funk, aka Philadelphia Eddie , as well as John O'Meally, with his recounting of being in the U.S. Navy. Alex Baker of the National Gallery of Victoria, Australia, and David McCarthy of Rhodes College provided information that led to a better understanding of H.C. Westermann's military life and connection to tattoos, and Thomas Moore, curator of an earlier tattoo exhibit at The Mariners' Museum, gave access to his research.

Special thanks to Keith Brand and Diana Nicolae, associate professors at Rowan University, and students Jon Horwitz and Tom Oceanak, for producing the exhibit's oral history video documentary and the following members of the U.S. Coast Guard, Delaware Bay Sector Station, Philadelphia, who shared their tattoos in the documentary – Mark Lumaque, Emilio Mercado, Darrell Walter, and especially Richard Sambenedetto, Jr., whose tattooed feet are the iconic image of the exhibit and catalogue. The Coast Guard connection would not have been possible without the organizational assistance of the Coast Guard's Britton Henderson. We have high esteem for Hanna Manninen, who made Herculean efforts in designing the exhibit posters, opening invitations, text panels, and catalogue – all on tight deadlines during the pregnancy and delivery of her second child.

Sincere appreciation also goes to the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission for its support of the exhibit.

Lastly, I am deeply grateful to the members of the Board of Port Wardens for their support and commitment to bringing innovative programming to Independence Seaport Museum.

Lori Dillard Rech
Past President
Independence Seaport Museum
April 2009

LENDERS TO *SKIN & BONES*

INSTITUTIONS

Dietrich American Foundation, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Estate of Richard Dietrich
Fleisher/Ollman Gallery, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
The Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender and Reproduction, Bloomington, Indiana
The Library Company, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
The Magazine, San Francisco, California
The Mariners' Museum, Newport News, Virgnia
Mystic Seaport Museum, Mystic, Connecticut
Navy Art Collection, Washington, D.C.
Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Massachusetts
Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Sailor Jerry, Ltd., Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Seaport Museum New York, New York City, New York
Tattoo Archive, Winston-Salem, North Carolina
Triangle Tattoo & Museum, Fort Bragg, California
University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, New York

INDIVIDUALS

Dr. Robert and Katharine Booth
Edward R. Denny, aka "Sailor Eddie, Jr."
T.H.P. Henderson
David McCarthy
Patricia and Robert Marks
Nick Schonberger
Troy Timpel

We apologize for any omissions.

Street sign, *Philadelphia Eddie's Tattooing*, 621 South 4th Street, 1980s. Painted wood with hardware. Loan courtesy of Troy Timpel, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

UPDATE

Independence Seaport Museum, Philadelphia is proud to have its exhibition, *Skin & Bones – Tattoos in the Life of the American Sailor*, hosted by Mystic Seaport Museum where it will provide another occasion to understand the life and culture of the American sailor. We have hosted a number of Mystic's traveling exhibits, such as *Black Hands, Blue Seas* and *Women and the Sea*, and now happily reciprocate with *Skin & Bones*.

Skin & Bones has been more successful than the Independence Seaport Museum could ever have imagined, receiving a glowing review on the cover of the *New York Times* weekend arts page by Edward Rothstein on May 23, 2009. Rothstein was generous in describing the exhibit as "so successful that by the end it leaves you more curious rather than less, as you begin to understand a small part of this subculture's customs and heritage." This started a surge in the media with appearances on airwaves and articles and notices in newspapers, websites, blogs, and magazines as diverse as *American History, Sea History, Tattoo Revue*, and across the seas in *Tatuaz*, published in Gliwice, Poland.

The museum offered a creative selection of public programming including *Tattoo Scuttlebutt*, a panel discussion featuring C.W. Eldridge, tattooist and director of Tattoo Archive in Winston-Salem, NC.; Nick Schonberger, a local tattoo scholar; Tattooist Troy Timpel and his mentor, the venerable Philadelphia Eddie, and Richard "Sam" Sambenedetto, Jr., United States Coast Guard Warrant Officer, whose feet are tattooed with the traditional sailor pig and rooster and featured on the cover of this catalog.

The museum also screened the pre-released, and much acclaimed, film documentary *Hori Smoku*, exploring American tattooing through the life of Norman "Sailor Jerry" Collins, and introduced by the director and Philadelphia native Erich Weiss. And to provide a touch of reality, the museum hosted Troy Timpel's, *Mighty Warship "Olympia" Tattoo Festival*, providing the public, and the tattooists themselves, an opportunity to get in touch with the American sailor tradition of being tattooed on a real, historic naval vessel.

The name of a long forgotten sailor-tattooist aboard the USS *Olympia* was accidentally discovered when installing an enlargement of the famous Frances Benjamin Johnston photograph of a tattoo scene aboard the ship. The enlargement enabled the laundry-mark inside the cuff of the sailor's trousers to be read, identifying him as William Reader, Petty Officer, 2nd Class, a gunner's mate aboard ship in the Battle of Manila Bay in 1898.

Philadelphia Eddie, working in town since 1963, provided a grand finale for the museum's tattoo year by donating a group of his original flash drawings to the museum's collection. They will remain here to remind future generations that *Philadelphia has always been a tattoo town**.

Captain John J. Gazzola
President
Independence Seaport Museum
April 2011

*Craig Bruns, curator of *Skin & Bones*, contributed the essay, *Philadelphia Has Always Been a Tattoo Town*, to Marianne Bernstein's photo-book, *Tatted*, Gritt City, 2009, which documents Philadelphia's renowned contemporary tattoo culture.

PREFACE

TATTOOING – WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

For centuries, exhibitions have proved one of the core venues for people to learn about and understand tattoos. Initially, these exhibitions revolved around the circus. Tattooed bodies traveling the carnival circuit and appearing in dime museums were the first exhibitions of the art in the United States. These worked to formulate popular opinions of tattooing as a savage custom, while also attracting and swelling the ranks of professional tattooists.

Through the first wave of tattoo exhibitions, the public's perception of tattoos often focused on the fantastical tales of the time.

Famed sideshow attraction John Rutherford regaled crowds in the early 1800s with his account of being shipwrecked, captured, and forcibly tattooed by native Maoris in New Zealand. Likewise, larger-than-life showman Gus Wagner, a world-traveling tattooist, tattooed man, and circus performer in the early 1900s, entertained with stories of exotic locales and his own 264 tattoos, promoting himself as "the most artistically marked-up man in America." Early books on the subject, for example, *Secrets of A Strange Art* (1933) by Albert Parry, were concerned mostly with the underlying psychology of why people got tattoos, leaning heavily toward an erotic link.

The notion of tattooing as an art, and one ingrained in the American cultural landscape, developed slowly.

TATTOOING AS AN ART

Finally, on October 5, 1971, a groundbreaking exhibit titled *Tattoo!* opened at the American Folk Art Museum in New York City. The exhibit for the first time situated the art of tattooing within a larger framework of folk and vernacular artists. Ninety-two objects ranging from Gottfried Lindauer's prints of Maori tattooing to the C.H. Fellowes flash book and a fully reproduced tattoo parlor, were arranged to trace the history of tattooing with a broad sweep, articulating the point that tattooing is a global art. The objects, like the flash book, pinpointing an American tattoo style played a key role in offering a sophisticated assessment of tattooing removed from the sensation-driven displays of the carnival.

Additionally, historic objects mingled with the work of contemporary artists – notably Mike Malone, renowned for standardizing tattooing and tattoo flash – connecting and addressing a key theme in tattoo scholarship, that of change and continuity.

Exhibitions following *Tattoo!* fit within this theme as well. Change and continuity are as easily traced in art installations as through extant flash books. The vast majority of museum shows, including *Pierced Hearts and True Love* at The Drawing Center in New York City in 1995, and *Skin Deep: The Art of Tattoo* at the Mariners' Museum in Newport News, VA in 1999, hinge on continuity. Mariners', like the American Folk Art Museum before, relied on a global historical sweep to introduce the uninitiated and misinformed to the world of tattooing.

As a method of connecting to audiences, presenting a broad scope was a sound way to define the subject and hark back to tattoos' long and deep history throughout humanity.

THE MARITIME CHAPTER

But now, as achieved by Independence Seaport Museum's exhibit, *Skin & Bones – Tattoos in the Life of the American Sailor,* the time has come for exhibits to begin presenting more nuanced ideas about tattooing, thus promoting fresh scholarly inquiry.

Focusing solely on the sailor, Seaport Curator Craig Bruns explains how the tattoo fit into life at sea and expresses the origins of the American tattoo. He presents evidence that learning about sailor interactions with tattoos also sheds light on the early workings of America's professional tattoo trade and how the trade developed through the sailor. Tattooists traveling from port to port expanded the trade's knowledge and visual vocabulary. Importantly, these travels also spurred the movement of tattoo-related objects, such as flash, toolboxes, machines, and stencils.

With diligent research, Bruns discovered a potential and quite interesting line of ownership for a landmark tattoo parlor at 11 Chatham Square in New York City. Through extant business cards, newspaper reports, and oral histories, Bruns was able to formulate a credible theory about how the shop passed through a series of famed Bowery-based tattooists – from electric tattoo machine inventor Samuel O'Reilly, incredibly to his archrival, "Electric" Elmer Getchell, and ultimately to O'Reilly's former apprentice, Charlie Wagner. This line probes into provenance, an oft-avoided and difficult subject in tattoo history, and the inner politics of the tattoo community. Bruns' questioning and method speak to the future of tattoo research, one that will continue to collect stories and work more precisely to connect those pieces of history.

Many efforts are in place to make this happen.

STITCHING IT ALL TOGETHER

The work of Chuck Eldridge with the Tattoo Archive in Winston-Salem, NC, is not unnoticed. Nor are the efforts of Mr. G and Madame Chinchilla at Triangle Tattoo & Museum in Fort Bragg, California. Both are preserving the history and artifacts of tattooing. Great collectors and historians such as Lyle Tuttle of San Francisco, credited with helping to mainstream tattooing and gain its acceptance as an art form, and Dana Brunson, a Cincinnati tattooist with a huge collection of 20th century flash art designs, have amassed a great cache of objects and material telling intricate stories. Tattooist Don Ed Hardy's publications have opened up a world of history and artistic exploration. Folklorist and scholar Alan Govenar of Dallas, TX, and New York City, co-author of *Stoney Knows How: Life as a Sideshow Tattoo Artist (1982)*, deserves credit for his continued study of tattooing as well.

These people, like the broad sweeping history behind many museum exhibitions, are a base from which to continue chronicling the art of tattooing. They hold and share stories that help us to understand the great depth of tattoo history. The question is, where do we go from here?

THE NEXT STEPS

One step is the collecting of local stories into anthologies. Clayton Patterson's current project to document the history of New York City tattooists sets a standard. Bringing together tattooists, historians, anthropologists, journalists, and others creates an amalgamated approach to tattoo history that promotes new inquiries and the intermingling of disciplines. This lays the seeds for fully articulated explorations of tattooing and its links to all aspects of American culture. Ventures like the New York project require a steady stream of new information, mined from both archival research and newly taken oral histories.

Philadelphia, as Bruns found, contains a wealth of tattoo history. Like many other cities, however, some of it is being lost. It remains vital to collect local tales, business cards, artifacts, photographs, and more. With this material, historians, antiquarians, and curators can continue to further our understanding of tattooing. Jane Caplan's wonderful anthology, *Written on the Body (2000),* presents a wealth of thought about tattooing.

Another positive step is the presentation of exhibitions such as *Skin & Bones* by museums, which connect tattooing more firmly to other aspects of American culture.

The history of the carnival and the sailor are parallel stories in the history of the tattoo, especially in understanding how it spread through mid-America. Transient communities were vital to this process. As with

port cities swarming with seafarers from all corners of the country, the carnival was a venue for tattooists to connect with each other, learn new tricks, and share the progression of design sources.

Govenar's book, *Stoney Knows How,* and South Street Seaport Museum's 1999 exhibition of Govenar's collection, *American Tattoo: The Art of Gus Wagner*, both focused on the carnival angle. However, while entertaining stories of carnival side shows are prevalent, nuanced accounts of the full connection of tattoo, carnival, and American culture in the model of a museum exhibition are not. Thus, a detailed exploration of the carnival in a museum setting is a logical follow-up to *Skin & Bones*. From there, questions about these two major growth paths of tattooing history will be brought to the fore, giving rise to more wonderful stories and materials. Beyond the carnival and the sea, similar avenues of tattoo research may also be explored in other sub-groups such as the biker and queer cultures.

Inevitably, as the volume of documents, materials, and artifacts expands, we must call into question where these collections will live. Eldridge's Tattoo Archive sets precedent. Museums around the nation have exciting pockets of tattoo history. Small sets of designs at Winterthur Museum & Country Estate in Delaware, the American Folk Art Museum, and the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC, as well as the material of tattooist "Cap'n" Bill Coleman at Mariners' Museum, clearly suggest interest in preservation.

Yet there is still a disconnect between core collectors and major institutions. Finding the correct place for the collections of Tuttle and Brunson remains. Photographs, for example, fundamental lenses for research, are often difficult to find in original form.

SCHOLARS & COLLECTORS UNITE

However, a burgeoning reverence, true interest, and willingness to do the work of unraveling and preserving the fascinating history of the tattoo – before it is too late – is bringing together the academy and the collector, who in the past often worked outside each other's scope. Fostering relationships in these fields is a long and arduous process, but an exhibition as rich as *Skin & Bones,* in which these vital connections were forged, aids the cause.

As with the anthology, the exhibition sets the stage for an intermingling of minds and the wealth of tattoo-related objects. It also provides venues for access to archived material and making it searchable to future researchers, ensuring the continued growth of tattoo history.

Tattooing has come a long way from a sideshow oddity. Public perceptions of tattooing are no longer universally limited to ideas about savages, or the even more simplified generalization of tattoos as symbols of the criminal element.

Looking forward, exhibitions such as *Skin & Bones* help expand tattoo knowledge, offer new avenues of research, and promote the capture and collection of tattoos' many wonderful stories. All of this continues to make tattooing an exciting and fertile subject for those of us entranced by one of the world's oldest arts. Its history is our passion.

Nick Schonberger
Independent Scholar
April 2009

Photograph, *much-tattooed sailor, aboard the USS NEW JERSEY (BB-62),* Lcdr. Charles Jacobs, December 1944. Loan courtesy of The Mariners' Museum, Newport News, Virginia [PP2623]

ESSAY

THE LIFE OF A SAILOR

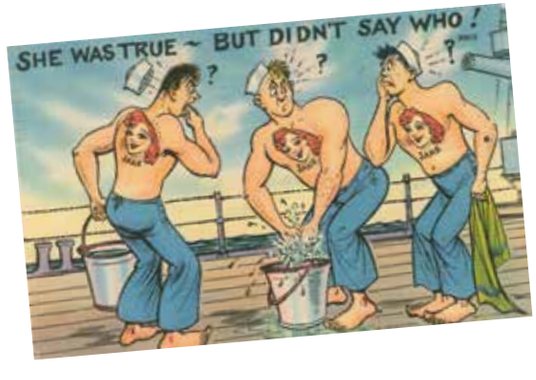
When I joined the United States Navy in North Carolina in 1965, I was as green as a gourd! Although I had never traveled outside of the state, I knew there was a big world out there. I had seen it on the pages of the magazines I flipped through at the newsstand and now I was ready to see it with my own eyes. Having little to lose, I joined up.

The Navy shipped me off to San Diego, California, for boot camp. After boot camp I spent two years on shore duty in Texas and then was sent to sea for the final two years. I had no trouble finding places to get tattooed, both in San Diego and while stationed in Texas. Broadway in San Diego was lined with tattoo shops and once in Texas I could hitchhike to Corpus Christi's famed North Beach. The two years in West-Pac (Western Pacific) helped me meet my early vow of getting a tattoo for every month I was in the Navy.

Little did I know that those four years in the Navy would shape who I am today. Although I had many jobs after the Navy, including pearl diving with the Sells & Gray Circus, working on the Love Valley, NC Rock Festival, and building custom bicycles for Albert Eisentraut, I continued to get tattooed. In the mid 1970s, I was getting tattooed by Don Ed Hardy and he offered to teach me the art. As they say, the rest is history.

During those early years of tattooing in San Francisco I had the pleasure of working with Henry Goldfield. At this time there were several Navy bases in the San Francisco Bay area and Goldfield's was the fleet tattoo shop. In a little over a decade I had come full circle. I had gone from getting tattooed at the fleet shops in San Diego, to tattooing the fleet in San Francisco. As far as I'm concerned there is no higher calling, or greater pleasure, than to follow in the tradition of all those great sailor tattooists who went before.

C.W. Eldridge
Tattoo Archive
April 2009



Postcard, *She Was True – But Didn't Say Who!* Tichnor Brothers, Inc., *circa* 1943. Chromolithograph. Independence Seaport Museum [2008.18.3]

INTRODUCTION

For sailors, tattoos are more than skin-deep; they penetrate their bones and anchor their souls. Belief in the **power of tattoos** has fortified them against dangers at sea for centuries. Tattoos remind them of the fraternity of seafarers and their connection to both land and water.

Sailors are responsible for bringing tattoos to America. With the birth of our country came the creation of the American tattoo. British sailors transferred their tattoo tradition directly to their American colonial brothers. Though landlubbers commonly viewed the tattoo with suspicion, for seafarers it was a **sign of belonging** and their extended and everlasting family.

Throughout American history, merchant and naval seamen have kept the **tradition unbroken and alive.** Tattoos, their meanings and functions, have been passed down from father to son and elder to younger. They survive on the bodies of **men and women** who sail the seas in the tradition of their forbears.

If you have a tattoo, thank a sailor!

WHY A PIG & ROOSTER?

Sailors have long believed that tattooing a pig on their left foot and a rooster on their right will protect them from drowning at sea, as pigs and roosters were frequently the only **survivors of a ship wreck.**

This belief finds its roots in the fact that animals were typically transported in **wooden crates**. If a ship was sinking, the crates would float and perhaps be carried by currents to the safety of land. Another explanation suggests that because pigs and roosters can indeed swim and would take the shortest, quickest, and **most direct route to land**.

These are the feet of Richard Sambenedetto, Jr., who has served with the U.S. Coast Guard for nearly two decades. He is one of countless seamen **keeping the tradition** of sailor tattoos alive today.

DOES IT HURT?

The sensation of getting a tattoo is described as similar to bee stings, sunburn, being pinched, a slight tickling, or "pins and needles." **It all depends** on an individual's pain tolerance.

Pig & rooster tattoos on the feet of Richard Sambenedetto, Jr., U.S. Coast Guard, Atlantic City, New Jersey, 2008. Photograph, Tom Gralish, 2008.

ORIGINS OF THE AMERICAN SAILOR TATTOO

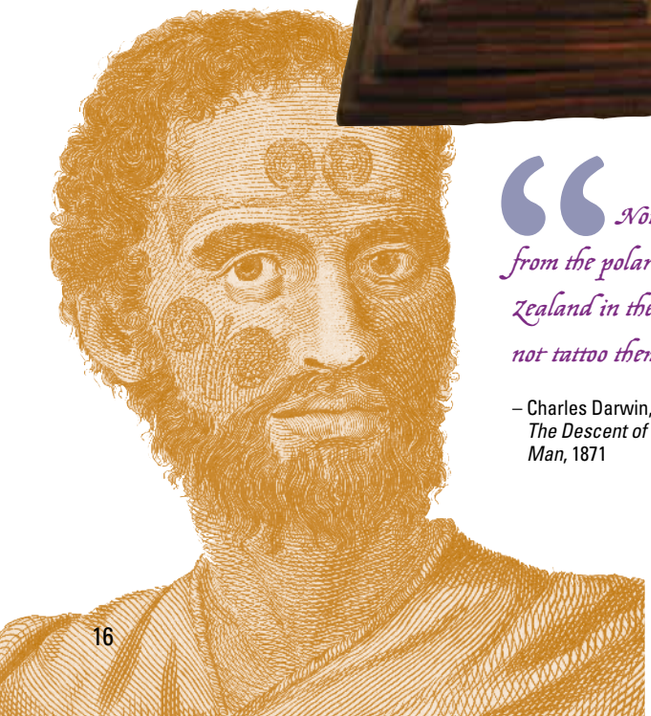
The affinity for tattoos was passed by British sailors to their seafaring brothers in service of the **fledgling United States.** It was commonly believed British seamen first embraced tattooing when Captain James Cook and his *Endeavor* crew encountered the native peoples of the South Pacific islands around 1770. However, it is now thought British sailors already had a well-developed **tattoo tradition** by this time.

It is believed that the British tradition was built over centuries beginning with the Celts and Picts. As Britain's exploration and commerce expanded, its sailors came into contact with **many cultures** that also practiced tattoo including those in the Mediterranean and the Americas.

Scrimshaw Tattoos – Sailor-carved whale teeth with images copied from 16th century prints depicting tattooed members of the Picti tribe of Scotland.

Pair of whale's teeth, *Pict*, 1860. Carved whale teeth with mahogany mounts. Loan courtesy of The Dietrich American Foundation, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania [1.2.530.1,2]

Print, *Picti Icon I*, bookplate from *A Briefe and true report of the New found land of Virginia in 1590*, Theodor DeBry. Image courtesy of The Mariners' Museum, Newport News, Virginia [E141B91-P26]



> *"Not one great country can be named, from the polar regions in the north to New Zealand in the south, in which the aborigines do not tattoo themselves."*
>
> – Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, 1871

1770 portrait of a Maori dignitary of New Zealand with a traditional *Ta moko* facial tattoo.

Print, *A Man of New Zealand*, from Cook's Voyages, 1773. Engraving. Image courtesy of The Mariners' Museum, Newport News, Virginia [G420.C7A5]

THE WORD "TATTOO"

The word tattoo has an interesting history. It came from Captain James Cook's voyages to the Polynesian islands of the South Pacific in the late 1770s.

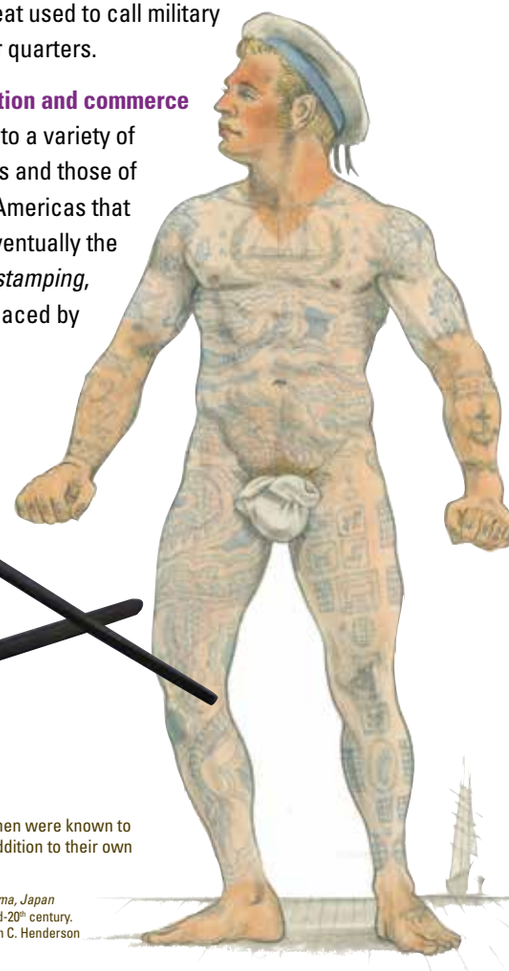
The Polynesians used the word *tatau* to name the traditional indelible markings on their bodies. The word recalled the **rhythmic tapping** made by the *tatau* practitioner as he struck the back of the needled tool to puncture the skin in a desired pattern. The word reminded the British of their own word *tattoo,* the name for a drum beat used to call military personnel back to their quarters.

England's **exploration and commerce** at sea exposed sailors to a variety of Mediterranean cultures and those of the newly discovered Americas that practiced tattooing. Eventually the words *pricking*, *mark*, *stamping*, and *India ink* were replaced by the new word *tattoo*.

Pacific Tattoos – Examples of tattoo tools are from the Pacific Island nation of Samoa, visited by many British and American ships in the 18th and 19th centuries.

Tattoo rig, Samoa Islands, 20th century. The tools are fashioned of naturally occurring materials. Loan courtesy of the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania [50-21- 125, 127, 128, 149, 150]. Philadelphia venue only.

Jane Caplan, *Written on the Body, The Tattoo in European and American History*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 2000, p.xv



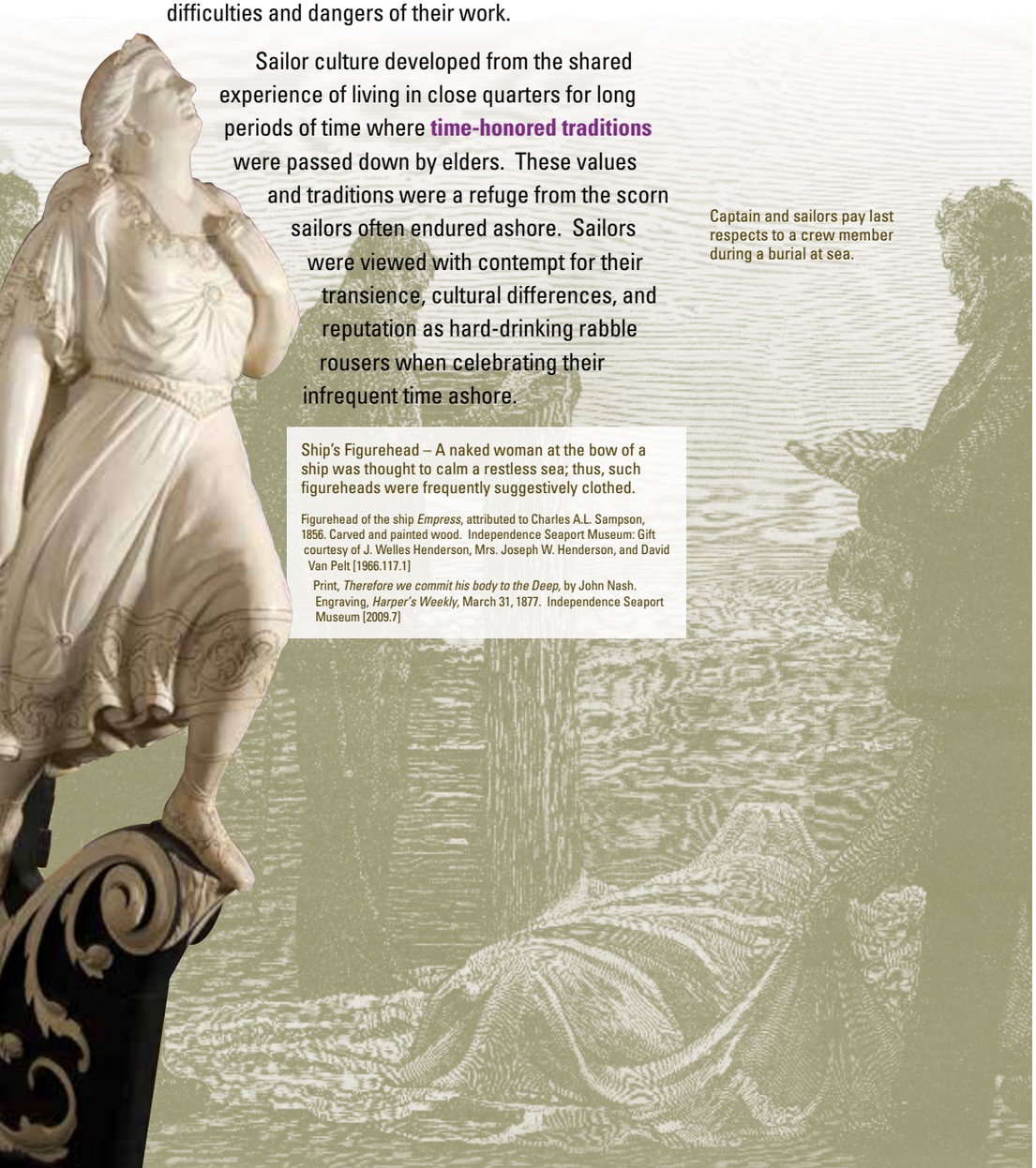
Mixing Traditions – British seamen were known to acquire Polynesian tattoos in addition to their own western-style tattoos.

Drawing, detail, *Seaman, Tattooed in Burma, Japan and Western Ports*, unidentified artist, mid-20th century. Pencil on paper. Loan courtesy of Hannah C. Henderson

LIFE OF THE SAILOR

The seaman's life during the Age of Sail (16th to mid-19th century) was hard and often shortened by natural and man-made dangers. Tattoos identified a man as a long-term sailor who earned his living primarily at sea. Patches on their clothing and the scars on their **weathered bodies** told of the low wages, difficulties and dangers of their work.

Sailor culture developed from the shared experience of living in close quarters for long periods of time where **time-honored traditions** were passed down by elders. These values and traditions were a refuge from the scorn sailors often endured ashore. Sailors were viewed with contempt for their transience, cultural differences, and reputation as hard-drinking rabble rousers when celebrating their infrequent time ashore.



Captain and sailors pay last respects to a crew member during a burial at sea.

Ship's Figurehead – A naked woman at the bow of a ship was thought to calm a restless sea; thus, such figureheads were frequently suggestively clothed.

Figurehead of the ship *Empress*, attributed to Charles A.L. Sampson, 1856. Carved and painted wood. Independence Seaport Museum: Gift courtesy of J. Welles Henderson, Mrs. Joseph W. Henderson, and David Van Pelt [1966.117.1]

Print, *Therefore we commit his body to the Deep*, by John Nash. Engraving, *Harper's Weekly*, March 31, 1877. Independence Seaport Museum [2009.7]

SUPERSTITION AT SEA

Sailors were surrounded by vast and unpredictable seas with mere wooden ships to defend them from the **frightening strength** of wind and waves. A complex system of superstitions, some detailed below, grew over time and offered comfort and protection in this dangerous environment. Tattoos became a part of these beliefs.

PIG & ROOSTER

A pig and rooster tattooed on a **sailor's feet** might prevent drowning, since pigs and roosters were frequently the only survivors of a ship wreck.

FIGUREHEADS

A naked woman at the bow of a ship could calm a **restless sea**, thus figureheads were frequently scantily clothed.

DAVY JONES' LOCKER

Devil was distorted into "Davy," while "Jones" referred to the biblical Jonah held captive in the belly of a whale. "Davy Jones' Locker" was where **souls of the wicked** were tortured by evil spirits of the deep.

WHISTLING

Whistling was thought to attract **favorable trade winds** to a ship, while whistling during a storm would bring disastrous gales.

MERMAIDS

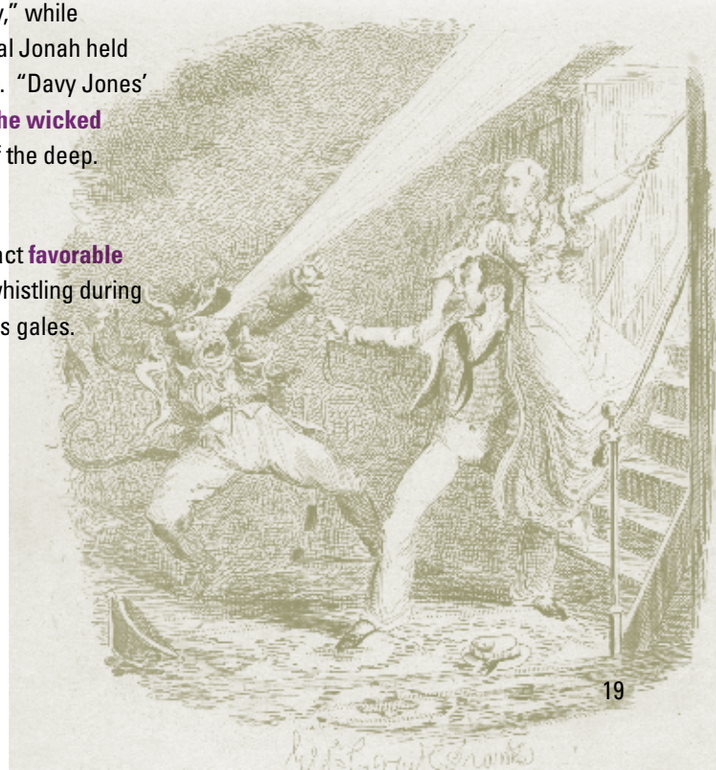
Mermaids could **conjure a storm** with a song. Sailors threw coins overboard to divert their interest from their ship.

SHARKS

A shark circling a ship was a bad omen, as they sought the **souls of the sick** aboard.

FISH HOOKS

Pins found in a church were believed to make the **best hooks** for catching fish.



Sailor saves a lady from Davy Jones.

Print, *Jack Outwitting Davy Jones*, by George Cruikshank, mid-19th century. Engraving. Independence Seaport Museum: Gift courtesy of J. Welles Henderson [2001.33.16]

Fletcher S. Bassett, *Legends and Superstitions of the Sea and of Sailors*, Singing Tree Press, Detroit, 1971

SAILOR SKILL AND CRAFT

Staving off boredom during long voyages gave rise to "sailor craft." **Inventive sailors**, limited to materials found on board, made scrimshaw from whale bones, carved figures from wood, even fashioned buttons from cheese rinds or shark vertebra*.

Tattooing is an example of a sailor craft. With a **sail maker's needle** and a mixture of urine and gunpowder, even in the middle of the ocean, the "ship tattooist" was always ready to go to work on willing — or bored — shipmates.

All the sailor crafts, including tattoos, frequently shared **subjects and symbols** that had special meaning to the seafaring community or were borrowed from popular culture.

Sailor Made – Seamen were able to make a large variety of practical and decorative items with limited supplies at sea. These items illustrate the fine level of craftsmanship that could be achieved aboard ship.

Scrimshaw ditty box, inscribed "P.F. TO M.A.S.", Alexander Wiggins, 1868. Steamed and bent whalebone with incised drawing and pigment, wood and tortoise shell. Loan courtesy of The Dietrich American Foundation, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania [1.8.1104]

Bosun's whistle with macramé lanyard, William McCoy, *circa* 1890. Sterling silver whistle with cotton cord. Independence Seaport Museum: Gift courtesy of Dr. Rosemary Clarke, given in the name of her mother, Violet McCoy Clarke [1989.57.2]

*Marcus Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates, and the Anglo-American Maritime World, 1700-1750,* Cambridge University Press, 1987, p.11

TATTOOING ABOARD SHIP

Early American tattooing took place aboard ships during long voyages. It was a **hazardous procedure** in a time when the spread of germs and disease was not understood. Getting a tattoo was not a decision taken lightly because of the risk to health and livelihood.

The required tools were simple and could be easily made of materials commonly found aboard a ship. Needles used to repair sails could be employed to **prick the skin**. A pigment of ink borrowed from the ship captain, or when needed, a mixture of gunpowder and urine was then rubbed into the wound to create the tattoo.

Marcus Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates, and the Anglo-American Maritime World, 1700-1750,* Cambridge University Press, 1987

Power of the Wind – Sailmakers' needles were used aboard ship to repair the sails and rigging.

Corner of a sail, mid-20th century. Canvas fitted with steel grommets, bound with rope, leather and cord. Independence Seaport Museum: Gift courtesy of J. Welles Henderson [00.1098]

Needle case with four sailmakers' needles, mid-19th century. Bamboo case covered with macramé. Independence Seaport Museum: Gift courtesy of J. Welles Henderson [2003.44.5]

Pricker with case, *circa* 1900. Steel point mounted to wood handle with a thimble, wood case covered in macramé. Independence Seaport Museum [00.1070]

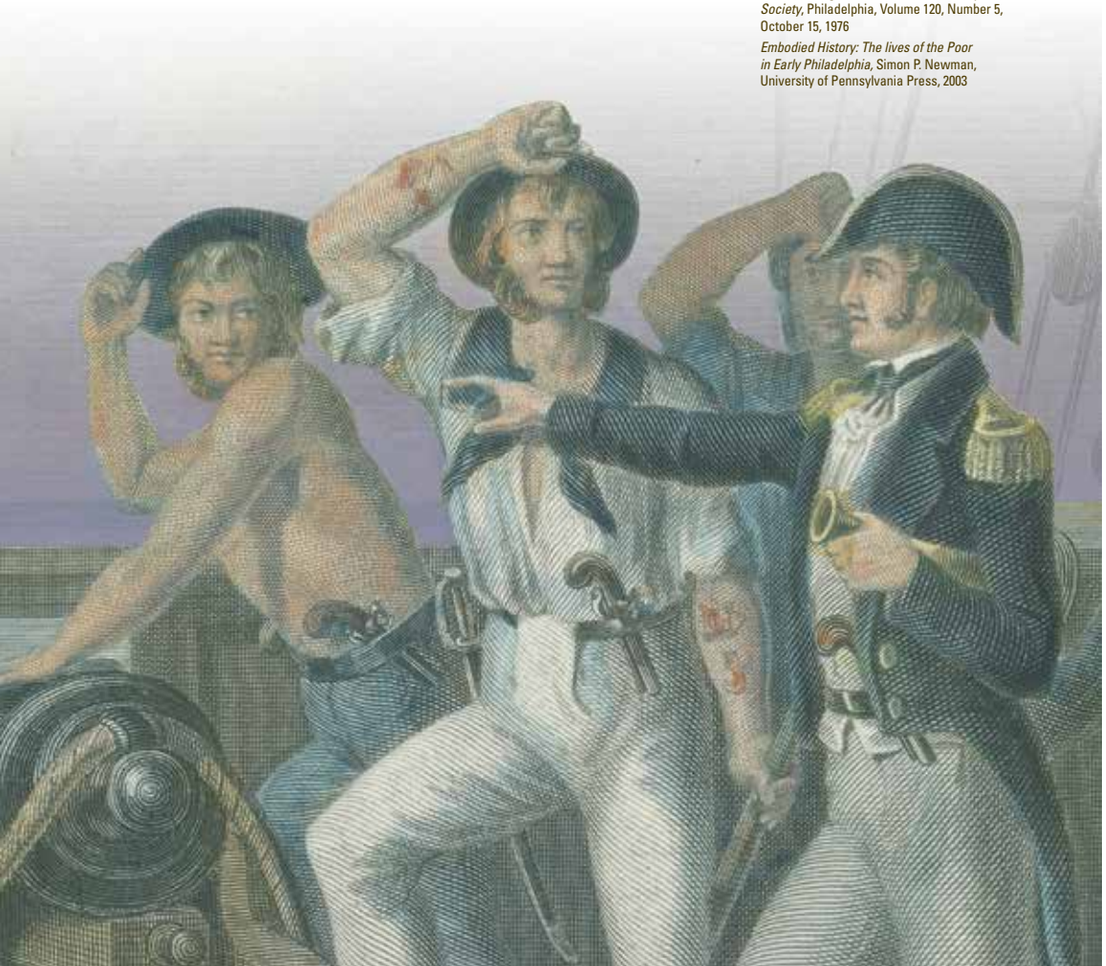
Needle roll with needles, *circa* 1915. Flannel-backed leatherette with sailmaker's needles. Independence Seaport Museum: Gift courtesy of William R. Klaus [1994.82.136]

Cannon ball, late 18th- mid-19th century. Cast iron. Independence Seaport Museum [1977.24.123]

EARLY AMERICAN TATTOOS

The values and beliefs of **lifelong sailors** are revealed in their tattoos, which are known primarily through historical descriptions. These sailors are responsible for bringing tattoos to America and were nearly the only individuals who wore them during the early republic. Their tattoos adopted new patriotic American symbols to proclaim their **allegiance to liberty**.

African-American sailors shared the same tattoos as their fellow white seamen and together **rallied in port cities** for Congress to protect them from impressment (forced service) into the British Navy. This and many other dangers at sea motivated some sailors to tattoo their names and hometowns on their bodies in the event of their deaths in a foreign land.



Rare Images – Tattooed seamen are rarely depicted in prints from the early years of the American republic.

Print, detail, *Commodore Perry at the Battle of Lake Erie*, Virtue & Yorston, *circa* 1850-1860. Engraving. Independence Seaport Museum [1979.78.8]

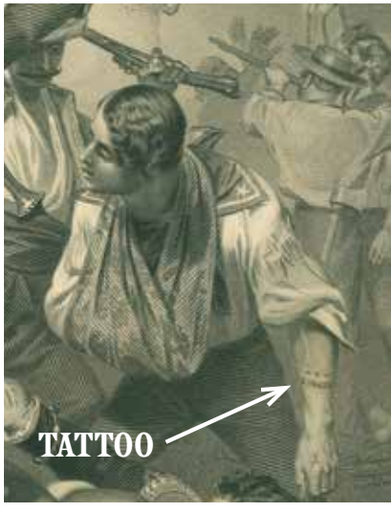
Ira Dye, *Early American Merchant Seafarers, in Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, Philadelphia, Volume 120, Number 5, October 15, 1976

Embodied History: The lives of the Poor in Early Philadelphia, Simon P. Newman, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003

REUBEN JAMES (c.1776-1838)

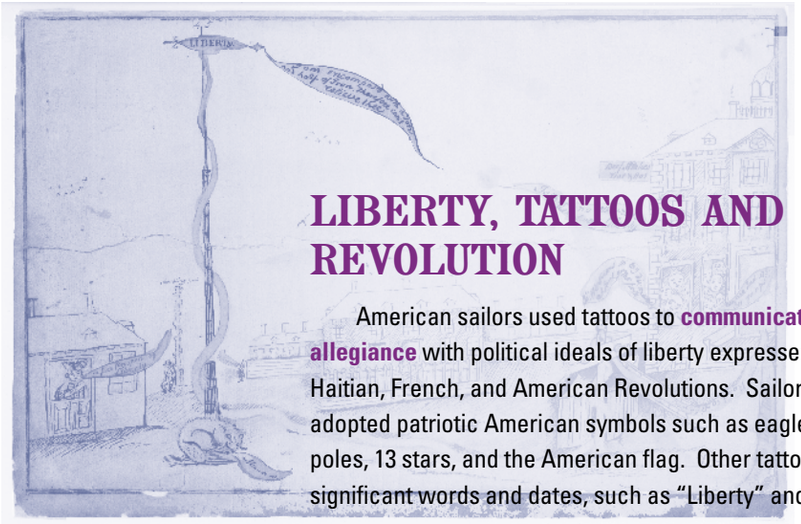
Reuben James' tattoos can be seen on his left arm in this period print. His name was intended to identify him in the event of his **death or capture** by the British or pirates of the Barbary States of North Africa. The meaning of the three stars is not known, but could celebrate events in his nautical career.

It is unusual for a common sailor to be depicted in such detail, but James was a hero. He saved the life of his captain Stephen Decatur, during the **legendary raid** to destroy the captured U.S. frigate *Philadelphia* in Tripoli harbor in 1804.



Seaman Reuben James

Print, detail, *Decatur's Conflict with the Algerine at Tripoli*, Alonzo Chappel, 1874. Engraving. Independence Seaport Museum: Gift courtesy of J. Welles Henderson [1992.35.19]



LIBERTY, TATTOOS AND REVOLUTION

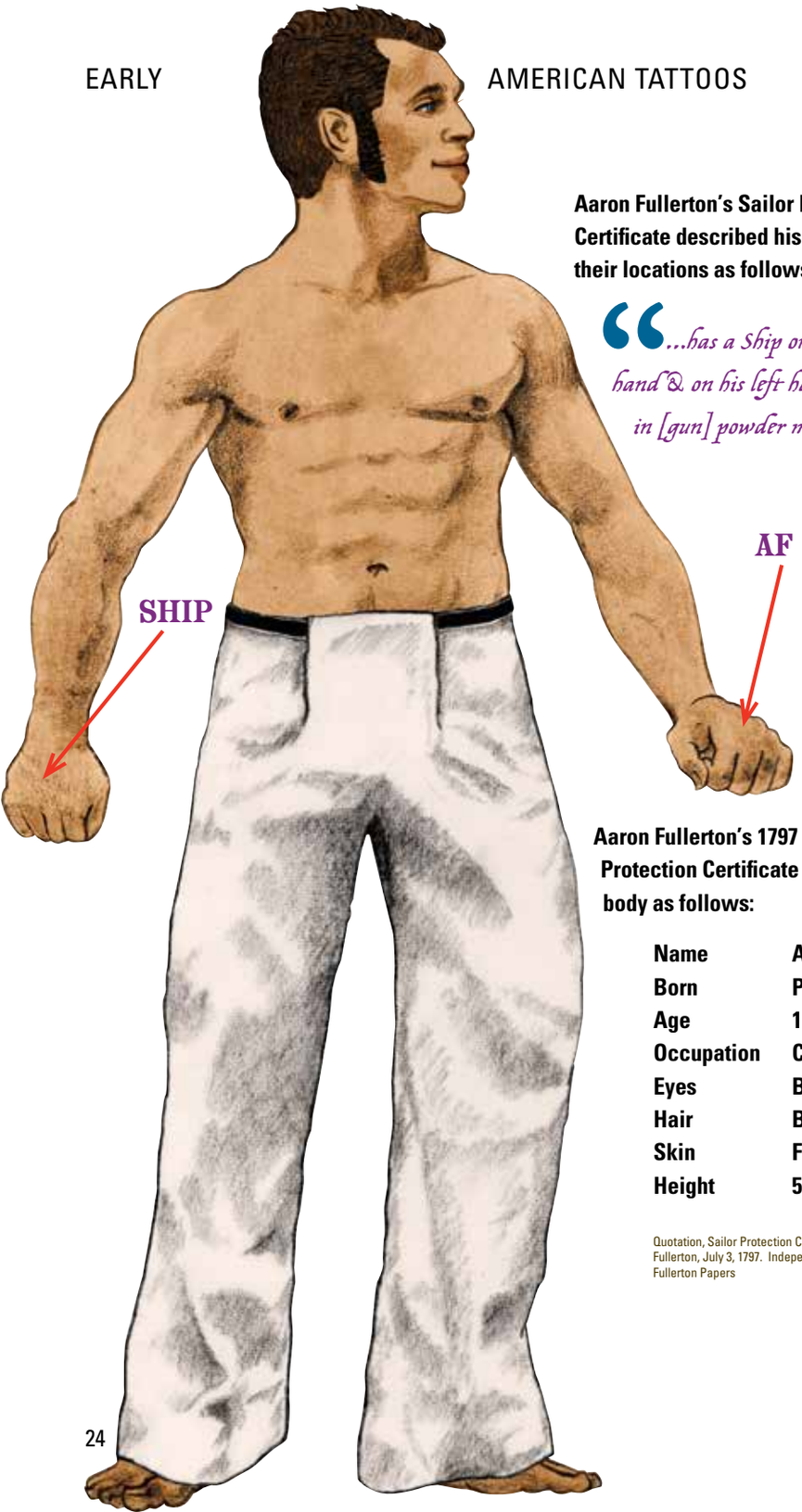
American sailors used tattoos to **communicate their allegiance** with political ideals of liberty expressed in the Haitian, French, and American Revolutions. Sailor tattoos adopted patriotic American symbols such as eagles, liberty poles, 13 stars, and the American flag. Other tattoos included significant words and dates, such as "Liberty" and "1776."

During the Revolutionary War, liberty poles were used as symbols of dissent.

Drawing, detail, *Liberty Pole, New York*, unidentified artist, *circa* 1770. Pen and ink and wash drawing on paper. Loan courtesy of The Library Company of Philadelphia, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania [396.F vol. II]

Ira Dye, *Early American Merchant Seafarers, in Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, Philadelphia, Volume 120, Number 5, October 15, 1976

Liberty poles became the popular emblem of Thomas Jefferson and the Democratic-Republican Party, which sought to represent the needs of seafarers to Congress. The liberty pole held a special significance to the seaman since it symbolized the fight for liberty and was commonly made of a discarded ship's mast or yard arms.



Aaron Fullerton's Sailor Protection Certificate described his tattoos and their locations as follows:

"...has a Ship on his right hand & on his left hand, AF 1778 in [gun] powder mark."

Aaron Fullerton's 1797 Sailor Protection Certificate describes his body as follows:

Name	**Aaron Fullerton**
Born	**Pennsylvania**
Age	**19**
Occupation	**Carpenter**
Eyes	**Blue**
Hair	**Brown**
Skin	**Fair**
Height	**5 feet, 5 inches**

Quotation, Sailor Protection Certificate for Aaron Fullerton, July 3, 1797. Independence Seaport Museum, Fullerton Papers

SAILOR PROTECTION CERTIFICATES

Sailor Protection Certificate Applications (1796-1818) provide a rare resource for understanding the kinds of tattoos found on the **bodies of early American seamen**. The certificates were an employment-related passport that identified a sailor through descriptions of his body, including scars and tattoos.

Sailor Protection Certificates were adopted by Congress in 1796 as a means of **protecting sailors** against Britain's continued arrest of American ships and the impressments (forced service) of American sailors into Royal Naval service during its war against France.

AARON FULLERTON (b.1778)

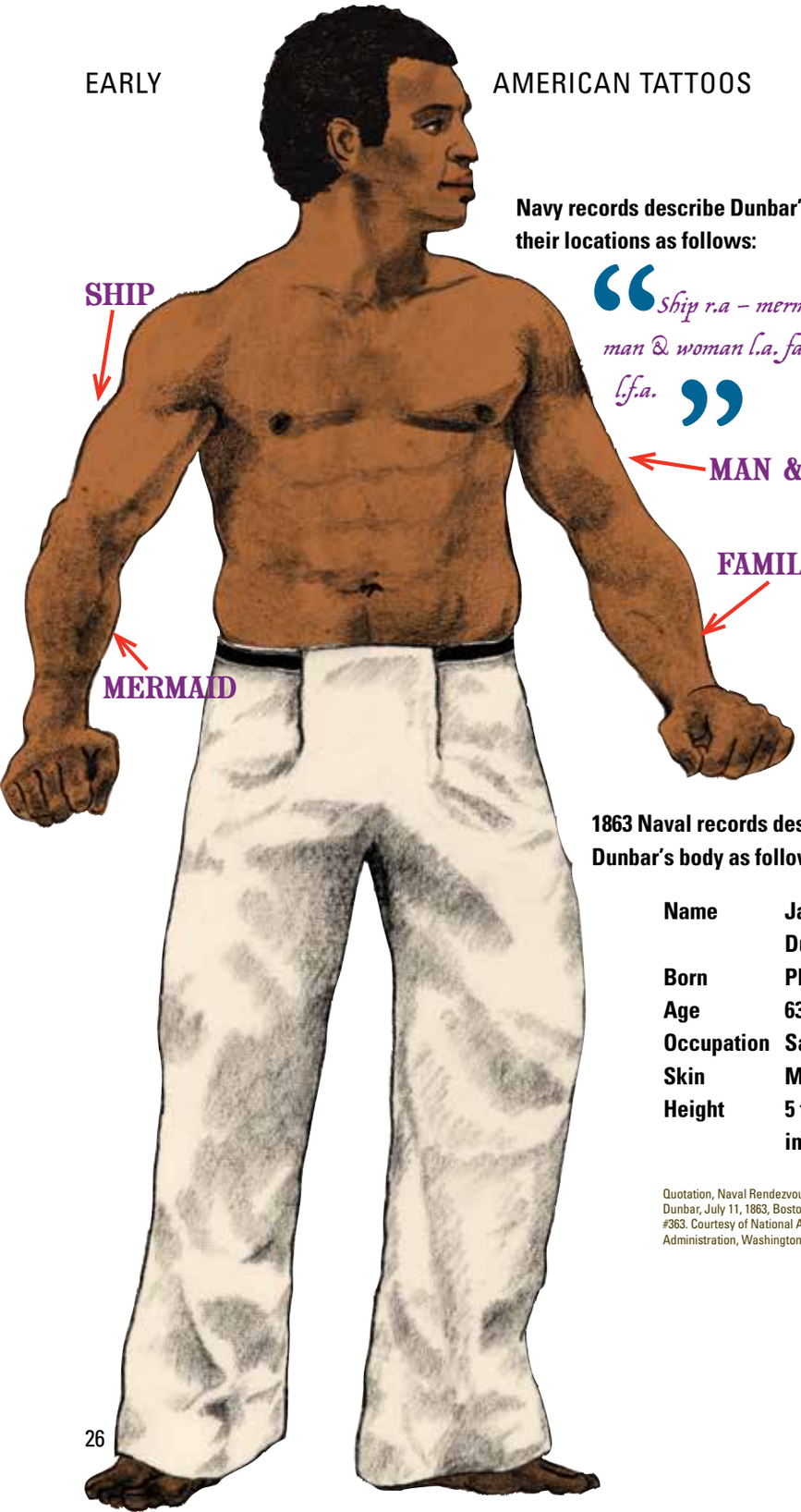
The ship tattooed on Aaron Fullerton's right hand identified him as a professional sailor. He worked aboard merchant ships as a carpenter. Fullerton's **fear of being impressed** into the British Navy drove him to apply for a Sailor Protection Certificate at age 19 to prove he was an **American citizen.** The document included a description of Fullerton, including the tattoos of his birth date and initials on his left hand.

Aaron Fullerton's Tattoos – The scrimshaw ship above suggests what Fullerton's ship tattoo may have looked like.

Document, Sailor Protection Certificate for Aaron Fullerton, July 3, 1797. Independence Seaport Museum, Fullerton Papers

Scrimshaw whale's tooth with a ship, sun, and moon, 1840. Whale tooth with incised drawing and pigment. Loan courtesy of The Estate of Richard Dietrich, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania [1.2.HRD.219]

Scrimshaw splicing tool, *Oregon, George R. Abbott, 1858.* Carved whalebone with incised text, drawing with pigment. Loan courtesy of The Dietrich American Foundation, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania [1.3.1049]



Navy records describe Dunbar's tattoos and their locations as follows:

> *"Ship r.a – mermaid r.f. a ; man & woman l.a. family group l.f.a."*

1863 Naval records describe James Dunbar's body as follows:

Name	**James Forten Dunbar**
Born	**Philadelphia**
Age	**63**
Occupation	**Sail-maker**
Skin	**Mulatto**
Height	**5 feet, 5 ¼ inches**

Quotation, Naval Rendezvous Records, James Dunbar, July 11, 1863, Boston, Massachusetts, #363. Courtesy of National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C.

AFRICAN AMERICANS AT SEA

Both free and enslaved blacks were part of the **community of sailors**. Employment at sea offered African-American men more opportunities than on land – skills trumped the color of skin.

Working the docks or aboard a ship as a sailor were among the **few occupations** open to free blacks in the early republic. James Forten Dunbar's skills as a sailmaker served him well at sea.

JAMES FORTEN DUNBAR (1799-1870)

James Dunbar after 37 years at sea had acquired a series of **tattoos that told the story** of his life.

The tattoos on his left arm depict a family and a couple that **reminded him of the loved ones** he lost rapidly over a six year period. With his family gone, he joined the Navy.

The ship and mermaid likely reminded him of **his many voyages** to places like England, China and the East Indies aboard merchant and naval ships.

James F. Dunbar's Tattoos – These sailor crafts suggest what Dunbar's tattoos might have looked like.

Document case, *Thomas Hope, Ship Broker, Philadelphia, circa* 1810. Soldered and painted tin box. Independence Seaport Museum: Gift courtesy of J. Welles Henderson [1976.49.14]

Mermaid ornament, late 18th century. Hammered, cut and painted iron. Independence Seaport Museum [00.1791]

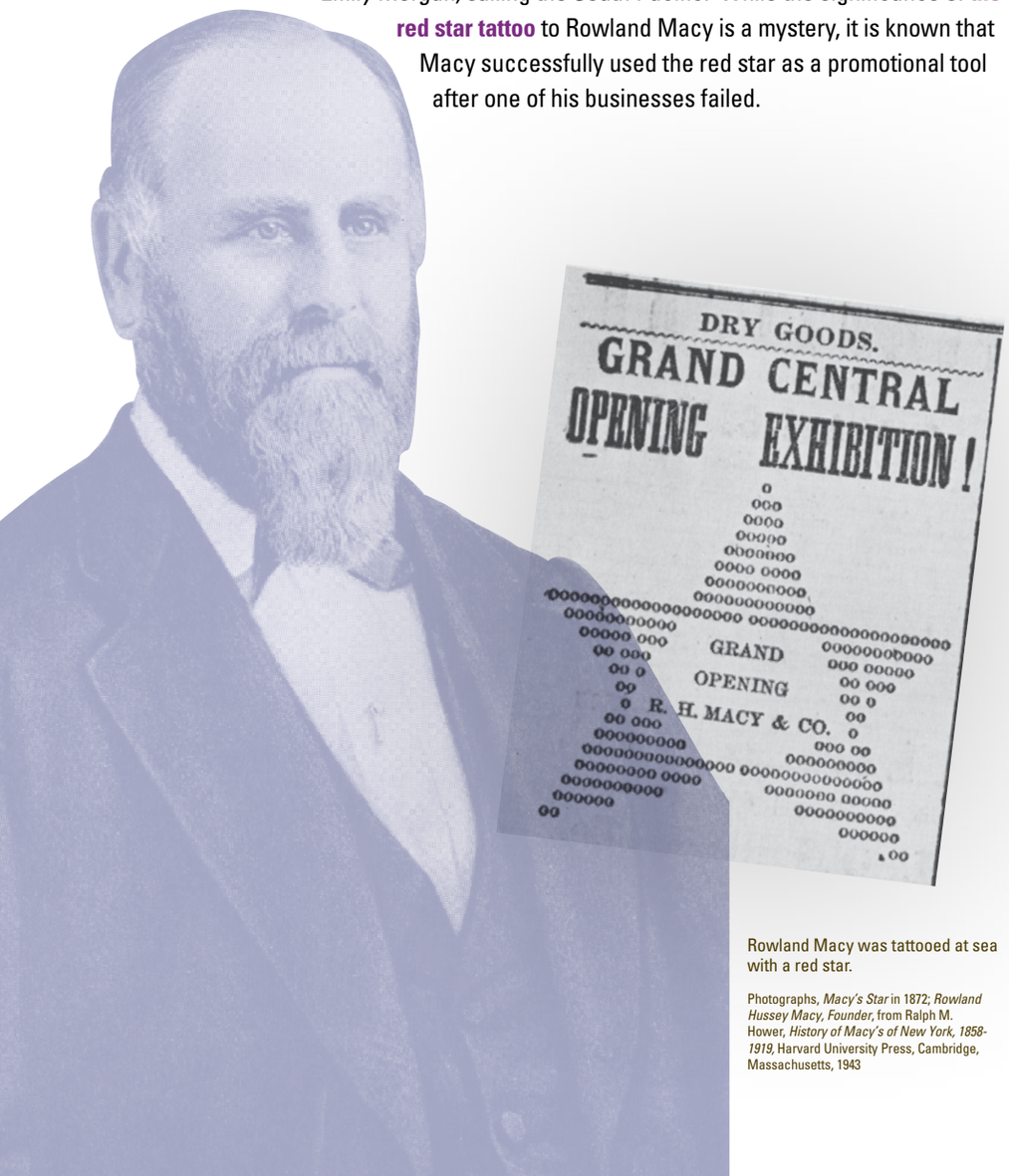
Scrimshaw whale's tooth with couple on bench mid-19th century. Whale tooth with incised drawing and pigment. Independence Seaport Museum: Purchased with funds donated by J. Welles Henderson [1971.28]

Julie Winch, *"No Common Lot,"* in *Perspectives on Race Ethnicity, and Power in Maritime America: Papers from the Conference Held at Mystic Seaport,* edited by Glenn S. Gordinier. Mystic Seaport Museum, September 2000

ROWLAND MACY (1822-1877)

It is not commonly known that Rowland Macy, the founder of the Macy's department store had a red star tattooed on his arm.

Macy was born to a **family of seafarers** on the island of Nantucket and went to sea at age 15. He received the tattoo some time during the four years he worked aboard the whaler *Emily Morgan,* sailing the South Pacific. While the significance of **the red star tattoo** to Rowland Macy is a mystery, it is known that Macy successfully used the red star as a promotional tool after one of his businesses failed.



Rowland Macy was tattooed at sea with a red star.

Photographs, *Macy's Star* in 1872; *Rowland Hussey Macy, Founder*, from Ralph M. Hower, *History of Macy's of New York, 1858-1919*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1943

Coil of Rope – Melville described a sailor with a tattoo of a coil of rope around his waist.

Rope, *circa* 1900. Rope waterproofed with tar pitch. Independence Seaport Museum [1982.465]

Print, Whaling in American Waters, unknown artist, mid 19th century. Color lithograph on paper. Image courtesy of Rosenbach Museum & Library, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania [1954.0788]

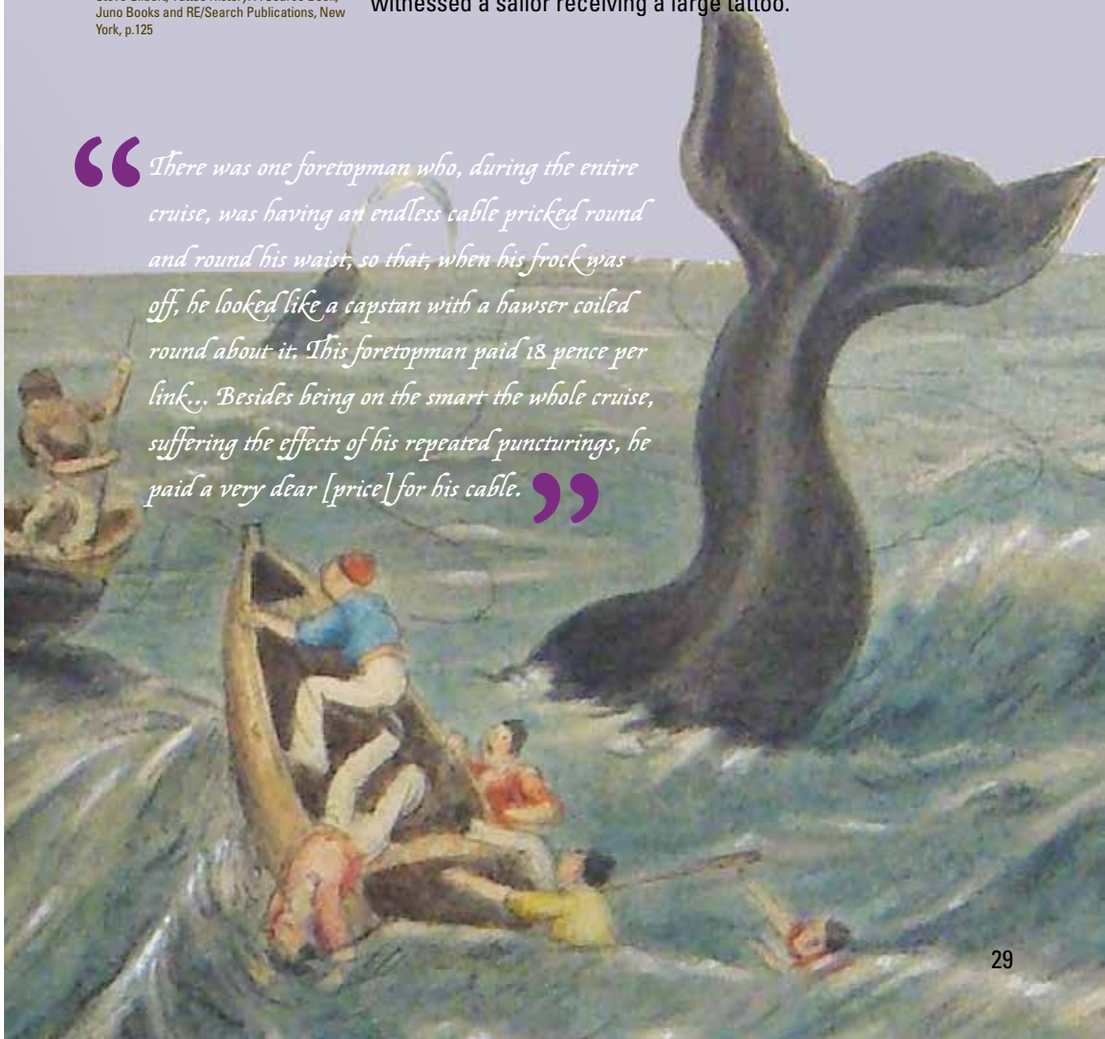
Quotation, Herman Melville; as quoted by Steve Gilbert, *Tattoo History: A Source Book,* Juno Books and RE/Search Publications, New York, p.125

HERMAN MELVILLE (1819-1891)

It is likely that Herman Melville's early novels such as *Typee* contributed to introducing the word *tattoo* to the American public.

Melville was a sailor before he was a writer and went to sea at an early age as a cabin boy, bound for Liverpool, England.

It is unclear if Melville had tattoos, but he certainly had a great interest in them, **describing tattoos** in his many books. While aboard the frigate *United States* in 1844, Melville witnessed a sailor receiving a large tattoo.



"There was one foretopman who, during the entire cruise, was having an endless cable pricked round and round his waist, so that, when his frock was off, he looked like a capstan with a hawser coiled round about it. This foretopman paid 18 pence per link... Besides being on the smart the whole cruise, suffering the effects of his repeated punctures, he paid a very dear [price] for his cable."

CIVIL WAR 1861-1865

The War Between the States set brother sailor against brother sailor. The American **seafaring community** was now divided. Seamen pledged their allegiance to either the United or the Confederate States of America and marked their bodies with patriotic tattoos.

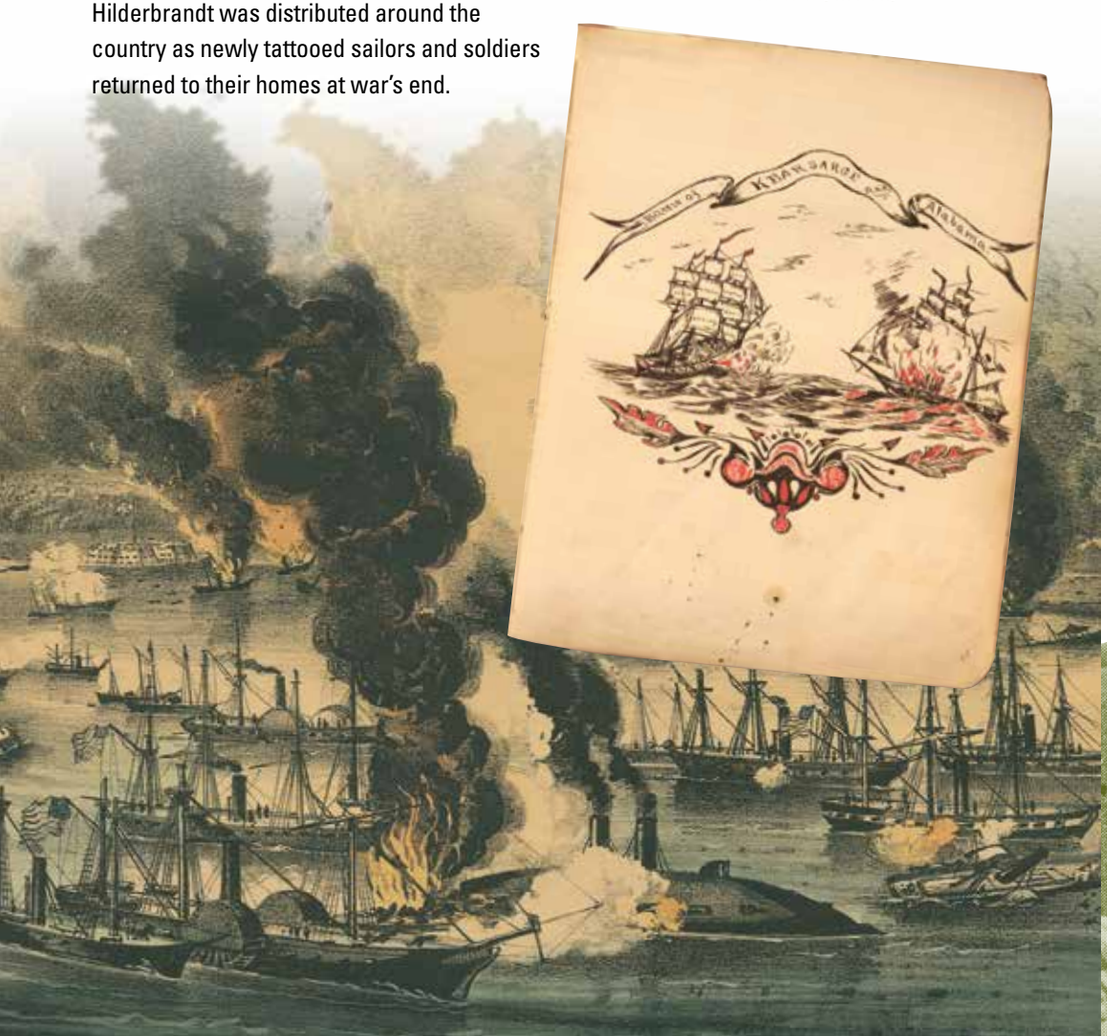
Sailors **commemorated sea battles** by getting large tattoos on their chests or backs depicting great engagements such as those between the sloops of war USS *Kearsarge* and CSS *Alabama* or the ironclad warships USS *Monitor* and CSS *Virginia*.

The work of Civil War-era tattooists such as Martin Hilderbrandt was distributed around the country as newly tattooed sailors and soldiers returned to their homes at war's end.

Great Battles – Sailors commemorated great sea battles by getting large tattoos on their chests or backs.

Print, detail, *Com. Farragut's Fleet, Passing the Forts on the Mississippi, April 24th, 1862*, Currier & Ives, 1862. Hand-colored lithograph. Independence Seaport Museum: Gift courtesy of J. Welles Henderson [1978.74.58]

Drawing, *Battle of "Kearsarge" and "Alabama"* tattoo design, C.H. Fellowes, *circa* 1900. Colored pencil and ink on paper. Image courtesy of Mystic Seaport Museum, Mystic, Connecticut [1983.52.3.35]



GILBERT HARRISON PURDY

(1828-1912)

Gilbert Purdy belonged to the "Star Gang," distinctive for the star each member had tattooed on his forehead and for their **vow to never leave** the Navy. They were heroes, crew members of the Union sloop of war USS *Kearsarge*, which defeated the infamous Confederate raider CSS *Alabama* during the Civil War.

Purdy became known by younger shipmates for **spinning yarns** about the Age of Sail and his sailor superstitions of days gone by. He upheld his "Star Gang" vow and became one of the oldest seamen in the U.S. Navy, retiring in 1900 at age 72.

Gilbert Purdy (standing) shares his exploits with his shipmates.

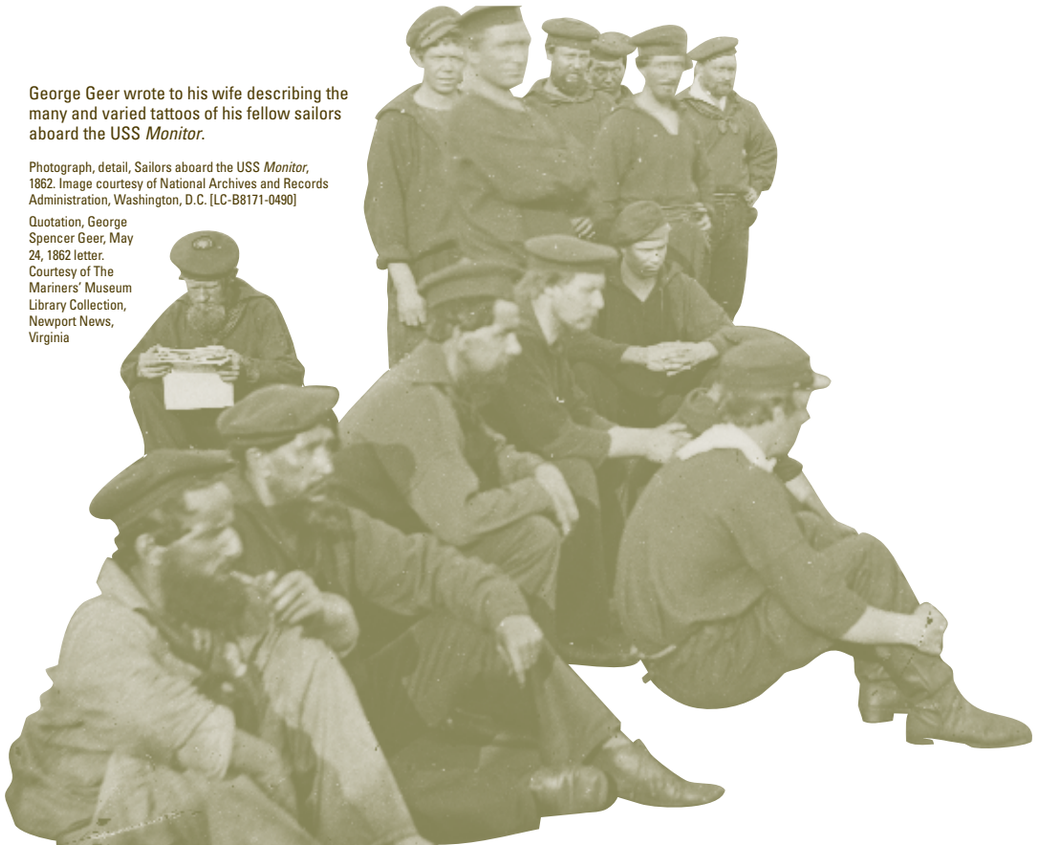
Print, detail, *Spinning a Yarn*, by E.H. Hart, *circa* 1890. Photograph. Independence Seaport Museum: Gift courtesy of Hannah L. Henderson, in memory of her husband, J. Welles Henderson [2008.46]

Steve Gilbert, *Tattoo History: A Source Book*, Juno Books, p.123

GEORGE SPENCER GEER (1836-1892)

George Geer served aboard the ironclad warship USS *Monitor* as a first-class fireman during its famous Civil War battle with the Confederate ironclad CSS *Virginia*. In one of his letters home in 1862 he describes the **tattoos of his fellow sailors** aboard ship.

"...I wish you could see the bodys [sic] of some of these old sailors. They are regular Picture Books have India Ink pricked all over their body one has a Snake coiled around his leg some have splendid done pieces of coat of arms of state American Flags and most of all have the Crusifiction [sic] of Christ on some part of their body."



George Geer wrote to his wife describing the many and varied tattoos of his fellow sailors aboard the USS *Monitor*.

Photograph, detail, Sailors aboard the USS *Monitor*, 1862. Image courtesy of National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C. [LC-B8171-0490]

Quotation, George Spencer Geer, May 24, 1862 letter. Courtesy of The Mariners' Museum Library Collection, Newport News, Virginia

Masonic Symbol – Captain Wakeman's tattoos of Masonic symbols likely resembled the compass and square carved on this octant box. The octant was an indispensable navigational instrument used to determine a ship's latitude at sea.

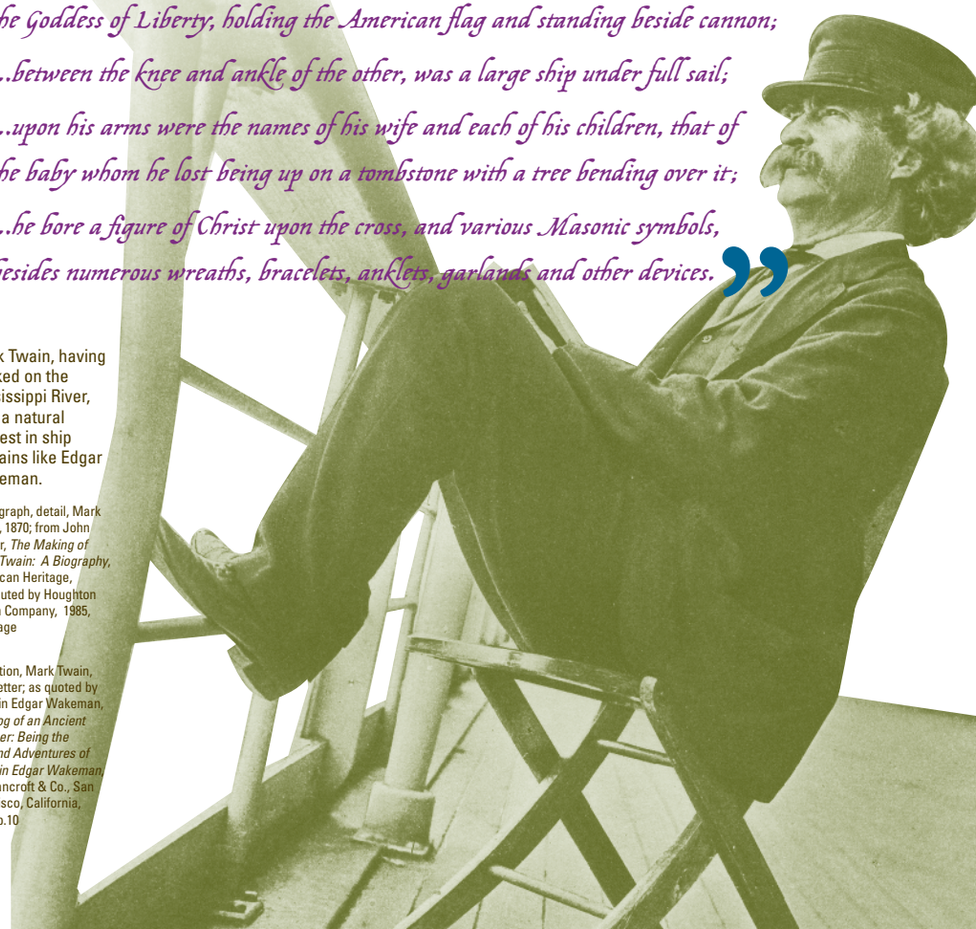
Octant box, early 19th century. Carved and varnished wood. Independence Seaport Museum: Gift courtesy of Mrs. Alfred Putnam and Mrs. Witney Wright [1974.54.20a-d]

CAPTAIN EDGAR WAKEMAN (1818-1875)

Mark Twain provides a wonderful description of Captain Edgar Wakeman's tattoos in a letter to his wife in 1866. He described Wakeman as being *"tattooed from head to foot like a Feejee Islander."*

Wakeman's tattoos are clearly American in origin and not of the type produced in the islands of Fiji. Twain's characterization reflects the popular romanticized notion of the **exotic nature** of tattoos and their roots in the South Pacific islands.

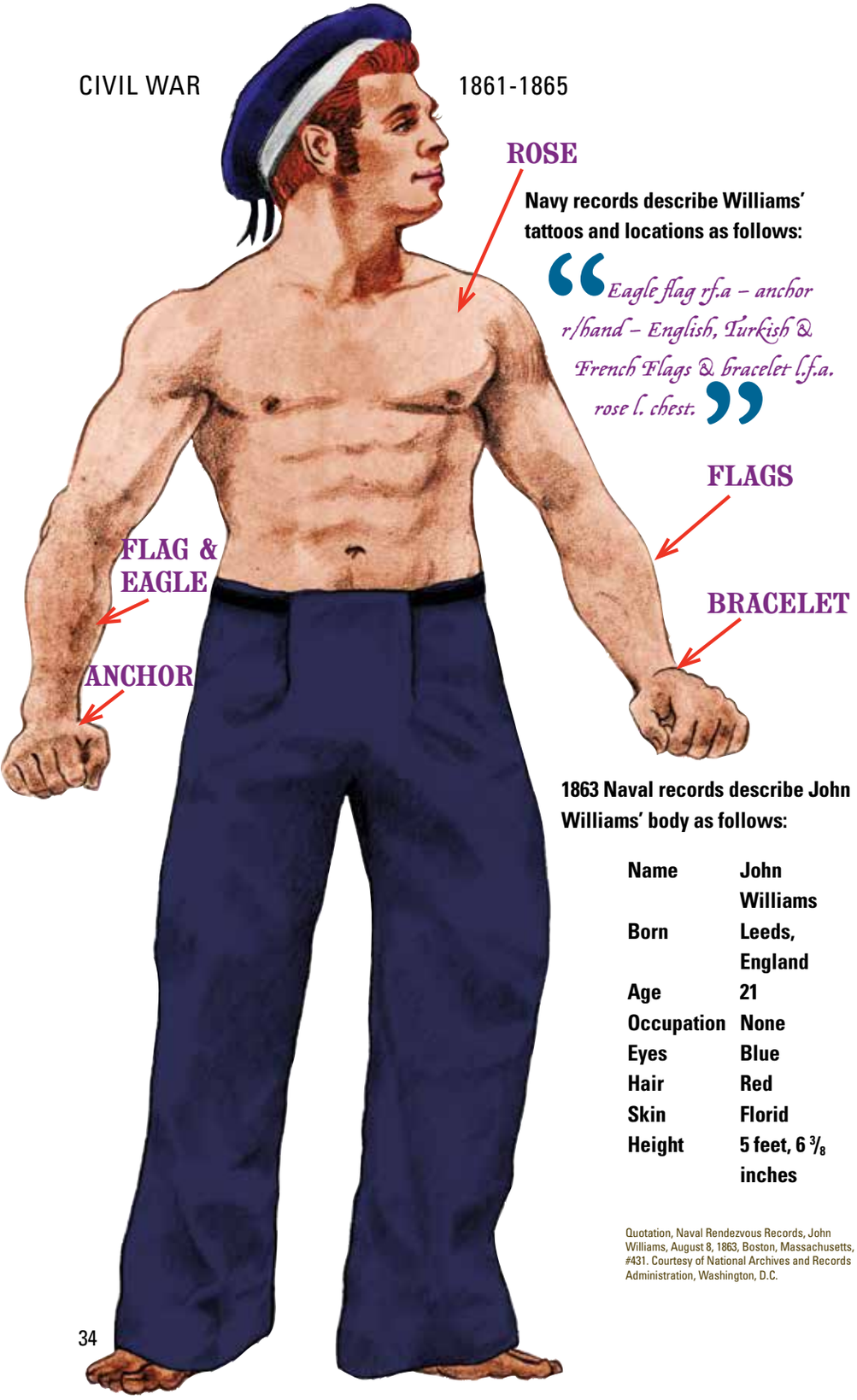
"Between the knee and ankle of one leg, was tattooed in colors a figure of the Goddess of Liberty, holding the American flag and standing beside cannon; ...between the knee and ankle of the other, was a large ship under full sail; ...upon his arms were the names of his wife and each of his children, that of the baby whom he lost being up on a tombstone with a tree bending over it; ...he bore a figure of Christ upon the cross, and various Masonic symbols, besides numerous wreaths, bracelets, anklets, garlands and other devices."



Mark Twain, having worked on the Mississippi River, took a natural interest in ship captains like Edgar Wakeman.

Photograph, detail, Mark Twain, 1870; from John Lauber, *The Making of Mark Twain: A Biography*, American Heritage, distributed by Houghton Mifflin Company, 1985, title page

Quotation, Mark Twain, 1866 letter; as quoted by Captain Edgar Wakeman, *The Log of an Ancient Mariner: Being the Life and Adventures of Captain Edgar Wakeman*, A.L Bancroft & Co., San Francisco, California, 1878, p.10



Navy records describe Williams' tattoos and locations as follows:

"Eagle flag r.f.a – anchor r/hand – English, Turkish & French Flags & bracelet l.f.a. rose l. chest."

1863 Naval records describe John Williams' body as follows:

Name	**John Williams**
Born	**Leeds, England**
Age	**21**
Occupation	**None**
Eyes	**Blue**
Hair	**Red**
Skin	**Florid**
Height	**5 feet, 6 3/8 inches**

Quotation, Naval Rendezvous Records, John Williams, August 8, 1863, Boston, Massachusetts, #431. Courtesy of National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C.

JOHN WILLIAMS (b.1842)

John Williams was an immigrant from England and at age 21 bore a great number of tattoos. He can be **identified as an American** citizen by the eagle and flag on right forearm and his enlistment into the Union Navy. His other tattoos, including an anchor, rose, and international flags, suggest he spent many years at sea visiting countries as distant as Turkey.

John Williams' Tattoos – These sailor crafts suggest what Williams' tattoos might have looked like.

Sailor's liberty belt with international flags, mid-19th century. Needlepoint backed with sack cloth and edged in leather. Independence Seaport Museum [2008.32.5]

Scrimshaw whale's tooth with flower, late 19th century. Whale tooth with incised drawing and pigment. Independence Seaport Museum: Gift courtesy of Frank T. Howard [1967.311]

Scrimshaw whale's tooth with *E PLURIBUS UNUM*, 1860. Whale tooth with incised drawing and pigment. Loan courtesy of The Dietrich American Foundation, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania [1.2.965]

Navy records describe Boston's tattoos and their locations as follows:

"crucifix and whale l.forearm: has lost l.forefinger"

1863 Naval records describe Oliver Boston's body as follows:

Name	**Oliver C. Boston**
Born	**Nantucket, Massachusetts**
Age	**27**
Occupation	**Steward**
Eyes	**Black**
Hair	**Black, curly**
Skin	**Mulatto**
Height	**5 feet, 8 inches**

Quotation, Naval Rendezvous Records, Oliver C. Boston, July 18, 1863, New Bedford, Massachusetts, #379. Courtesy of National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C.

OLIVER C. BOSTON (b.1836)

Oliver Boston was born in Nantucket, the heart of America's whaling industry in New England. The whale tattooed on his left forearm and the **loss of his left forefinger** indicates he likely worked on a whaling ship.

African-Americans like Boston were employed in great numbers to work aboard the difficult and frequently **dangerous whaling voyages.** He joined the Union Navy during the Civil War and unfortunately was offered less opportunity as he was relegated to serve only as a cabin steward.

Oliver C. Boston's Tattoos – These sailor crafts suggest what Boston's tattoos might have looked like.

Scrimshaw whale's tooth with cross and wreath, mid-19th century. Whale tooth with incised drawing and pigment. Loan courtesy of The Dietrich American Foundation, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania [1.2.283-1]

Scrimshaw whale's tooth with whale, mid-19th century. Whale tooth with incised drawing and pigment. Loan courtesy of The Estate of Richard Dietrich, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania [1.2.HRD.2325]

GEORGE W.W. DOVE

It is not known if George W.W. Dove sported tattoos when he served aboard the USS *Richmond* during the Civil War. The sailor-made **embroidered images** on this blouse stem from the same visual vocabulary as the tattoos decorating the bodies of fellow crew members. This demonstrates how sailors used their **bodies and clothing to communicate** their pride as mariners and their allegiance to the Union.

Non-regulation uniforms such as this would have been worn on special occasions when a ship's crew was **allowed to go ashore** to entertain themselves. The bag would have been worn around the neck and under his blouse to carry and keep money and valuables safe while in port.

Embroidered Tattoos – The embroidered images on this blouse suggest what the patriotic tattoos of the Civil War might have looked like.

Sailor's blouse belonging to George W.W. Dove, *circa* 1860. Silk embroidered wool, silk ribbon and metal buttons. Loan courtesy of Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Gift of Hannah L. Henderson [2008-37-1]. Philadelphia venue only.

STEEL SHIPS AND ELECTRIC TATTOOS

The invention of the electric tattoo machine echoed the **technological advancements** in America's new steel Navy. The Age of Sail slowly came to a close as faster and more reliable steam-powered steel ships made the world more accessible.

Likewise, the tedious method of hand-tattooing gave way to faster, more **efficient, electric tattooing**. Acceptance of the new method created a boom in the business. Once considered a shipboard craft, tattooing was now offered by ex-sailors as they traveled the country, eventually settling down in towns and cities.

Tattoos' maritime associations reminded Americans of their **newly found pride** as a world power, solidified largely through naval victories during the Spanish-American War and the later famous circumnavigation of the globe by America's Great White Fleet.

Remember the *Maine* – The explosion of the battleship USS *Maine* prompted America's declaration of war with Spain in 1898. "Remember the *Maine*" was the battle cry of sailors as they avenged the loss of their fellow seamen.

Hardtack biscuit with *REMEMBER THE MAINE, OUR SAILORS*, S.M. Mosteller, 1898. Biscuit with ink drawing. Loan courtesy of Patricia and Robert Marks

Drawing, *Remember the "Maine"* tattoo design, C.H. Fellowes, *circa* 1900. Ink on paper. Image courtesy of Mystic Seaport Museum, Mystic, Connecticut [1983.52.3.19]

SAMUEL O'REILLY

(active 1875-1908)

Samuel O'Reilly transformed the tattoo world in 1891 with the invention of his electric *Tattoo Machine*. Tattooing had been a slow and **laborious process** and was now made efficient. O'Reilly patented his *Tattoo Machine,* which he readapted from Thomas Edison's 1876 *Autographic Printing Pen* and called this new process *tattaugraphs*.

O'Reilly is thought to be among the first tattooists in America to trade working on board a ship for settling down in a port and **opening a studio.** He started calling himself "Professor," opened a tattoo studio at Chatham Square in New York City in 1875, and began **training apprentices.** *"Professor O'Reilly used to declare solemnly that an American sailor without a tattoo was like a ship without grog — not seaworthy."*

One of Samuel O'Reilly's tattoo machines. The design was awarded a United States patent in 1891.

Photograph, Samuel O'Reilly Tattoo Machine, *circa* 1891. Image courtesy of Tattoo Archive, Winston-Salem, North Carolina

Quotation, Albert Parry, *Tattoo: Secrets of a Strange Art as Practised Among the Natives of the United States*, Simon & Schuster, 1933, page 81

Quotation, Samuel O'Reilly; as quoted by Steve Gilbert, *Tattoo History: A Source Book*, Juno Books and RE/Search Publications, New York, p.129

"The glory of a man-o'-war at Santiago and elsewhere was to be stripped to the waist, his trousers up to his knees, his white skin profusely decorated in tattoo; begrimed with powder, they were the men to do or die. Brave fellows! Little fear had they of shot and shell, amid the smoke of battle and after they scrubbed down the glorified in their tattoos."

Photograph, *Gun Crew Drill - U.S. Battleship*, unidentified photographer, *circa* 1910. Loan courtesy of The Magazine, San Francisco, California

NEW WAY OF TATTOOING

The time-honored tattooing method was a simple **bundle of needles** attached to a wooden handle. The tattooist dipped it in ink and rhythmically punctured the skin in the desired pattern.

Samuel O'Reilly's 1891 electric *Tattoo Machine* replicated the **laborious motions** of the hand as it punctured the skin. This allowed the tattooist freer movement of the hand in the execution of the design. The machine brought tattooing into **the electric age**, but did require access to electricity. In addition, the invention created a **buzzing sound** now synonymous with tattooing.

Display card, *Old Style Hand Tattooing Needles*, assembled by August Bernard Coleman, *circa* 1930. Bone-handled needles mounted to a labeled display card. Loan courtesy of The Mariners' Museum, Newport News, Virginia [IT 02ABC]

C.H. FELLOWES (active 1900)

The hand-drawn tattoo design book of C.H. Fellowes from 1900 is among the earliest known American tattoo design books still in existence. It features designs commemorating admirals and ships involved in the recently fought Spanish-American War of 1898. These newly developed tattoos reflected the **technological advances** that heralded America's new steel navy.

Little is known about Fellowes except what can be interpreted from subjects in his book. A large percentage of the designs feature maritime subjects and suggest Fellowes might have served in the Navy and possibly **learned tattooing there.**

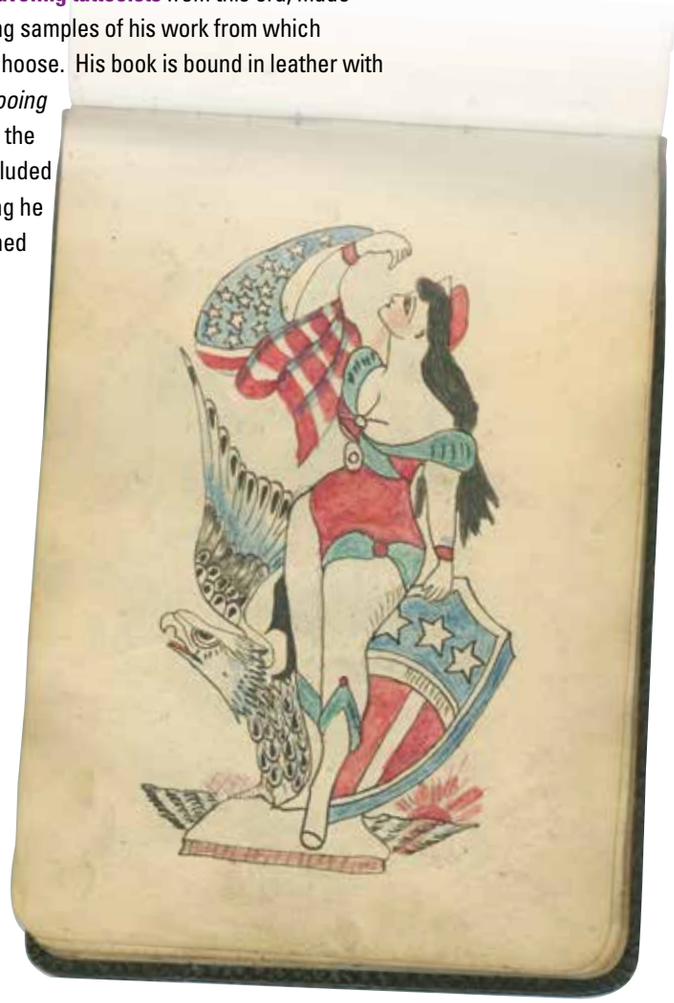
C. H. Fellowes Flash Book

Drawing, page of tattoo flash from a design book by C.H. Fellowes, 1900. Ink on paper. Image courtesy of Mystic Seaport Museum, Mystic, Connecticut [1983.52.3.86]

C.V. BROWNELL (active 1900)

The **tattoo design book** of C.V. Brownell is among the earliest known American flash books of its kind to have survived and is thought to have been made around 1900. It features maritime subjects including a steel battleship and sailors at ship wheels, capstans, and a topmast flying the American flag. However, it is unknown if Brownell served in the Navy or just offered such designs to his clients.

Brownell, like other **traveling tattooists** from this era, made hand-drawn books featuring samples of his work from which prospective clients could choose. His book is bound in leather with *"C.V. Brownell, Fancy Tattooing Artist"* imprinted in gold on the cover. The imprint also included his street address indicating he had settled down and opened a studio in Wisconsin, it is believed.



Drawing, page of tattoo flash from a design book by C.V. Brownell, *circa* 1900. Ink and color pencil on paper. Image courtesy of Nick Schonberger

TRAVELING TATTOOISTS

Sailors by nature were nomadic, **moving from ship to ship** as job opportunities arose or military transfers occurred. Because they had little space aboard ship for personal belongings, ship tattooists stored their supplies in compact workboxes.

Commonly the **tattooists' workboxes** were used to advertise their services and painted with images to attract the attention of potential customers. They also prepared compact books of hand-drawn tattoo designs from which their customers could choose.

It is unknown when sailor **tattooists began to settle in ports** and offer their services out of storefronts and studios. The earliest documented American studios were opened by Martin Hilderbrandt and Samuel O'Reilly in New York City in the mid-1870s.

Traveling Tattooists

Flash book, unidentified artist, *circa* 1890. Colored pencil and ink in a leather-bound autograph book. Loan courtesy of Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Massachusetts [M27853]

Tattooist's tool chest, late 19th century. Machinist's tool box with painting on inner lid. Loan courtesy of Nick Schonberger

An early tattoo shop on the East River Front, New York City, in 1890.

Print, detail, *Characteristic Sketches on the East River Front, New York City: Tattooing*, from *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, November 22, 1890, cover illustration

LIEU TISDALE

Lieu Tisdale observed that many of his fellow sailors aboard the USS *Olympia* sported **"elaborately tattooed" feet.** Some looked like fancy slippers; others featured butterflies, snakes, or monkeys, and still others had "only a star on each toe."

During one of the many shipboard outbreaks of "tattoo fever" Tisdale got his first tattoo, a geisha girl on his left forearm.

His second – a **large tattoo on his chest** commemorating his participation in the Battle of Manila Bay – came during a five-day stint in the brig. He described it as a

> *"crossed cannon wrapped in the Stars and Stripes; while the American eagle, holding in his beak a banner with the inscription, "Manila, May 1, 1898," will hover above a bursting shell through whose fire and smoke rides the glorious United States Flag-ship Olympia."*

Cult of Dewey – Sailors commemorated their participation in the 1898 Battle of Manila Bay with tattoos of Commodore George Dewey, and his flagship, USS *Olympia*. These sailors were celebrated as heroes by the American public.

Drawing, Admiral George Dewey tattoo design, C.H. Fellowes, *circa* 1900. Pencil and ink on paper. Image courtesy of Mystic Seaport Museum, Mystic, Connecticut [1983.52.3.87]

Tattoo Fever – Lieu Tisdale described tattooing as common aboard the USS *Olympia*. However, only these few images provide a glimpse at what those tattoos might have looked like.

Photograph, William Reader tattooing a fellow seaman aboard USS *Olympia*, Frances Benjamin Johnston, 1899. Independence Seaport Museum [2003.38.1]

Print, detail, "*Olympia's" tattooed feet*, book plate from *Three Years Behind the Guns: The True Chronicles of a "DIDDY-BOX,"* Lieu G. Tisdale, The Century Company, 1908, page 128

POLLYWOGS AND SHELLBACKS

Crossing the Line – Sailors documented their passing the ceremony's tests with tattoos and closely-protected certificates to prevent having to endure the ceremony again.

Crossing the Line certificate, Edward S. Morgan, January 10, 1894. Ink on paper. Independence Seaport Museum: Gift courtesy of Mary T. Smith [1992.26.14]

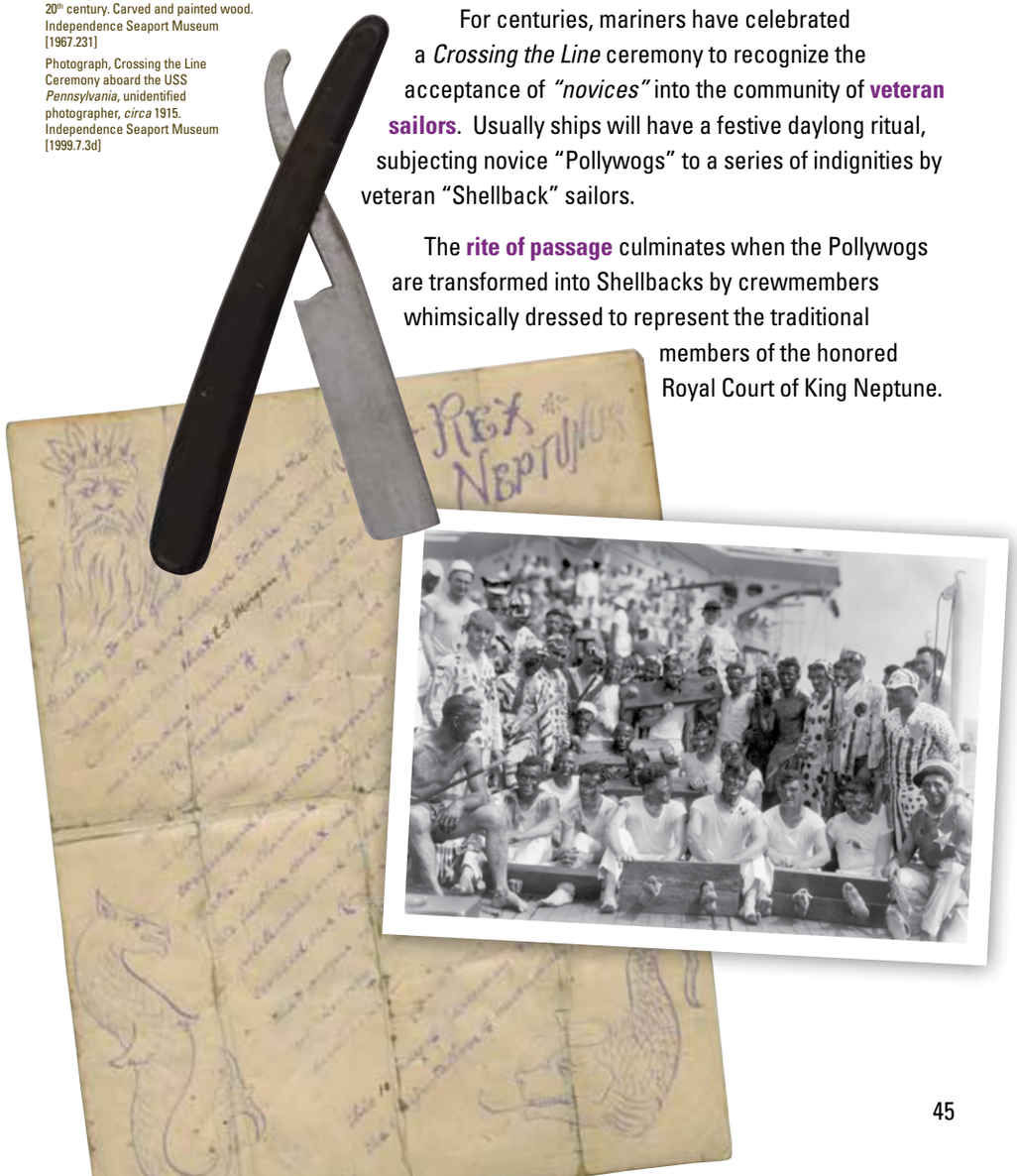
Crossing the Line ceremonial razor, mid-20th century. Carved and painted wood. Independence Seaport Museum [1967.231]

Photograph, Crossing the Line Ceremony aboard the USS *Pennsylvania*, unidentified photographer, *circa* 1915. Independence Seaport Museum [1999.7.3d]

The tattoo has been traditionally recognized as a way of marking a man's commitment to a seafaring life. The art has also been employed to celebrate **milestone events** in a seaman's nautical career such as their first crossing of the Equator, called *Crossing the Line*. These tattoos often feature the crossing date along with King Neptune, mermaids, and various sea creatures.

For centuries, mariners have celebrated a *Crossing the Line* ceremony to recognize the acceptance of *"novices"* into the community of **veteran sailors**. Usually ships will have a festive daylong ritual, subjecting novice "Pollywogs" to a series of indignities by veteran "Shellback" sailors.

The **rite of passage** culminates when the Pollywogs are transformed into Shellbacks by crewmembers whimsically dressed to represent the traditional members of the honored Royal Court of King Neptune.



WORLD WAR I

Merchant sailors were in great danger during World War I. The Atlantic Ocean became a battleground as German submarines waged war on **commercial shipping**, sinking ships without warning. In response, both the American Navy and the Merchant Marine rapidly grew to become among the largest fleets in the world.

Tattooists such as "Cap'n" Bill Coleman were drawn to **boomtowns** like Norfolk, Virginia, which grew to support servicemen stationed at newly built naval bases. Large numbers of men were recruited into service using **patriotic images** in advertising and in turn they sought tattoos to reflect their enthusiasm and support of the American cause. The efficiency of the electric tattoo machine was harnessed to tattoo the **largest mobilization** of American men yet assembled for service in the Navy.

Sailors sought patriotic tattoos to reflect their enthusiasm and support of America's participation in World War I.

Production tattoo flash, attributed to Zeis Studio, Rockford, Illinois, 1910s. Cyanotype print on paper. Loan courtesy of Fleisher/Ollman Gallery, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Rank badge, *circa* 1915. Embroidered cotton on wool. Independence Seaport Museum: Gift courtesy of Mary T. Smith [1992.26.8]

Sheet music, *Salute the Flag*, by Victor Bartlett, Himan Music Co., publisher, 1914. Chromolithograph. Independence Seaport Museum: Gift courtesy of Hannah L. Henderson, in memory of her husband, J. Welles Henderson [2008.46.54]

Tattooer's Art – Coleman's genius can be seen in the color and reinvention of traditional tattoo design.

Drawings, details, *Designs of the Tattooers Art*, August Bernard Coleman, *circa* 1920-1930. Watercolor and ink on paper. Loan courtesy of The Mariners' Museum, Newport News, Virginia [QW92 and QW93]

"CAP'N" AUGUST BERNARD COLEMAN (1884-1973)

"Cap'n" Bill Coleman's tattoos suggest **he was a seaman**. His tattoos included common sailor imagery like a large flag and eagle on his chest and a ship on his stomach, as well as sun designs on his kneecaps and fancy sock designs on his feet.

Coleman opened a tattoo shop in Norfolk, Virginia, in 1918, a year after the United States entered World War I. Norfolk was **a new Navy boomtown** and offered a steady supply of seamen in need of tattoos. Coleman's shop was located in the city's red light district where servicemen found their entertainment.

Following World War II, Norfolk passed an ordinance **making tattooing illegal,** prompting Coleman and other tattooists to move across the Elizabeth River to Portsmouth.

"Cap'n" Bill Coleman tattooing a sailor with an eagle, flag and anchor design.

Photograph, "Cap'n" Coleman in his Norfolk studio, by W.T. Radcliffe, 1936. Image courtesy of Tattoo Archive, Winston-Salem, North Carolina

C.W. Eldridge, *August "Cap'n" Coleman*, Tattoo Archive website, 2009, http://www.tattooarchive.com/history/coleman_august_cap.htm

"CAP'N" BILL COLEMAN'S ILLUSTRATED MAN

Early tattoos survive only in photographs, so this figurine, displayed in "Cap'n" Bill Coleman's shop window for many years, provides a rare opportunity to understand how individual designs made up a **full body-suit** of tattoos.

The figurine dates to World War I indicated by the **steel ships tattooed** on the stomach and the right shin featuring distinctive cage masts which were typical from 1919-1920. The New York tattooists Charlie Wagner and Elmer E. Getchell were also known to have similar figurines in their shops sporting tattoos from head to toe.

TATTOOING EQUIPMENT

These tattoo supplies from Coleman's studio date to the 1930s. The **electric tattoo machine** was actually made by Coleman. Its speed was controlled by a direct-current rheostat. The tattooist disinfected needles and skin with alcohol, used a mixture of petroleum jelly and powdered carbon to transfer a design pattern to the skin, and **blended dry pigments** stored in jars with distilled water and mouthwash to create the dyes.

Coleman's Tattoo Shop – These tattoo tools and figurine were used by "Cap'n" Coleman and came from his shop in Norfolk, Virginia, in the 1930s. The tattoo machines were made by Coleman himself. The figurine was decorated between 1910-1920.

Figurine of a Tattooed Man, painted by August Bernard Coleman, *circa* 1910-1920. Ink and colored pencil on painted plaster.

(2) Electric tattoo machines, made by August Bernard Coleman, *circa* 1930. Electromagnet mounted in a metal housing with a needle and rubber-covered tube.

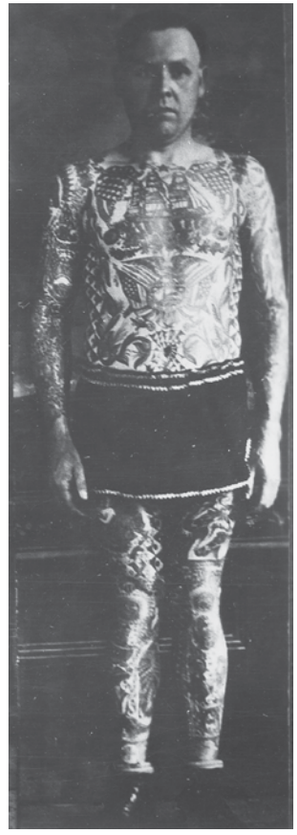
Bottles and jars of tattooing supplies, used by August Bernard Coleman, *circa* 1930. Common glass bottles and jars and a salt shaker.

Loan of all objects in this case courtesy of The Mariners' Museum, Newport News, Virginia [IT 01.01, 02, 03, 05, 011]. Philadelphia venue only.

GEORGE FOSDICK (1885-1946)

George Fosdick served in both the United States **Navy and Merchant Marine** but didn't start tattooing until after he was discharged. Fosdick opened his first tattoo shop in Portland, Oregon, in 1912, and later worked in Seattle, Washington. He went by the name "Sailor George" and sometimes as "Professor G. Fosdick."

> *"Father had a large family, money was not plentiful, so early in life I had to fend for myself. For a time I followed the sea; then later in life I learned the art whose age nobody knows."*



Sailor George – Sailor George was active along the northwest coast of the United States during World War I.

(2) Photographs, *Man tattooed by "Sailor" George [Fosdick] of Portland, Oregon,* unidentified photographer, 1920s. Mid-20th century copy photograph. Loan courtesy of The Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction, Inc., Bloomington, Indiana [KIDC70094ab]

C.W. Eldridge, *George Fosdick*, Tattoo Archive website, 2009, http://www.tattooarchive.com/history/fosdick_george.htm

FRED CLARK (1893-1964)

Fred Clark, like many other tattooists, learned his craft at sea and practiced it upon returning home. Clark's full-body suit of tattoos earned him the ability to be employed as the ***tattooed man*** at traveling circuses working out of Indianapolis and Cincinnati.

Clark's largest tattoo covers his entire back and **expresses his patriotism** and service aboard the battleship USS *Indiana* during World War I. The design features the battleship surrounded by a fancy frame and American flags topped with stars and a butterfly. Below, an eagle rests on a shield and embraces cannons and arrows under its wings.

Fred Clark the Sailor – Clark was proud of his service aboard the battleship USS *Indiana* in World War I.

Photograph, tattoos on Fred Clark's back, unidentified photographer, 1920s. Image courtesy of The Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction, Inc., Bloomington, Indiana [KIDC70094ab]

MARVIN R. KECK (1895-1971)

Marvin Keck's Trombone – Look closely at the trombone to see the names of ports and ships that Keck visited during his service in the Navy. This not only reflects the way that sailors listed ports of call on their bodies with tattoos but also on other sailor crafts being produced aboard ship.

Trombone belonging to and engraved by Marvin Keck, Frank Holton & Co., early 20th century. Brass. Independence Seaport Museum: Gift courtesy of Jim Keck [2006.24]

Marvin Keck didn't have tattoos, though his trombone did. A member of USS *Olympia's* band, Keck **engraved his trombone** with the names of ports he visited, just as sailors tattooed their bodies as proof of travels to be shared with family and friends back home.

Keck wrote a story, *A Trombone Talks,* where he allows the instrument to tell its story…

"As we stopped at different ports, my master would carve the name on my bell, so this was my first engraving "Gibraltar." ...During this voyage through the Mediterranean, we ran into a storm and my master and I fell down a hatchway giving my bell dents in several places. For these wounds I received a chevron carved on by bell, as all sailors were issued gold chevrons for wounds. ...Still having a little space on my bell flange, my master carved the home ports of the Olympia, "New York" "Norfolk" and "Charleston," South Carolina where most of the ships crew was discharged the last of November 1919."

Quotation, Marvin Keck, *A Trombone Talks, circa* 1919. Independence Seaport Museum: Gift courtesy of Jim Keck [2006.24]

THE FLEET'S IN!

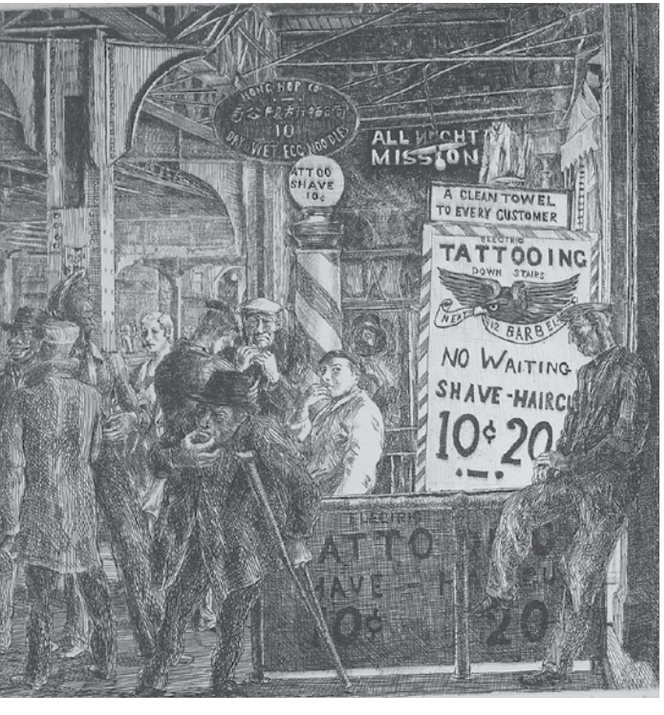
When a naval fleet arrived in port, hundreds of sailors fanned throughout the city in search of a variety of entertainments including bars, prostitutes, flop houses, and tattoo parlors. It was this kind of activity that gave sailors a bad name in the eyes of the general public. Regular folks instead preferred the humorous and clean-living image of *Popeye, the Sailor Man* of the 1930s. Popeye was a bit rough and always ready to fight – but only for what was right.

And yet, even **Popeye had a tattoo** — an anchor on his bulging forearm — that hinted at this dark side, even in the kind-hearted comic strip hero. The Navy took steps to clean up this negative image, including **banning tattoos** considered offensive. This created a booming business for tattooists adept at "clothing" naked lady tattoos.

The Fleet's In!

The Fleet's In! depicts sailors in pursuit of entertainment during shore leave. Their drunkenness seems to be getting in the way of anything actually happening. This was frequently the situation, and sailors and their buddies instead found themselves at tattoo shops, resulting in their transformation from naïve boys into seasoned sailors.

Painting, *The Fleet's In!*, Paul Cadmus, 1934. Tempera on board. Loan courtesy of U.S. Navy Art Collection, Washington, DC [34-5-A]. Philadelphia venue only.



Popeye iron-on transfer, *circa* 1940. Ink on tissue paper. © King Features Syndicate. Independence Seaport Museum: Gift courtesy of Hannah L. Henderson, in memory of her husband, J. Welles Henderson [2008.46.55]

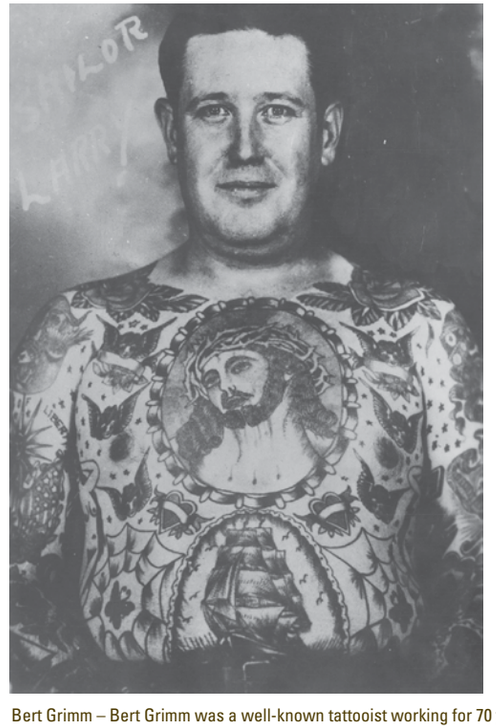
The Bowery – This print depicts a tattoo shop in the basement of a barber shop on Bowery Street in New York City in 1930. The Bowery was a rough and busy neighborhood to which sailors would flock to find inexpensive entertainment. Elevated train tracks made the street dark even during the day.

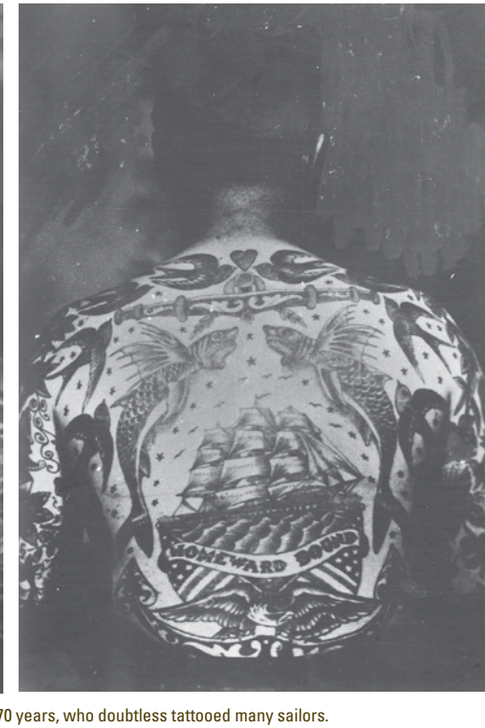
Print, *Tattoo-Shave-Haircut*, Reginald Marsh, 1932. Etching. Loan courtesy of Philadelphia Museum of Art: Purchased with the Thomas Skelton Harrison Fund, 1941 [1941-53-486]. Philadelphia venue only.

BERT GRIMM (1900-1985)

Bert Grimm started tattooing at age 12. Fascinated by the **tattooists of his hometown** of Portland, Oregon, Grimm made their shops his second home. His mentors were some of the most renowned tattooists on the West Coast, including Sailor Gus, Sailor George Fosdick, and Charlie Western.

Grimm moved around and worked in some of the **nation's largest ports** — Seattle, Los Angles, and Chicago, as well as inland cities like St. Louis, Salt Lake City, and Las Vegas. He settled down after World War II and opened the shop for which he is best known, *Grimm's World Famous Tattoo,* at Nu Pike Amusement Park in Long Beach, California, where generations of **Merchant and Navy sailors** got tattoos before shipping out.





Bert Grimm – Bert Grimm was a well-known tattooist working for 70 years, who doubtless tattooed many sailors.

Photographs, *"Sailor Larry" tattooed by Bert Grimm of St. Louis*, unidentified photographer. Loan courtesy of The Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction, Inc., Bloomington, Indiana [KIDC70025 and KIDC70026]

CHARLIE WAGNER (1875-1953)

Charlie Wagner was the most **renowned tattooist** of his time. Newspaper reporters frequently quoted his observations about his biggest customers – sailors.

"If there were a Jackie [sailor] without a piece of lucky tattooing on him, I'd know it... When I quit my job as a watchman on the waterfront to learn my art, the old-time tar thought he had to have a crucifix on his chest to keep him from general harm, a pig on his left instep so he couldn't drown, and "hold fast" on his hands, one letter to a finger, so as he couldn't fall from aloft."

Wagner apprenticed with legendary tattooist Samuel O'Reilly in New York City's roughest neighborhood, Chatham Square. When O'Reilly died, Wagner took over the shop and worked for 45 years as the *Michelangelo of Tattooing*. Like his mentor, he patented in 1904 **his own version of an electric tattoo machine**. Wagner's innovative design is the basis of today's tattoo machines.

Charlie Wagner tattooing in his shop in the 1930s.

Quotation, Charlie Wagner; as quoted by Albert Parry, *Strange Tattoo: Secrets of a Strange Art as Practised Among the Natives of the United States*, Simon and Schuster, 1933, p.66

C.W. Eldridge, Charlie Wagner, Tattoo Archive website, 2009, www.tattooarchive.com/history/wagner_charlie

Charlie Wagner – Wagner was known to charge only 25 cents for his tattoos, undercutting his competitors' prices.

Business Card, *Professor Charlie Wagner Electric Tattooing Artist, circa* 1900. Photolithograph. Loan courtesy of Tattoo Archive, Winston-Salem, North Carolina. Philadelphia venue only.

Print, Professor *Charlie Wagner Electric Tattooing Artist, circa* 1900. Photolithograph. Loan courtesy of Tattoo Archive, Winston-Salem, North Carolina

"Those Airy Tattooed Girls– Dress 'em Up," Says Uncle Sam

Needled Ladies Lacking Clothes, May Lend a Tang to Gentlemen in Civilian Life. But Those Going Into the Army or Navy Must Now Outfit Them in Inky Lingerie, or Cover 'Em With Colorful Bouquets, Shirts and Butterflies

NAKED LADIES

In the early 20th century the United States began requiring recruits to alter their tattoos of naked ladies before being admitted into the Navy. Naval officials believed such tattoos showed *"the recruit to be of* **possibly loose moral nature** *and the effect on the men with whom he is associated might not be a good one. We want clean-minded men in the United States Navy."*

This rule remained in effect throughout World War II and benefited tattoo artists like Charlie Wagner who *"estimated that next to covering up the names of former sweethearts, the work which had brought him the most money over the years had been complying with the Naval order of 1908." Wagner said "he was too busy to sterilize his needles because he was doing essential war work:* **tattooing clothes on women** *so they could join the Navy."*

This poster provided creative suggestions to tactfully "dress" naked lady tattoos.

Print, detail, *"Those Airy Tattooed Girls – Dress 'em Up,"* Says Uncle Sam, possibly distributed by the Navy League, *circa* 1917. Image courtesy of Tattoo Archive, Winston-Salem, North Carolina

Quotation, Charlie Wagner; as quoted by Albert Parry, *Tattoo: Secrets of a Strange Art as Practised Among the Natives of the United States*, Simon & Schuster, 1933, page 18

Quotation, Charlie Wagner; as quoted by Steve Gilbert, *Tattoo History: A Source Book*, Juno Books and RE/Search Publications, New York, p.129

MILDRED HULL (d. 1947)

Mildred (Millie) Hull billed herself as the **"only lady tattooist in New York City"** and worked out of barber shops and bars in Chatham Square. She was likely the only tattooist in the city between the 1920s and the 1940s that offered a woman's touch to the sometimes painful process of tattooing.

Hull's husband, **Tommy Lee, was a sailor** who sported many of her tattoos. Both Hull and Lee wore full body suits of tattoos and were part of a close circle of elite tattoo professionals that gathered around famed tattooist Charlie Wagner.

Sailors on shore leave would flock to Chatham Square and make their way up the Bowery where the streets were lined with bars, penny arcades, shooting galleries, and tattoo shops. The price of a tattoo varied from shop to shop, but sailors could **get a bargain** from Millie Hull and Wagner, whose tattoos were always the least expensive, starting at just 25 cents.

Tommy Lee – Tommy Lee's chest tattoo features a ship flanked with two swallows surrounded by wreaths and American flags, all topped with an eagle.

Photograph, Tommy Lee, unidentified photographer, *circa* 1930. Mid-20th century copy photograph. Loan courtesy of The Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction, Inc., Bloomington, Indiana [KIDC70099a]

Hull and her husband, Tommy Lee, had tattoos covering their entire bodies.

Photograph, Mildred Hull, 1930s. Image courtesy of Tattoo Archive, Winston-Salem, North Carolina

WORLD WAR II

The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and America's entrance into World War II triggered a **massive mobilization** of young men from all across the country – even larger than World War I. The hordes of young Navy and Merchant Marine recruits suddenly faced life away from home, **alone in strange surroundings** and facing their mortality. The atmosphere was ripe for customs that promoted male bonding, a sense of belonging, and the transformation from naive boys into seasoned sailors.

The custom of getting a tattoo with your sailor buddies served as an **unofficial initiation** ceremony into the military brotherhood and into manhood.

"20, 30, 50 guys would be waiting, from all over. Usually from out of town. Work 5-6 hours without getting up, bent over. In those days you'd sit in a booth, the guys would be all around you, no privacy. Guys all around you, gassed up too and everything. Guys waiting right there for you. A guy picked a tattoo from the wall, you didn't know small or big, whatever the guy picked. Cheap. It was full steam ahead, you had to be fast and a lightning bolt."

World War II Tattoos – Each generation of tattooists and sailors adapts traditional imagery to meet the needs of their time.

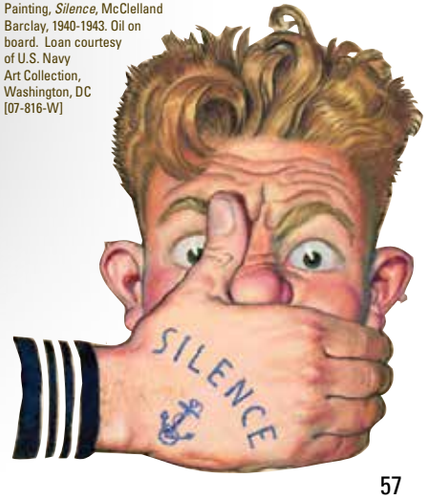
Photograph, Captain Elvy Campbell, tattooed by Sailor George Fosdick, unidentified photographer, 1943. Loan courtesy of Tattoo Archive, Winston-Salem, North Carolina

Photograph, *Intoxicated Party, Panama City*, 1940s. Image courtesy of The Magazine, San Francisco, California

Quotation, Stanley Moskowitz; as quoted by Michael McCabe, New York City Tattoo: The Oral History of an Urban Art, Hardy Marks Publications, Honolulu, Hawaii, 1997, p.27

Loose Lips Sink Ships – This illustration was intended to alert shipyard workers not to talk about their work. The anchor tattoo reminded them of the sailors that would sail the ships they were building. Secrets leaked to the enemy during the war could result in sunken ships and the death of many sailors.

Painting, *Silence*, McClelland Barclay, 1940-1943. Oil on board. Loan courtesy of U.S. Navy Art Collection, Washington, DC [07-816-W]



SAILOR JERRY COLLINS (1911-1973)

Norman Keith "Sailor Jerry" Collins was trained by legendary tattooist Tatts Thomas in Chicago. He relocated to **Honolulu's Chinatown** in the early 1930s and worked for Valentine Galang, a well-known Filipino/Hawaiian tattooist. Sailor Jerry served in the **Merchant Marine** during World War II, sporadically tattooing while co-owning a business that photographed sailors with hula girls against a painted-paradise backdrop.

His fascination with traditional **Japanese tattoos** led him to develop his own style combining Eastern and Western forms into a new hybrid. Collins set **high standards** for his work and customers. He purposely charged higher prices in the belief that only clients who truly understood his artwork would seek him out.

Sailor Jerry – During World War II, Sailor Jerry served in the Merchant Marine, sporadically tattooing while co-owning a photographic business that catered to sailors.

Drawing, tattoo flash, *5I*, Sailor Jerry, *circa* 1940. Watercolor and ink on paper. Loan courtesy of Sailor Jerry, Ltd., Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Quotation, Don Edward Hardy, *Sailor Jerry Collins: American Tattoo Master*, Hardy Marks Publications, Honolulu, Hawaii, 2007, p.51

"The customer is not always right, and you have to consider the thousands of people that will look at it and judge it as well as the subject getting the work put on. I wouldn't mess up a nice design just to please one customer, because someone else will take it and take it the way it's supposed to be."

The young Norman Collins dressed in Navy uniform in 1928.

Photograph, Norman Keith Collins in Navy uniform, 1928, *Sailor Jerry Collins: American Tattoo Master*, page 10. Image courtesy of Don Edward Hardy

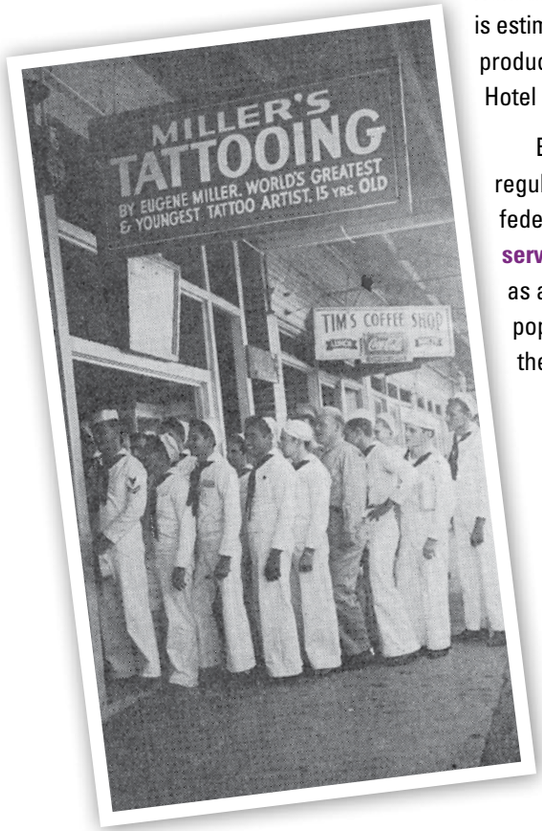
HOTEL STREET, HONOLULU

During World War II, Honolulu became the hub of naval operations in the Pacific.

The city was filled with servicemen returning from battle or waiting to be deployed. They were a bored, lonesome, homesick group who "observed the conventions of a society of men, of **young men who may soon be dead**."

Sailors flocked to Hotel Street in Chinatown to spend their pocket money on entertainment. They stood patiently in long lines for a chance to be photographed with a hula girl, or entrance to a bar, or three minutes with a prostitute and then a tattoo. "For many of the men, Hotel Street sex and tattooing went together like peanut butter and jelly." It is estimated that **300-500 tattoos a day** were produced in the eight known tattoo shops along Hotel Street during the heyday of World War II.

Brothels, bars, and tattoo shops were regulated by municipal, territorial, and federal authorities to **protect the health of servicemen.** Local authorities saw brothels as a necessary measure to protect the city's population of young girls and women from the rowdy servicemen.



Eugene Miller was a 15 year-old Filipino whose tattooist shop was located on Hotel Street in Honolulu.

Photograph, Miller's Tattooing, *New Army-Navy Review*, February 1944, p.14. Image courtesy of Hawaii State Library, Honolulu, Hawaii

Quotations, Beth Bailey and David Farber, *The First Strange Place: The Alchemy of Race and Sex in World War II Hawaii*, The Free Press, Division of Macmillan, New York, New York, 1992

LOOKING FOR LOVE...

Sailors often had the **names of loved ones** tattooed on their bodies to reassure themselves they had someone special at home and to help sustain their dream of the perfect love and life awaiting them at war's end. These types of tattoos became the hallmark of sailors in the war. Tattoos of hula girls, pin-ups, the names of sweethearts, and even "Mom" were **powerful personal icons** to take into battle. Each represented something, someone, or some ideal to fight for, a reason to live.

Popular humor of the period touched on the seamen's worst fears, the possibility their sweethearts were not faithful, and they might truly be alone.

Sustaining the Dream – Posing with a hula girl for a photograph made it possible for a sailor to imagine better times when the war would be over.

Photograph, two sailors with a "hula girl" with photo-backdrop, inscribed "Me," unidentified studio photographer, 1940s. Loan courtesy of The Magazine, San Francisco, California

Quotation, unidentified veteran sailor; as quoted by Madame Chinchilla, *Stewed, Screwed & Tattooed,* Third Revised Edition, Triangle Tattoo & Museum, 2005, p.1

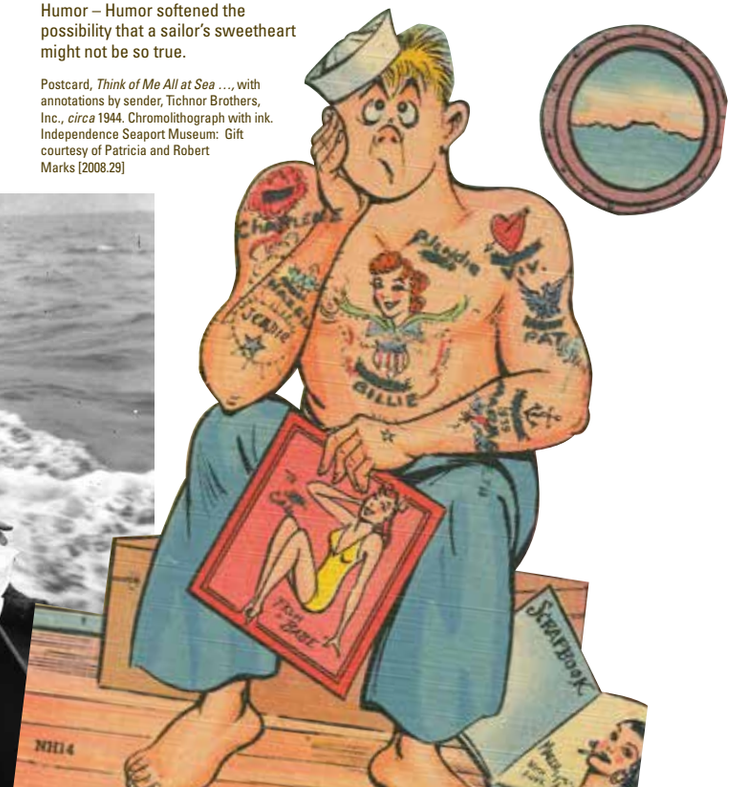
"See this bikini... my wife made me put this on her cause she didn't really like the idea of me having a naked lady on my arm, and she made me have her hair tattooed brunette to match hers instead of blonde. That's O.K. 'cause I loved the old gal!"

A Reason to Live - Tattoos of pin-ups, hula girls, and the names of sweethearts represented something to fight for, a reason to live.

Photograph, *Where Marines Go their Pin-Ups Go: Tarawa, Gilbert Islands,* unidentified photographer, 1943. Image courtesy of National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC [127-GW-1204]

Humor – Humor softened the possibility that a sailor's sweetheart might not be so true.

Postcard, *Think of Me All at Sea …*, with annotations by sender, Tichnor Brothers, Inc., *circa* 1944. Chromolithograph with ink. Independence Seaport Museum: Gift courtesy of Patricia and Robert Marks [2008.29]



H.C. Westermann on an anti-aircraft gun aboard the aircraft carrier USS *Enterprise* in 1945.

Photograph, Westermann on 20 mm antiaircraft gun, USS *Enterprise*, 1945. Image courtesy of Bud McIvor

David McCarthy, *H.C. Westermann at War: Art and Manhood in Cold War America*, University of Delaware Press, Newark, Delaware, 2004

HORACE CLIFFORD WESTERMANN (1922-1981)

Horace Clifford Westermann **served as a Marine** aboard the USS *Enterprise* during World War II, and later became an extraordinary sculptor and printmaker. H.C. Westermann was a larger-than-life character with a penchant for swearing, a canvas of tattoos on his body, and he held a strong identification as a Marine throughout his life.

In fact, the war violence he witnessed greatly informed his art. In a 1978 letter and drawing, he recounts his 33-year-old **nightmarish memory** of discovering a friend's body, identifiable by his tattoo, atop a pile of casualties from a bloody battle in the Pacific.

"I looked down on the fantail of the ship and they had all the dead people stacked there like cordwood. It was a pretty ungodly sight. Well the moon was bright and the dead sailor on top of the pile was a good pal of mine. That's him in the drawing... he was naked and on his chest was a huge beautiful tattoo of an eagle that he was so proud of.... Well the next morning they placed each dead man in a mattress cover with a five inch projectile tied between his legs and we buried them at sea."

A Nightmarish Memory – Westermann related his memory of finding the body of his dead, tattooed friend after a naval battle in a letter and drawing. His own tattoos doubtless reminded him of his buddy throughout his life.

Drawing, *The Dead Young Sailor,* H.C. Westermann, 1978. Gouache and ink on paper. This drawing accompanied the May 3, 1978 letter to Thomas Armstrong. Loan courtesy of Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, New York, Frances Mulhall Achilles Library, Special Collections [X.78.1a]. Philadelhia venue only.

Quotation, Horace Clifford Westermann, May 3, 1978 letter; as quoted by David McCarthy, *H.C. Westermann at War: Art and Manhood in Cold War America*, University of Delaware Press, 2004, p.59

THE TRADITION CONTINUES

After World War II, the U.S. Navy remained the largest and most powerful fleet in the world and played major roles in the Cold War, Korean War, Vietnam War, and Gulf War.

Tattooists continued to find seamen their largest customer base. Their busiest days were the 1st and the 15th of each month when sailors flocked to the tattoo shops on payday. Designs developed in the 1940s were updated by **the new generation** of tattooists, and requests for custom work increased. The tattooists of this period and their loyal clientele laid the foundation of the **tattoo renaissance** that bloomed in the 1980s and continues to this day.

Being a Man – In 1958, Philip Morris Companies, Inc. used the image of a tattooed Marine to redirect the advertising campaign for their Marlboro cigarette brand toward men. Some 10 years later, a photograph of a wounded Marine with a tattoo reflects the increasingly troubled identity of men during the Vietnam War.

Photograph, medical evacuation patients on the deck of the ship USS *Tripoli*, South Vietnam, 1967. Image courtesy of National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC [428-K-39785]

Payday – A tattoo shop's busiest times were on the 1st and 15th of each month on the Navy payday. Sailors at Phil Sparrow and Cliff Raven's tattoo shop in Milwaukee, Wisconsin in 1962.

Photograph, sailors wait their turn in Phil Sparrow and Cliff Raven's tattoo studio, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Chuck Arnett, 1962. Image courtesy of The Magazine, San Francisco, California

Photograph, sailor with bandages over his new tattoos, Phil Sparrow and Cliff Raven's studio, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Chuck Arnett, 1962, photograph. Image courtesy of The Magazine, San Francisco, California

Beautiful to the Eye – Sailor Eddie and Esther Evans were known for producing open designs with large areas of color and employing the newest selection of colors in the region.

Drawing, detail, tattoo flash, Sailor Eddie Evans, *circa* 1960. Colored pencil and ink on board. Independence Seaport Museum: Gift courtesy of J. Welles Henderson [00.791]

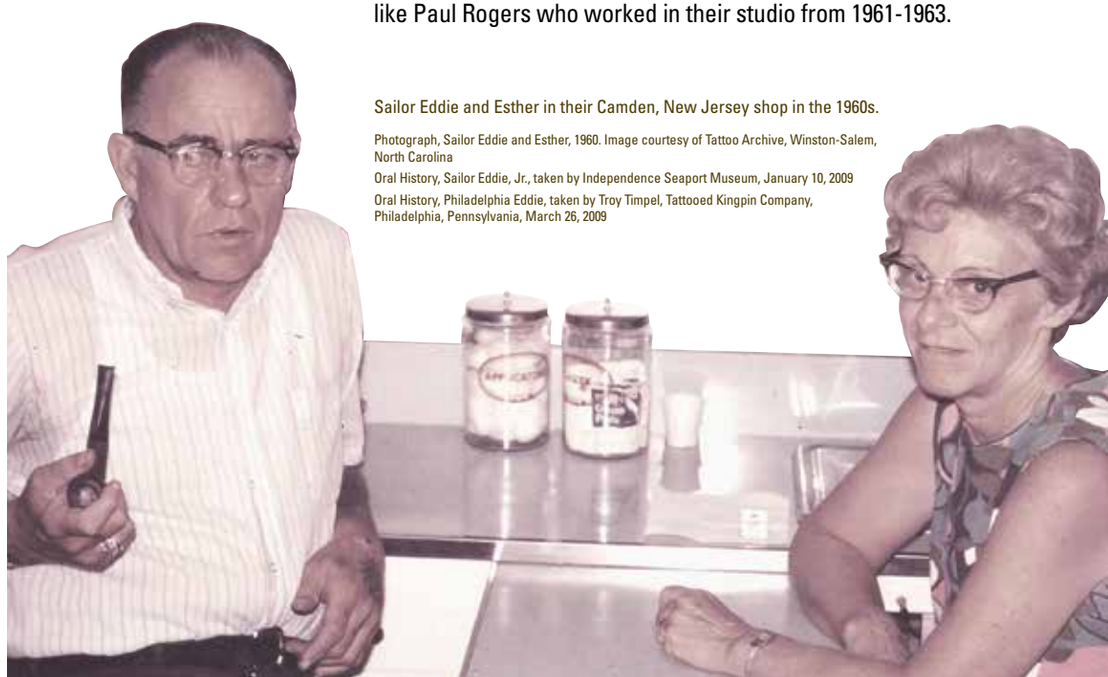
SAILOR EDDIE AND ESTHER

(active 1933 – 1984)

Eddie and Esther Evans **worked as a team** from the very beginning. They learned tattooing in between performing sword swallowing and dodging knives with a traveling carnival in 1933. The day after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, Eddie joined the Navy and served for six years, surviving the sinking of his ship. He then settled in Philadelphia, working in the Navy Yard as a boiler instructor.

Eddie claimed the title "Sailor Eddie," and with his wife Esther operated **their first tattoo shop** at 9th and Race Streets in Philadelphia from 1950-1958. The neighborhood's decline prompted their relocation to Broadway, a major thoroughfare in Camden, New Jersey, just across the Delaware River. Over the years Eddie, with **Esther's feminine touch,** operated the most modern tattoo shop, offering the newest selection of colors in the region.

Eddie primarily outlined and shaded the tattoo designs on the clients, and then Esther colored them in. The husband-and-wife team was **well respected** and attracted renowned tattooists like Paul Rogers who worked in their studio from 1961-1963.



Sailor Eddie and Esther in their Camden, New Jersey shop in the 1960s.

Photograph, Sailor Eddie and Esther, 1960. Image courtesy of Tattoo Archive, Winston-Salem, North Carolina

Oral History, Sailor Eddie, Jr., taken by Independence Seaport Museum, January 10, 2009

Oral History, Philadelphia Eddie, taken by Troy Timpel, Tattooed Kingpin Company, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, March 26, 2009

PHILADELPHIA EDDIE (b.1936)

Edward Funk **relocated to Philadelphia** when tattooing was made illegal in New York City. He opened a tattoo shop on 9th and Race Streets in 1963, an area where four other shops were located, and took the name "Philadelphia Eddie." Philadelphia's Navy Yard was very active during the Vietnam War, insuring a steady stream of prospective tattoo clients. He recalls, "On the weekends there were **sailors just walking the streets** with their hats, "dixie cup" hats. Come down to Race Street....drink, chase the girls."

Eddie also remembers servicemen from the Naval Hospital who were being treated for wounds inflicted during the Vietnam War.

Philadelphia Eddie – Eddie made it his business to know all the tattooists in the business. He purposely designed a set of flash to appeal to women in the Navy. These designs featured a variety of animals like skunks and dolphins wearing sailor hats.

Drawing, detail of tattoo flash *E-4*, Philadelphia Eddie, 1970s. Colored pencil and ink on paper. Loan courtesy of Troy Timpel, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

"Yes, we had a naval hospital and all the amputees were learning how to walk with their wooden legs and that just hurt my heart. They would come in and take off their wooden leg and want a tattoo right there where the stump was and I just couldn't do that. They would want spider webs or sometimes they would want targets [showing] 'this is where I was shot.'"

Philadelphia Eddie tattooing a sailor nicknamed Whitey, in 1952.

Drawing, tattoo flash, *E-1*, Philadelphia Eddie, 1970s. Colored pencil and ink on paper. Loan courtesy of Troy Timpel, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Photograph, Philadelphia Eddie tattooing Whitey, 1952. Image courtesy of Troy Timpel, Tattooed Kingpin, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Quotation, Philadelphia Eddie; oral history taken by Troy Timpel, Tattooed Kingpin Company, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, March 26, 2009

JOHN O'MEALLY (b.1937)

John O'Meally volunteered for service in 1954, several years before the U.S. Navy began officially providing equal opportunities for **African American seamen** and officers. During a cruise in the Caribbean while in the Navy Reserve, he began weighing the possibility of becoming a **career sailor**. Taking a cue from older sailors, O'Meally decided to get a tattoo while on shore leave in Coco Solo, Panama. His tattoo – an anchor with a ribbon reading U.S.N. – led him to a **life in the Navy**.

O'Meally served on top-secret submarine missions as a naval electrician for 16 years during the Cold War. By the time he retired in 1975, after having **served 21 years** in the Navy, he had earned the rating of Commissioned Warrant Officer-3.

O'Meally's Tattoo – O'Meally got a tattoo of an anchor with a ribbon reading "U.S.N." in Coco Solo, Panama in 1954.

Photograph, John O'Meally's tattoo on his left forearm, 2008. Independence Seaport Museum

Photograph, John O'Meally, Commissioned Warrant Officer-3, 1974. Image courtesy of John O'Meally.

C.W. ELDRIDGE THE SAILOR (b.1947)

"I was born on March 26, 1947 in Western North Carolina and developed an interest in tattoos early on. My dad, uncles and my brother all had tattoos, and I liked the look of them. I knew from an early age that I would be tattooed. Being dissatisfied with high school, I joined the United States Navy in 1963 and set off for a real education.

....After 13 weeks of boot camp in San Diego, about $200 in my pocket and 12 hours of liberty, I had my first opportunity to fulfill my childhood dream. I returned from liberty with four tattoos and the beginning of my personal tattoo scrapbook.

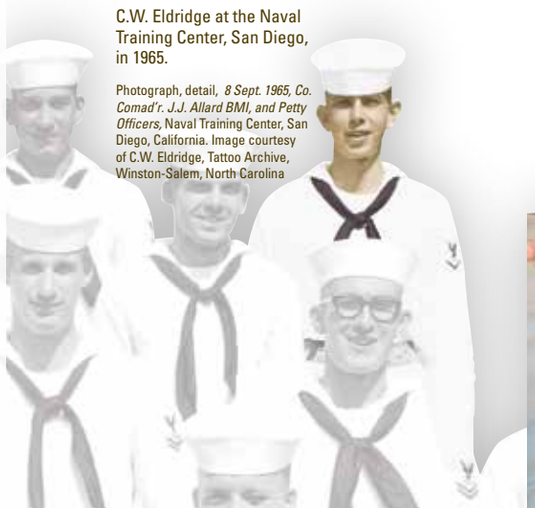
...During the mid 1960s, Broadway in San Diego was awash with sailors and all the tattoo shops had lines of white hats waiting for their marks of manhood.

...In 1967 I received orders to the USS Oriskany CVA 34. The O2Boat [Oriskany] was an aircraft carrier operating in the Gulf of Tonkin off Vietnam. The ship took me to the Philippines, Hong Kong, Hawaii and Japan where I continued to add to my ever growing tattoo collection"

The Beginning of a Collection – Eldridge began his tattoo collection in earnest, getting four tattoos in 12 hours during his first liberty at boot camp.

Cowgirl, upper right arm, by Tattoo Joe, Winston-Salem, North Carolina, 1973. One of Eldridge's favorite designs published by Milton Zeis Studio.

Carp, upper right arm, by Cliff Raven, Chicago, Illinois, 1970s. The image was selected from Raven's tattoo flash.



C.W. Eldridge at the Naval Training Center, San Diego, in 1965.

Photograph, detail, *8 Sept. 1965, Co. Comad'r. J.J. Allard BMI, and Petty Officers,* Naval Training Center, San Diego, California. Image courtesy of C.W. Eldridge, Tattoo Archive, Winston-Salem, North Carolina

C.W. ELDRIDGE THE TATTOOIST

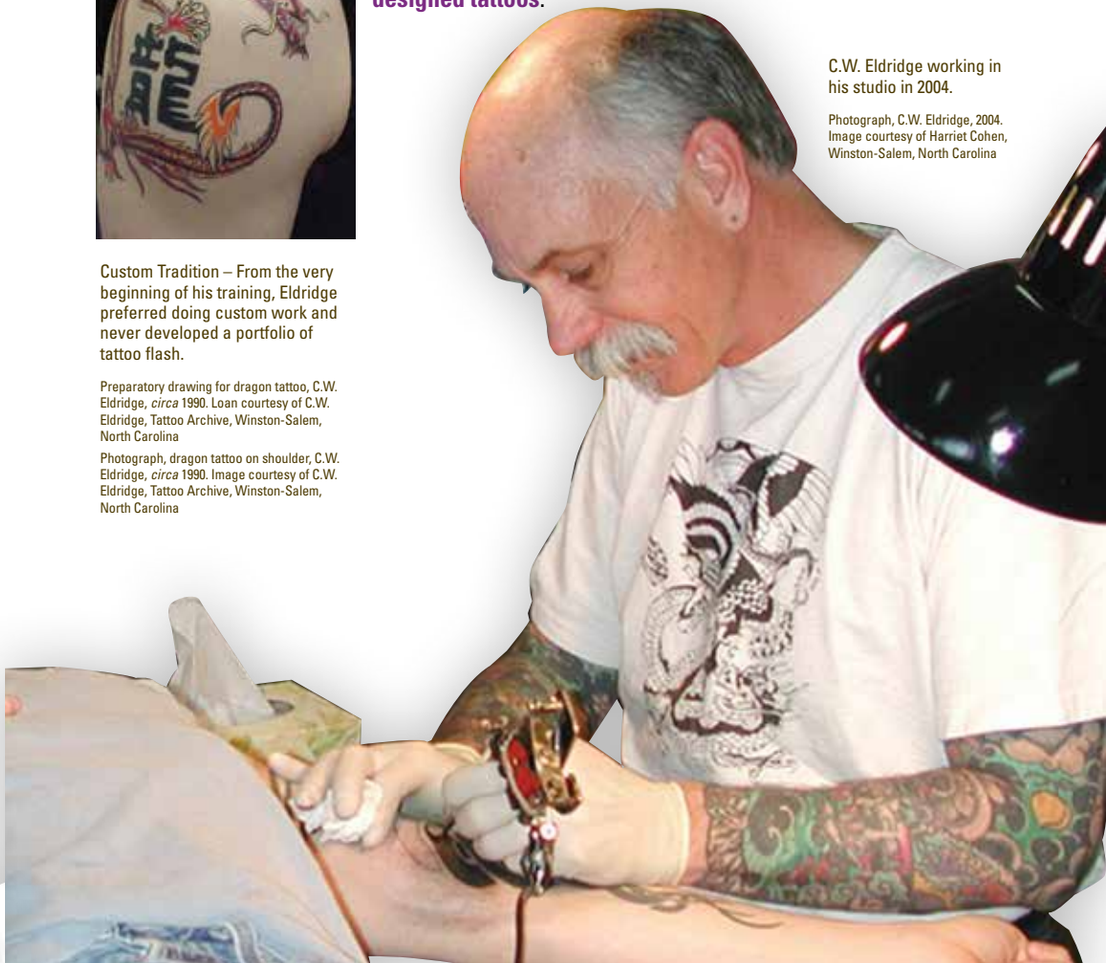
C.W. Eldridge, **like many sailors** who preceded him, eventually became a tattooist himself. He started his career after being tattooed for several years by the now-famous Ed Hardy. Hardy was impressed by Eldridge and invited him to learn the craft at his newly opened *Tattoo City* studio in San Francisco.

Eldridge continued to work with a variety of celebrated tattooists and finally opened his own shop in Berkeley, California, in 1985. Eldridge now tattoos at his shop, the *Tattoo Archive*, in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, focusing on **custom-designed tattoos**.

Custom Tradition – From the very beginning of his training, Eldridge preferred doing custom work and never developed a portfolio of tattoo flash.

Preparatory drawing for dragon tattoo, C.W. Eldridge, *circa* 1990. Loan courtesy of C.W. Eldridge, Tattoo Archive, Winston-Salem, North Carolina

Photograph, dragon tattoo on shoulder, C.W. Eldridge, *circa* 1990. Image courtesy of C.W. Eldridge, Tattoo Archive, Winston-Salem, North Carolina



C.W. Eldridge working in his studio in 2004.

Photograph, C.W. Eldridge, 2004. Image courtesy of Harriet Cohen, Winston-Salem, North Carolina

C.W. ELDRIDGE THE HISTORIAN

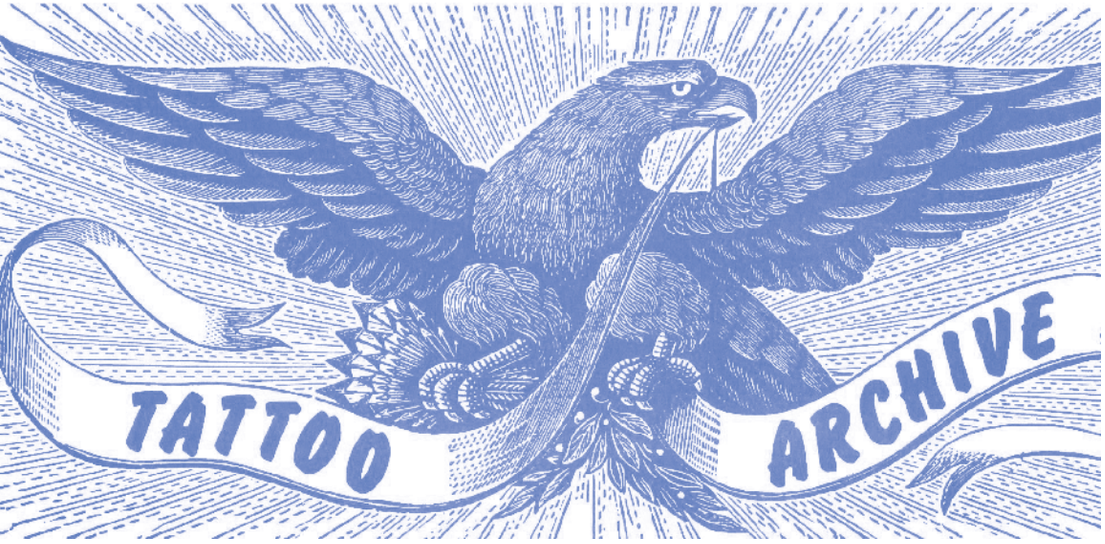
C.W. Eldridge established the Tattoo Archive in Berkeley, California, in the 1980s, bringing together his love of tattooing with a forum to continue and present the **tattoo's fascinating history** to the general public.

The archive grew when renowned tattooist Paul Rogers left his **extensive collection** of tattoo memorabilia to his friend Eldridge upon his death in 1990. Three years later, Eldridge, along with other tattoo community members, founded the *Paul Rogers Tattoo Research Center* at the Tattoo Archive.

In 2007, Eldridge relocated the archive to North Carolina, the birth state of both Rogers and Eldridge, when he and his wife, Harriet Cohen, opened their tattoo museum, research center and tattoo studio in Winston-Salem.

Logo, Tattoo Archive. Image courtesy of Tattoo Archive, Winston-Salem, North Carolina

C.W. Eldridge, Tattoo Archive website, 2009, http://www.tattooarchive.com/research_center.htm



WHAT ARE SAILORS DOING NOW?

Sailors today still honor the **unbroken tattoo traditions** of their forebears. Tattooists and their sailor clientele continue, like generations before them, to add their own twist to the growing tattoo design vocabulary. Sailors are no longer restricted to the designs presented on the walls of the tattoo shop, but engage the tattooists to **create custom designs** to fulfill their specific needs and desires.

The foundation of the **American tattoo** in the maritime world can be seen and felt in sailor-styled or "old school" designs favored today by the general populace. Even today's neo-tribal tattoos find their inspiration in the Pacific Island cultures that American whalers encountered on their **voyages over 200 years ago.**

So, if you have a tattoo, thank a sailor!

A sailor's calf with an inventory of the names of USCG vessels on which he served. Each has a corresponding symbol to represent his experience while serving aboard.

Photograph, service record tattoo on the calf of Richard Sambenedetto, Jr., U.S. Coast Guard, Atlantic City, New Jersey, 2008

SAILOR EDDIE, JR. (b.1963)

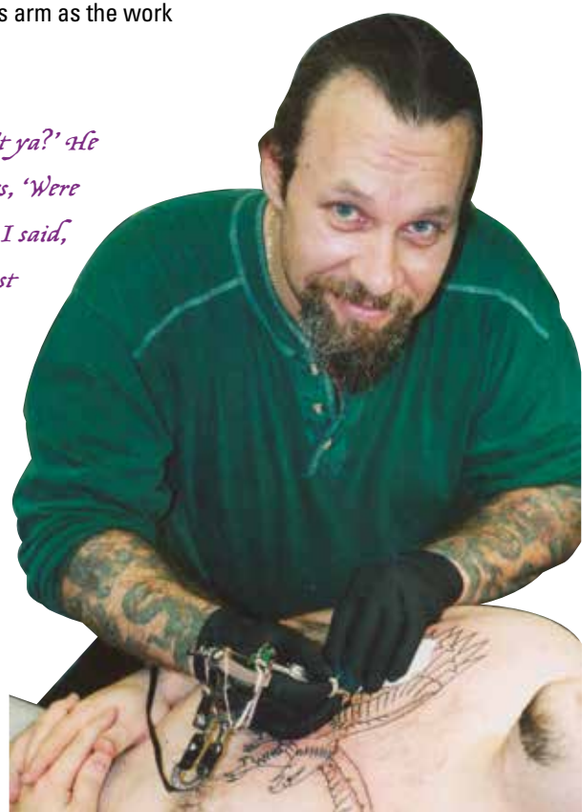
Edward Denny, aka "Sailor Eddie, Jr.," is the grandson of Sailor Eddie and Esther Evans, the celebrated tattooists of Philadelphia and Camden, New Jersey. He began helping in their shop when he was five and did his **first tattoo at age eight**. Eddie Jr. opened his own tattoo studio up the street from his grandparents' Camden shop in 1979 at age 16. He has been tattooing for 38 years, upholding the high standards instilled in him by his grandparents.

While Eddie Jr. has kept up with the technical changes in the tattoo industry and developed his **own tattoo design style**, he is one of the few tattooists today who can still give a genuine old-school tattoo in the style of his grandparents' era. Those **connections to the past** are important to him and he occasionally recognizes his grandparents' tattoo handiwork on people he meets. In fact, he got his current studio in Philadelphia after recognizing the dragon tattoo on the landlord's arm as the work of his grandparents.

Tradition Speaks – Sailor Eddie, Jr. bridges the old and the new, honoring the 'old school' methods and tradition he was taught by his grandparents but adapting and challenging himself to the methods and designs of the new school.

Drawing, tattoo flash, *Go Navy U.S.A.*, Sailor Eddie, Jr., 2009. Colored pencil and ink on board. Loan courtesy of Sailor Eddie Jr, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

"You got that tattoo in Camden, didn't ya?' He says, 'Yeah.' 'My grandfather did it.' He says, 'Were you that little kid running around in there?' I said, 'Yeah.' He said, 'Here's the keys, give me first month's rent when you can!' That's how it happens, that fast, that easy."



Sailor Eddie, Jr. working in his shop in the 1990s.

Photograph, Sailor Eddie, Jr. tattooing, 1990s. Image courtesy of Sailor Eddie, Jr., Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Oral History, Sailor Eddie, Jr., taken by Independence Seaport Museum, January 10, 2009

Trophy – Chinchilla was bestowed with the "Twin Screw Award" by her partner's father, Robert Balser, a Navy veteran of World War II who delighted in her fascination with the twin screw tattoo.

Trophy, *The Chinchilla Twin-Screw Propeller Award*, Robert Balser, 1992. Two painted boat propellers and engraved plaque mounted to varnished wood. Loan courtesy of Triangle Tattoo & Museum, Fort Bragg, California

Quotation, Madame Chinchilla, Triangle Tattoo & Museum, Fort Bragg, California, excerpts, email, January 11, 2009

Mr. G., essay, *Madame Chinchilla's Twin Screw Award*, Triangle Tattoo & Museum, Fort Bragg, California, March 27, 2009

MADAME CHINCHILLA (b.1946)

Madame Chinchilla joined the **growing ranks of women** who entered the tattooing profession in the 1970s and 1980s when she and her partner, Mr. G, opened Triangle Tattoo & Museum in Fort Bragg, California in 1986.

Chinchilla was bestowed with the "Twin Screw Award" by her partner's Navy veteran father who delighted in her fascination with the **twin screw tattoo**. Sailors believe a twin screw tattoo will keep them afloat, prevent drowning, and propel them to safety.

Just as Esther Evans, wife of Sailor Eddie, lent a feminine touch to the tattoo shop, so did Madame Chinchilla. She spent time listening to the sailors, validating their beliefs about the **power of tattoos**, and giving comfort to those with war-ravaged memories.

"I was the link, the midwife and patient and curious ear to the veteran sailors and their experiences concerning their tattoos. I was an ignorant woman who knew nothing of the life they had in wars. I held many of them as they wept in memory of those days. I tattooed images that were ... profound and superstitious; they were religious in a way. I feel honored to be part of their patriotic tattoo expression in being Americans."

Madame Chinchilla tattooing twin screws on Captain Fuzzy.

Photograph, Madame Chinchilla tattooing twin screws, by Deidra Lamb, 1997. Image courtesy of Madame Chinchilla, Triangle Tattoo & Museum, Fort Bragg, California

DOCUMENTARY VIDEO

The following are excerpts from the documentary, *Skin & Bones – Tattoos in the Life of the American Sailor*, presenting today's sailors discussing their tattoos and life experiences. Though their stories and tattoos are contemporary, they reflect and build on the symbols, motivations, and beliefs American sailors have employed through history.

Emilio Mercado, Petty Officer, USCG

Sector Delaware Bay Station, Philadelphia

"In the service we all share our tattoo stories – we call them sea stories. Not every sailor has tattoos, not every sailor likes tattoos – so I would say that we would talk about our tattoos and share our sea stories according to what happened to us while we were at sea – according to our duties – most of our tattoos represent what we do.

"There is something unique about my Neptune tattoo on my left calf – the tattoo doesn't show the eyes of Neptune – since I'm acting as the eyes of Neptune right now for the United States Coast Guard and the nation. I'm looking at people's safety while [they are at sea]. Once I retire, the eyes will be drawn in the tattoo as a completion of my duty and to insure safety for my own life."

Darrell Walter, Petty Officer, USCG

Sector Delaware Bay Station, Philadelphia

"I was about three years [in the Coast Guard] when I got my first tattoo. The popularity is definitely there, a lot of people do get them. Some people get them as a passage … once they get accepted to enter the Coast Guard.

"My last tattoo [is] the shape of Africa with the American Flag. I see a lot of people with either Scottish flags on them, Italian flags, Texas flags on them – I realized I need something to represent me."

Richard Sambenedetto, Jr., Chief Warrant Officer, USCG

Atlantic City Station, New Jersey 2008

"Most of my tattoos represent parts of my life, instead of being just vocal about it. I decided to patch together a mural … of different stages throughout my life. It's kind of like a window to the soul. Normally your eyes don't get tattooed – that way you can have an open soul. [With body tattoos] you can openly communicate to someone. They can visually see where you've been in an instant. Just like if you were in a full-dress uniform, the first impression of rank of your "chest candy," your ribbons, medals, and awards are shown – which can give you a quick snapshot. My tattoos are kind of like the same thing. You could take one look, [and] say, 'That guy's been to sea.'"

Mark Lumaque, Petty Officer, USCG

Sector Delaware Bay Station, Philadelphia

"[A tattoo] symbolizes unity. A majority of people have one. [Tattooing] symbolizes history and tradition. It dates back to pirates, and it's for the same reason anyone else would get tattoos – to basically show your feelings, show your enjoyment, to show pain, to show a tribute to family. You want people to know this is a part of me, this is what's happened to me, this is what I've mourned, this is what I've enjoyed. It's always been a thing of the Coast Guard, pirates, Navy – it's always been tradition."

The documentary was produced by students Jon Horwitz and Tommy Oceanak under the direction of Associate Professor Diana Nicolae in the Department of Radio, Television Film, Rowan University, Glassboro, New Jersey, in 2009.


SHIPMATE