

KP Women



Breaking the Gender Barrier



AMERICAN MERCHANT MARINE MUSEUM

Acknowledgements

Any exhibit is a team effort, and “KP Women: Breaking the Gender Barrier, 1974-1978” is no exception. The genesis of this effort came when Nancy Wagner (KP '78) very generously offered to donate her collection of uniforms to the Museum. As it turned out, her mother, Florence Wagner, had saved her entire set of USMMA uniforms, from her athletic gear to her dress whites. Museum staff immediately recognized the potential of this collection, and in concert with its volunteers and contractors, put together this exhibit to coincide with the fortieth anniversary of women graduating from Kings Point and the Academy’s seventy-fifth anniversary.

Standing out among these are the women of the Class of 1978. We at the American Merchant Marine Museum earnestly thank these women for sharing their stories and their strength that gave life to this exhibit. Many of the class of 1978 recalled memories and stories – shared pictures, documents, and experiences

with the museum and, of course, with all who experience the exhibit as well.

We also thank all of those who helped to ensure the exhibit accurately represented the proud USMMA tradition. Dr. Jane Brickman, Professor Emeritus, shared not only her own stories, but documents, pictures, memos, leads, and meeting notes that rounded out the exhibit's final production. USMMA's library staff, Dr. Donna Selvaggio, Jeremy Lauber, and Stephanie Apperio, kindly facilitated the use of its Academy images. Unless otherwise noted, the images in this pamphlet are either from Schuyler Otis Bland Library, or from the Academy's yearbook, *Midships*. Fotini Mamos, a Textiles and Apparel major at Queens College, deserves special thanks for cataloguing and interpreting the tailoring details of the uniforms, as does Ian Watts, an expert on maritime uniforms who generously donated his time and expertise.

Finally, a special thank you also to all of those who agreed to be interviewed, including Captains Ann Sanborn and Cynthia Robson

who shared their own personal stories of breaking the Merchant Marine's gender barrier. A special shout-out goes to Kings Point's coaches and athletic staff, including Women's Basketball Coach Alexa Shields, Deputy Director of Athletics Captain William Fell, and Assistant Athletic Director for Communications Joe Guster. KP alumni Jack Spitz, Fiona Boyle, and Tara Mulligan who provided valuable insight and images. Not least of all, Museum volunteers Elinor Haber, Rose Packard, Lee Kasten, and Mitchell Friedman brought invaluable insight and skills to this project.



Plebe candidates Della Anholdt, Rochon Greene, and Terry Olsen await in-processing at INDOC, July 1974. In the background are Kathy Jarvis, Meredith Neizer, and Kathy Metcalf.

THE FIRST KINGS POINT WOMEN

Arriving on Campus

When women first entered the Merchant Marine Academy in 1974, they weren't just breaking the barrier of women being admitted to a school, they were helping to break the gender barrier of an entire industry.

In 1972, Congress passed Title IX of the Equal Education Amendments Act, which declared that no educational institution receiving federal funding could discriminate against students or applicants because of their gender. For women, this Act opened the door to all of the economic opportunities that accompany higher education, opportunities that had not existed, or were very limited before. After federal courts supported these provisions in several decisions, no institution of higher

“No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance”

education could use gender as an excuse to keep women out, including the five federal service academies.



Nancy Wagner arrives on campus, July 1974. Very shortly she and the other plebe candidates in this photo would put away their miniskirts, bell-bottom trousers, and plaid blazers in favor of khaki uniforms.

Of the service academies, the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy at Kings Point was the first to admit women. In 1974, Kings Point recruited and admitted fifteen women into the graduating class of 1978. Of these fifteen, only eight would graduate. This dramatic attrition rate speaks to the difficulties these pioneering female mariners faced at Kings Point. Their stories, their trials and tribulations, and most importantly, their successes are charted here.

The arriving women brought special challenges to the Kings Point campus starting with INDOC, as the two-week “boot camp”-like period of indoctrination was known. There were questions that needed immediate answers. Superintendent Arthur B. Engel decided that women would be treated the same as men. But could the female arrivals be treated exactly the same as male students? Did that include uniforms? Haircuts? Curriculum? Sleeping Quarters? All of these questions needed to be answered, and fast! The Academy had only six months to recruit



Tailors had to adjust quickly to the different tailoring needs of women when they arrived on campus. This staged publicity photo demonstrates that both men and women seem to be nervous about this change.

and prepare for its first class of female midshipmen.

One of the issues in successfully integrating women into the Academy was how to properly fit their uniforms. The administration assumed that the Academy tailors would simply be able to adjust the men's uniforms to women's bodies. Of course, that assumption proved false. The uniforms were very large on the female plebes and, as alumna Kathy Metcalf explained, "it is impossible to keep a straight gig line when your uniform swallows your whole frame!" A gig line refers to the vertical alignment of shirt buttons, trouser fly, and belt buckle and is a critical component of proper uniform wear. When attired in men's uniforms, maintaining a gig line was all but impossible for women. Being in proper dress and uniform is an important element of being part of the Regiment of Midshipmen and having ill-fitting uniforms jeopardized the women's ability to be in proper dress, especially when running around with rifles!

Overall, the first day of integrating women onto the campus went smoothly, but did have its minor mishaps. Frances Yates, who would go on to graduate with her class in 1978, arrived on campus to begin her career as a

“My first thought was, wow! This place is progressive! But then I realized there must have been a mistake”

—Frances Yates, KP '78

mariner alone, having crossed the country without her parents. Seventeen years old, Frances followed the line of other students awaiting their roommate assignments. But when she looked at who her new roommate would be, she saw the name Peter Ziegler. Apparently, clerical staff saw the name Frances and assumed it was one of the 333 male plebes and not one of the fifteen new females. According to Frances, “My first thought was, wow! This place is progressive! But then I realized there must have been a mistake and

got a new roommate assigned to me, a woman this time.”

In addition to uniforms, other issues of appearance had to be addressed. For instance, should women be forced to get the same buzz cut required of men? A particularly prominent memory of the first days at the Academy for alumna Teresa “Terry” Olsen was the barbers laughing when the new female midshipmen sat in their chairs. The Academy barbers were not prepared to do anything other than shave heads, so the first fifteen women sported some rather interesting hairstyles. They had been told to arrive on campus with short or shoulder length hair. Upon arriving, without warning, they were marched with the rest of the midshipmen to the barbers and their hair was cut off! Alumna Frances Yates said of the experience, “I was sad and I am sure I cried, but what was I going to do? The hair was already gone and I knew it would grow back.” Thoughtfully, the Academy began warning women their hair would be cut. Yates also recalled that hair would remain a problem

throughout her time at the Academy. “Over the years you would find fun and interesting ways to tie and pin your hair back, but I collected quite a few demerits over the years, and my hair being too long was a pretty regular item that incurred demerits!”

“I was sad and I am sure I cried, but what was I going to do? The hair was already gone and I knew it would grow back.”

—Frances Yates, KP '78

Equality Equals Sameness?

As the first federal academy to accept women, the Academy’s administration had to craft its own guidelines regarding the treatment of female students. Hoping to quell criticism and controversy, the Academy decided that female midshipmen would be treated the same, as much as possible, as the male midshipmen.

Including the title “midshipman,” which USMMA would use for both men and women —and still does.

When it came to curriculum, this policy worked wonderfully. The women were scheduled for and took the exact same classes as their male classmates and, although many struggled with the curriculum, as most midshipmen do, male or female, many excelled. There were some differences in the men and women’s physical fitness curriculum, but the women were vocal in insisting that their physical program be just as strenuous as the men’s, and many women chose to volunteer for the men’s physical program when they were allowed to. Kathy Metcalf recalls playing co-ed rugby with the men, who welcomed the women to play. “The boys mostly went easier on us when it came to tackling, but I still took some hits. In fact, the hardest I was ever hit was by a woman!”

“The waterfront was a place to escape Academy life stress. I not only loved sailing with my team, but also was relieved looking at the Academy from the water. Sailing was my savior.”

—Nancy Wagner, KP '78

Female midshipmen also participated in a range of different clubs and sports including sailing, crew, and cheerleading; bicycle club, DeMolay, Land Hall, and Honor Guard. Of her time sailing with the Varsity team Nancy Wagner said, “The waterfront was a place to escape Academy life stress. I not only loved sailing with my team, but also was relieved looking at the Academy from the water. Sailing was my savior.”

Despite avenues for extracurricular fun, there was a high attrition rate of women leaving the academy before graduation. Nancy Wagner outlasted two roommates her first year. The



Nancy Wagner and Philip Greene, Jr. (both KP '78) at sailing practice on Long Island Sound with the USMMA waterfront in the distance. Greene went on to become a Navy admiral and Superintendent of USMMA.

first left immediately after the INDOC period, and the second was academically disenrolled. Happily, her third roommate, Rochon Greene, went on to graduate.

In addition to struggling with the incredibly heavy course load, Wagner explained the level of isolation that pervaded the experience of a midshipman, especially in the 1970s. “There were no iPhones or computers. You were lucky if you got a letter! There were payphones on main deck in each company. Plebes were assigned to ‘phone watch’. A plebe had to stand watch in the hall by the phones, answer them, run to the upperclassman's room to tell him that he had a call, then run back to the phone to take a message if desired, and deliver it. Plebes were not allowed to use the phones during indoctrination —no contact with the outside world. Plebes could use the phones on the weekend during a designated time-frame for maybe a two minute call. You had very little exposure to the outside world, especially during your first year at the Academy.”

When Nancy did get to call home, she often spoke with her father, “Red” Wagner (KP '45). He would assure Nancy that "if HE could do it, YOU could do it."

“You had very little exposure to the outside world, especially during your first year at the Academy.”

—Nancy Wagner, KP '78

The midshipman barracks were relatively bare bones and the floors, with the exception of first classmen dorms, were cold linoleum. Plebes were assigned the least desirable rooms and First Classmen the most desirable. Kathy Metcalf recalled in particular the barracks' linoleum floors that underclassman had to wax each week for inspection. “Those floors were just awful!” Metcalf explained.

“The boys mostly went easier on us when it came to tackling, but I still took some hits. In fact, the hardest I was ever hit was by a woman!”

—Kathy Metcalf, KP '78

Sea Year

A cornerstone of the Kings Point curriculum is sending all midshipmen out to serve as cadets aboard U.S.-flagged merchant vessels traversing the trade routes of the seven seas. During Sea Year, midshipmen, known as cadets when working aboard a ship, experience firsthand the life of a merchant mariner; putting their classroom knowledge to the test in a real-life environment. Even today Sea Year is a part of the fabric of Kings Point.

Like all Kings Pointers, memories of Sea Year remained vivid for the first women cadets. Nancy Wagner recalls that "My cadet shipping

included the *S/S Colorado* (States Line), *S/S President McKinley* (American President Lines), *S/S Maine* (States Lines) and *S/S Matsonia* (Matson Lines). I shipped out alone on *Matsonia* and stayed in the ship's hospital as there was no designated cadet room and the owner's stateroom was not an option.

The table below reveals that these young women served on a huge variety of U.S.-flagged vessels. Some of the ships were twice as old as the cadets who sailed on them, others like the LASH ships were of recent construction. Some cadets sailed on tankers, or research vessels; only one sailed with Military Sealift Command (MSC). Virtually all of the ships were steam vessels, but Ivy Barton may have been the only one who cared: she was the sole woman in the class of 1978 who majored in engineering. Sadly, most of the companies listed are now gone.



Prudential Line's LASH Atlantico was one of the first U.S. flagged ships to carry female USMMA cadets

Photo Credit: American Merchant Marine Museum

SHIPS OF THE WOMEN OF '78

COMPANY	SHIP NAME
American Export Lines	<i>CV Lightning</i>
	<i>CV Staghound</i>
	<i>CV Export Freedom</i>
	<i>SS Export Patriot</i>
American President Lines	<i>SS President Eisenhower</i>
	<i>SS President Truman</i>
	<i>SS President McKinley</i>
Apex Marine Corp.	<i>SS Golden Dolphin</i>
ARCO	<i>SS ARCO Enterprise</i>
Farrell Lines	<i>SS Austral Moon</i>
Matson Lines	<i>SS Matsonia</i>
Military Sealift Command	<i>USNS Kane</i>
Mobil	<i>SS Mobil Aero</i>
Moore-McCormack	<i>SS MORMAC Lynx</i>
	<i>SS MORMAC Cove</i>
	<i>SS MORMAC Draco</i>
	<i>SS MORMAC Rigel</i>
NASA	<i>RV Annandale</i>
Prudential Lines	<i>SS LASH Atlantico</i>
	<i>SS Santa Maria</i>
	<i>SS Santa Clara</i>
	<i>SS LASH Pacifico</i>
	<i>SS LASH Turkiye</i>
	<i>SS Santa Rita</i>
	<i>SS Wyoming</i>
States Steamship Co.	<i>SS Idaho</i>
	<i>SS Maine</i>
	<i>SS Colorado</i>

The young women who were the first to enter Kings Point were also some of the first to work on U.S.-flagged ships, especially among the licensed officers in the Deck and Engine departments of commercial vessels. Most mariners are apprehensive about their first months at sea. The first few Kings Point women cadets knew they were likely to face sexist comments and possibly even sexual harassment from shipmates. Nonetheless, in the spirit of “Acta Non Verba” they entered into this new environment knowing it was the only way to move ahead in their chosen career as a licensed U.S. Merchant Marine officer. One can only imagine how intimidating this experience was for these first few women.

The Academy did not foresee the unique dangers women might face during their Sea Year, and thus the first women at Kings Point were given the same safety training as men before embarking on their first ship. This meant training was directed at the most frequent issues male midshipmen had experienced over the years. Sexual harassment

training was non-existent in the mid-to late 1970s. If anything close to the topic was mentioned, it was on how to avoid sexually transmitted diseases.

The women were certainly nervous when boarding their first ships, where additional challenges abounded. For example, catcalling and whistling from the crew as the women boarded, or men insisting they carry the women's baggage up the gangway and then having someone criticize the women for allowing them to do so. Some crew members threatened that they had made keys to the women's rooms, implying it would be pointless to lock their doors at night. Some of the captains of the ships even told the women flatly they would not allow women to work on their ships, almost resulting in the women missing their departures.

Despite some challenging moments, all eight women graduates thrived during their Sea Year. Their experience would also help the women who followed them. Forums were set up on the Academy campus where those



Ivy Barton during graduation in 1978. She was the first woman to graduate from KP's marine engineering program.

women who had already returned from Sea Year could give advice and answer questions from women who were about to embark. In these forums, women could answer questions male sailors rarely or never had to consider

such as caring for female-specific medical issues, what clothing to take, and how to deal with aggressive co-workers. Early female midshipmen were given advice such as not to wear perfume or jewelry, and to always insist co-workers knock before entering their quarters.

Breaking the Barrier

The first women who graduated from the Merchant Marine Academy had an uphill battle from their Plebe Year all the way through graduation. Because they succeeded, they ensured that the opportunity to sail as a U.S. Merchant Marine officer would be a reality for the hundreds of women who would follow their example. All eight women who graduated sailed on their licenses and have successful careers, as is expected of all Academy graduates. Kathy Metcalf reflected a common sentiment when she recalls her KP experience as “an important time of my life, and it set me up for the rest of my life. It is a

fantastic club, and I am honored that I was allowed to belong to it.”



Graduation 1978: senior toss their hats in the air to celebrate the completion of their arduous four-year program

Photo courtesy of Terry Preston, KP '78

UNIFORMS

The uniform is an important element of the Merchant Marine Academy experience. Both the officers and midshipmen wear the uniform of the U.S. Maritime Service (USMS). The Commandant's office determines the appropriate uniform each day, depending on midshipmen activities and the weather or time of year.

The UOD, or Uniform of the Day, varied by season. In the 1970s midshipmen wore Service Khakis during warm weather months, comprised of a short-sleeve shirt, khaki pants or skirt, and black shoes. During cold weather months, the UOD changed to Winter Blue, which included a heavier navy blue long-sleeve shirt with gray necktie, navy blue trousers or skirt, and black shoes.

As the first women entered the Academy, they were instructed to present a conservative, feminine appearance. Paradoxically, especially for the first women, uniforms were almost identical to the men's. This meant young

women had to fumble with shirts that buttoned on the wrong side, or trousers that had to be so severely tailored that the back pockets nearly touched.

Display Case I

❶ Tropical Khaki Short Uniform

The first uniform the incoming midshipmen were issued is the Tropical Khaki Short Uniform, issued to students during their INDOC period as plebe candidates. Plebe candidates are students who have been accepted into the Academy, but have not yet formally joined the Regiment of Midshipmen.

INDOC in the 1970s was a rigorous two-week training period run by upper classmen in which incoming plebe candidates were taught to think and act like members of the Regiment of Midshipmen. All fifteen women who enrolled at the Academy in 1974 passed INDOC, although a few dropped out soon after.

During this training period, the women wore the exact same shirts, shorts, socks, and caps as the male plebe candidates. Unfortunately, this meant that the uniforms were quite large on the women and an extensive tailoring process was necessary to ensure the uniforms fit.



Men's uniform shorts tailored to fit Nancy Wagner. Note that the rear pockets nearly touch



There were no women's version of the Tropical Khaki Short uniform issued during INDOC, everybody received the male version. Notably, the female plebe candidate pictured above has short sleeves that reach below her elbow and shoulder boards that extend well past her shoulder. The khaki ball caps were worn only during INDOC.

The men's shorts on display demonstrate the drastic tailoring required to make them fit women. The middle of the shorts had to be cut open and re-sewn to such a small size that the rear pockets nearly touch. Luckily, these shorts were only worn by the women during their INDOC training. After being accepted, the midshipmen wore skirts, but by their second-class year they could opt for pants.

The INDOC period was tough on the women, and indeed for the men as well. Some male students commented to the press that the women certainly, 'got a lot of gruff.' One midshipman mused the reason women had it so tough was because the Academy wanted to test these pioneering women and make sure they could handle the rigors of Academy life. But the first fifteen women showed grit and determination and all fifteen survived this difficult period and were recognized as plebes and members of the Regiment.

② Khaki Working Uniform

Female midshipmen wore the Khaki Working Uniform to class and on Academy grounds during warmer months. Unlike the khaki short sleeve shirt, this shirt was made specifically for women but wasn't made available until their third year on campus. When women first entered the Academy, it strove to ensure that women were treated the same and held to the same rigorous physical and academic standards as the men. And the women liked it this way!

The Academy eventually realized that equality did not mean sameness. For example, men's and women's bodies are different. Not more than or less than, but different. When women's shirts are manufactured, tailors can take into account the difference in waist, hip and chest measurements to allow the fabric of the shirt to fall in a professional manner.

For example, "gores" which can be seen on this khaki shirt, are sewn into the shirts. The shirt is made of separate strips of fabric sewn

together, and the gores allow the waist to be cinched tighter to better accommodate a woman's figure.

"Darts" are unique to women's shirts. These are folds (tucks coming to a point) sewn into the front of a shirt to take in and provide shape to a garment, especially for a woman's bust. Darts also help cinch the waist, while allowing a stronger tuck into the skirt or pants, and a stronger gig line.

The two chest pockets sewn onto this shirt are also considerably smaller and more sharply shaped at the corners than the men's shirts.

The sleeves of the women's short sleeved shirts are also folded and hemmed instead of simply hanging down. The hemmed sleeves and smaller pockets are small changes that came by the women's third year at the Academy, but they helped to create a more professional, better fitting uniform. This is just one example of how small changes recognized gender differences without compromising equality.

Display Case II

③ Winter Blues Uniform

The first class of female midshipmen usually wore the Winter Blues Uniform as the Uniform of the Day during colder months.

The uniform consisted of a navy long sleeve shirt, a men's gray tie, black shoes and black socks. The tie was tucked Marine-style between the second and third button of the shirt. Men wore trousers with a black belt and women wore skirts hemmed at two-inches above the knee. This uniform was worn with the high-pressure hat. The collar devices centered on the leading edge of the collar with the stock of the anchor parallel to the edge of the collar.

There are several noteworthy items on this uniform. First, sewn on the upper left arm sleeve is the company patch. At first all female midshipmen were in Fourth Company. This was important because the company indicated what your class schedule was, where you slept, and with whom you marched and paraded.

Since there were only fifteen women in the plebe class of 1974, all women were housed together, in Fourth Company in Rodgers Hall. Later on, First Company in Palmer Hall was assigned female midshipmen. Second is the nametag centered ¼" above the right shirt pocket. Midshipmen received their nametag upon arriving at the Academy and were expected to wear it with all service uniforms. Third are the shoulder boards which display rank. These shoulder boards have one stripe, indicating the wearer is a first-class midshipman – or, in their final year at the Academy. In general more stripes meant higher rank. An anchor emblem designated a midshipman in the marine transportation program, while propellers indicated marine engineering.

Midshipmen stenciled their names, year of expected graduation, and company inside the collar of their uniforms. They still use the same stencils and system on their uniforms today.

During their first year women were required to wear skirts. Regulations stated, "The skirt

length shall be two inches above the knee as measured from the crease in the back of the knee. Stockings shall be plain and beige tone. Personal under garments shall be worn when in uniform and shall be of such color as to minimize showing through outer items of clothing.



Nancy Wagner's name, class year, and company are stenciled inside her shirt collar, a system still in use by midshipmen today.

④ Graduation Uniform, circa 1978

The first class of graduating KP women wore this graduation uniform in 1978. Summer Dress Whites were worn for special occasions, and graduation is one of the most important

days for any midshipman. It consisted of a white jacket, adorned with ribbons recognizing special performance. In this case, it is the Sea Year ribbon. Nancy Wagner also wore a silver star for Academic Excellence. Also worn is a white shirt, black cross-over dress tie, and white pumps.

These beautiful white uniforms do not stay pristine for long. This uniform has a yellow tinge. This is the result of an Academy tradition whereby graduates jump into Eldridge Pool fully clothed. Over time, the pool's chemicals changed the hue from white to the color seen here.

Today, many female midshipmen wear pants. But the first classes of women to attend the Academy were required to wear skirts and pumps. Frances Yates recalls that Admiral Engel was particularly proud of having the first women to attend a federal academy, and so he wanted the women in skirts so the women would stand out. This regulation changed by the pioneering class's third year, in

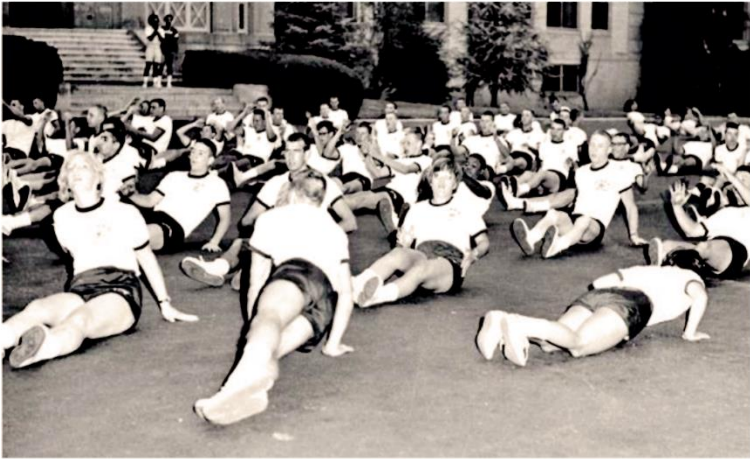
part because it was very difficult for women to march in skirts and heels. This was especially true if the field was wet, their heels would sometimes stick in the ground. Kathy Metcalf remembers in particular the terrible blisters the women would get. Some of the women even had infected blisters and had to go to the infirmary to treat them. Another source of discomfort was the regulation that required women to wear stockings with skirts. In the warmer months this often made the women uncomfortably hot.

Ill-fitting, uncomfortable, and even painful uniforms were all reminders that women were a very new presence on Academy grounds. It took time and patience to iron out a path toward full inclusion of women within the Academy ranks. But as these uniforms demonstrate, women could be equal without being the same.

Case III

Midshipmen were issued standard athletic wear regardless of gender. While the fit was meant to be baggy and comfortable, for the women, the uniforms ran comically large.

Women were also issued the same powder blue pajamas and bathrobes as men. Sometimes, Kathy Metcalf and her roommate would change into their civilian pajamas at night. According to Kathy, she just could not get used to the fly on the men's pajama bottoms. "It's just too breezy down there."



Plebe calisthenics on Barney Square, showing KP women wearing identical athletic wear as their male counterparts circa 1974.

ABOUT THE CURATOR

Jennifer McCabe grew up in Queens, New York. She holds a Bachelor's degree in history from Sacred Heart University in Fairfield, Connecticut, Summa Cum Laude, and a Master's degree in history from the University of Kentucky.



Jennifer is currently a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Kentucky, and is writing a dissertation on the lived experience of Americans during the Civil War, particularly on intelligence, communication, and the transmission of information. Beyond academic history, she has worked with multiple museums including the Fairfield Museum and History Center, the Camp Nelson Heritage Site, and the University of Kentucky Special Collections where she created the exhibit "U.K. Women: Leaders in Time," celebrating exemplary alumna of the university throughout the twentieth century. Jennifer has also taught as an adjunct professor at the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy and the University of Kentucky.

NOTES

MUSEUM MISSION STATEMENT

The American Merchant Marine Museum preserves displays and interprets historic artifacts and artwork related to the United States Merchant Marine Academy, the U.S. Merchant Marine, and the profession of seafaring. The Museum will educate and instill in midshipmen and the public an appreciation for the significant contributions made by the maritime services to the nation's heritage, and in particular by USMMA graduates and personnel in peace and war.

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We encourage you to call ahead before visiting. Group tours available by appointment.



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