

SHIP SHAPE

ANNE GRIMES RAND tells the history of the oldest naval vessel afloat, as it was and as it is today.



“I THOUGHT TELLING THE STORY OF just one historic ship would be fun for about three years,” says Anne Grimes Rand, president of the *USS Constitution* Museum. Rand came to the museum more than 25 years ago with a love of the sea, sailing and maritime history, and still learns something new every day. “The longer I’m here the more I understand the story. I feel very fortunate to have arrived here and to still be here.”

Before the story gets started, there is one thing we should know first. “She’s called ‘Old Ironsides,’” Rand says. During the War of 1812, sailors witnessed cannonballs bounce ineffectively off of the ship’s hull during a battle, exclaiming, “Huzzah! Her sides are made of iron!” and the nickname has stuck ever since.

The beloved American icon is docked at the Charlestown Navy Yard just across the pier from the *USS Constitution* Museum. The museum brings visitors through the ship’s rich history, from the lives and lore of courageous crew members to the trials and tribulations during the War of 1812. “People leave with a very memorable sense of what life was like 200 years ago,” Rand says.

The exhibit called *All Hands on Deck: A Sailor’s Life in 1812* is based on the museum’s ongoing research into the lives of the 1,243 sailors and officers that served aboard the *USS Constitution* during that conflict. You’ll meet David Debais, an 8-year-old African American

boy who joined the crew at the height of the war. “One of the comment cards from a young girl who went through said, ‘I used to think it was boring. Now I “heart” it.’ It’s exciting when you can help a kid on an elementary school field trip realize ‘Wow, these people, they’re just like us!’ History isn’t boring, it’s really fascinating!”

This July 4th is your last chance to see the *USS Constitution* set sail for quite some time when she makes her annual turnaround cruise in Boston Harbor. The ship is going into dry-dock next year to undergo a major restoration project that will take three years to complete. Rand is currently working on the details of a new introductory exhibit at the museum: *From Fourth to Frigate*. “We will be working with the Navy to tell a more structural story about the ship and how she was put together.” The exhibition will explore the challenge of shipbuilding in Boston

USS CONSTITUTION MUSEUM

Charlestown Navy Yard, Charlestown, 617-426-1812,
ussconstitutionmuseum.org

more than 200 years ago and answer the same questions builders asked themselves as they designed the biggest ship ever built to date. “It’s a chance to really dig into the live oak that is the real secret in Old Ironsides, this incredibly dense wood used for her frames.” Though the ship may be out of commission, Anne Grimes Rand will be steady at the wheel keeping the history of the *USS Constitution* alive. —Samantha DiMauro