

## EXHIBIT REVIEW

### *Enlightened Voyages, Enlightened Visitors*

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San Diego's active embarcadero is home to a myriad of attractions that grace the harbor front. One attraction in particular, the HMS *Surprise*, conveniently floats between the *Star of India* and the steam ferry *Berkeley*, all of which are part of a group of historic vessels making up the San Diego Maritime Museum. You may recognize the HMS *Surprise* simply by its "commanding" presence. In recent vintage, it was the featured vessel used in the filming of the 2003 blockbuster, *The Master and Commander*. Despite being praised by Hollywood and the movie industry, the HMS *Surprise* has remained a rather modest sea-faring vessel with all of its eighteenth-century accoutrements, not giving in to a modern makeover but to improvements that will allow it to be even more authentic.

The permanently moored and accessible vessel encompasses historic maritime exhibits that anchor on its wood planked floors every few months before making

# *The San Carlos at a Glance*



San Carlos.  
Artist: Bruce  
Dragoo



**Design:**

Adapted by Francisco Pacheco, a shipwright from Veracruz in New Spain (colonial Mexico) from contemporary designs of Iberian packet boats.

**Shipyard:**

Río Santiago, north of the port of San Blas, west coast of New Spain.

way for something new. The current exhibit, *Enlightened Voyages*, invites visitors to come aboard and explore the famous journeys of the HMS *Dolphin* and the Spanish packetboat *San Carlos* representing their competing nations, Great Britain and Spain. The newly opened exhibit has already caught the attention of the curious passerby, myself included.

With my sea legs leading me, I boarded the HMS *Surprise* and was quickly taken aback by its immense stature. After inspecting the main deck of the ship, I went below to the site of the *Enlightened Voyages* exhibit. My first impression can be summed up in one word—authentic. The name of the exhibit accurately and cleverly describes the voyages of the HMS *Dolphin* and the *San Carlos*, also known as the *Toison de Oro* or *Golden Fleece* during the eighteenth-century Age of Enlightenment. My self-enlightenment occurred when I saw the easily accessible and well-lit displays. Accompanying the colorful and legible descriptive panels were eighteenth-century artifacts and replicas. Enclosed in clear cases, the artifacts are well incorporated, easily visible, and in abundance, especially the collection of “Tools

# Serra and the Sea

The founder of the California missions Fray Junípero Serra believed that ships like the *San Carlos* were essential for the survival of Spanish outposts in Upper California.

**H**aving grown up on the Mediterranean island of Mallorca, Fray Junípero Serra was no stranger to the sea. His journals and correspondence with fellow missionaries and secular authorities reveal a keen understanding of the vital role played by maritime transportation in the survival of the new missions in California. Serra himself had

blessed the *San Carlos* and celebrated mass on its main deck before the outset of the “Sacred Expedition” to found San Diego in 1769.

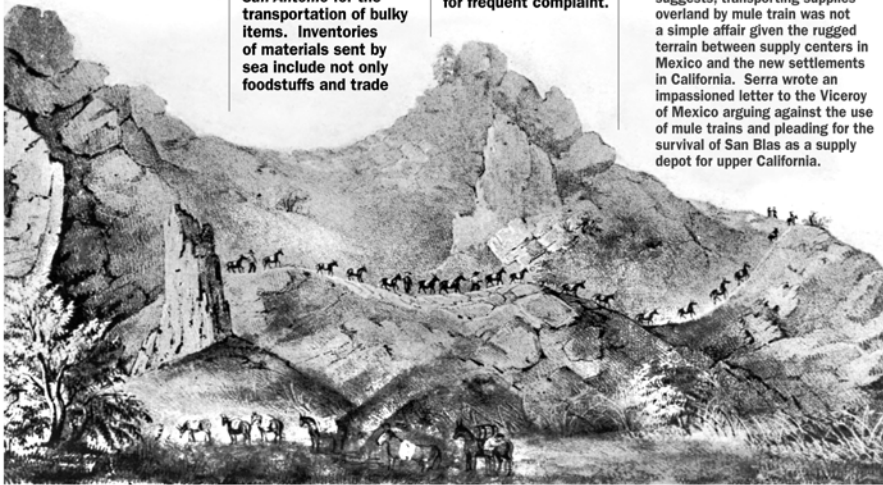
Like the military authorities in the newly established presidios, the first Franciscan missionaries depended heavily on the *San Carlos* and the *San Antonio* for the transportation of bulky items. Inventories of materials sent by sea include not only foodstuffs and trade

goods, but also items for the decoration of churches, the celebration of the liturgy, and the conversion of the indigenous population. The arrival of vessels sent from San Blas to San Diego and Monterey provoked great rejoicing. Their irregular schedules, however, were cause for frequent complaint.

Fray Junípero Serra was convinced that the survival of the missions and presidios in upper California depended on maintaining a maritime lifeline with San Blas in Mexico.



Bottom: As this illustration suggests, transporting supplies overland by mule train was not a simple affair given the rugged terrain between supply centers in Mexico and the new settlements in California. Serra wrote an impassioned letter to the Viceroy of Mexico arguing against the use of mule trains and pleading for the survival of San Blas as a supply depot for upper California.



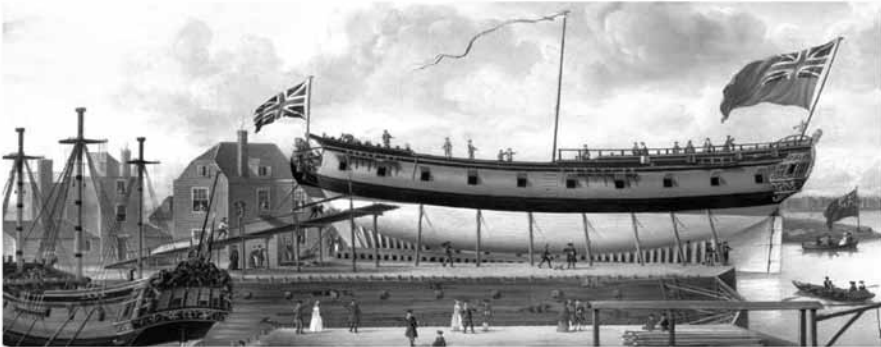
for a New Frontier.” These tools reflect the same tools carried on the *San Carlos* and recommended by José de Gálvez, the Spanish official who prepared the 1769 expedition. Gálvez thought they “would be used to build the first presidios, mission churches, and dwellings proposed for San Diego and Monterey.” Other noteworthy artifacts are the decagonal long glass and octant.

I must say I appreciated the diverse perspective the displays presented. The exhibit could have simply featured the lives of ship commanders John Byron and Samuel Wallis, the English explorers, but it also went into much greater depth by discussing living conditions for the sailors, food, weaponry, and difficulties at sea, among other things. The exhibit also explains the role of Father Junípero Serra and the overland parties that united with the *San Carlos* upon their arrival in San Diego in July 1769.

*Enlightened Voyages* takes visitors on a journey. In the beginning, there were voyages, and by the end, there were discoveries. I certainly hope other visitors will discover all that the *Enlightened Voyages* exhibit has to offer. I must also extend my appreciation to the curators for their hospitality, friendliness, and entertaining stories.

The exhibit is located within the HMS *Surprise*, a part of Maritime Museum in San Diego Harbor. The museum is open to the public and welcomes visitors between the hours of 9:00 a.m. and 8:00 p.m. *Enlightened Voyages* is a long-term exhibit. For additional inquiries, contact the San Diego Maritime Museum at (619) 234-9153 or visit their website, <http://www.sdmaritime.org>.

Woolwich Dockyards where the *Dolphin* was constructed.



A Royal Navy sixth-rate frigate, similar to HMS *Dolphin*, on the stocks.