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National Museum of American History Receives Gift From Americana Corner To Support Gunboat Philadelphia Preservation

Revolutionary War-Era Artifact at Center of Museum's Celebration of the Nation's 250th Anniversary

The gunboat USS Philadelphia, the oldest surviving American fighting vessel and an American cultural treasure, is being preserved at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History in part through a \$1 million leading gift from Americana Corner, an educational and philanthropic resource focused on America's founding era through the first century of the nation. The gunboat was one of the original artifacts on view when the museum, then the National Museum of History and Technology, opened to the public Jan. 23, 1964.

As the museum marks its 60th anniversary and prepares for the celebration of the nation's 250th, it is working to ensure the long-term preservation of this Revolutionary War vessel, considered to be part of the nation's first Navy.

"The Philadelphia is a powerful symbol of the birth of the nation, and it is our next great challenge to conserve this significant treasure," said Anthea M. Hartig, the Elizabeth MacMillan Director of the museum. "I am deeply grateful to Tom and Char Hand's commitment to history and to Americana Corner for ensuring this project can proceed. We have an immense responsibility to preserve these icons of the Revolutionary War and the patriots who fought in it"

Hand, a West Point graduate, founded [Americana Corner](#) in 2020 to share early American history and the momentous events, significant documents and influential leaders that helped create and shape this country. Americana Corner assists in conserving America's cultural and historical treasures through its Preserving America Grant Program, which supports diverse projects across the nation that contribute to sharing the rich tapestry of early American history.

"My passion for telling the incredible story of America, from its founding era through its first century, drew me to the gunboat Philadelphia, which is a treasure of our nation's founding history," Hand said. "The opportunity to preserve this critical artifact for future generations is quite meaningful, and I hope it inspires respect and admiration for those who worked to establish our country. Americana Corner is proud to make this gift to the nation for its 250th anniversary."

About the USS Philadelphia

In late 2023, the museum was awarded a \$750,000 grant from the U.S. Department of the Interior and National Park Service through the Save America’s Treasures grant program to preserve the USS Philadelphia, a registered National Historic Landmark. The grant was awarded through a competitive process and requires a dollar-for-dollar, non-federal match. The Americana Corner Foundation gift helps the museum meet the required match.

With Save America’s Treasures funds, organizations and agencies conserve significant U.S. cultural and historic treasures, which illustrate, interpret and are associated with the great events, ideas and individuals that contribute to the nation’s history and culture.

Built in the summer of 1776 under the direction of Brig. Gen. Benedict Arnold and the Continental Congress, the Philadelphia was among the ships that were part of a two-day battle against the British in October of that year off Valcour Island near the New York shore of Lake Champlain. While defeated, the fleet succeeded in delaying the British. An hour after the battle ended, the Philadelphia, which had been badly damaged, sank to the bottom of the lake where it remained until 1935. On view in the Lake Champlain region until 1961, the gunboat and its original equipment, including the cannon ball that issued the ship’s fatal blow, were moved to the Smithsonian before the completion of the museum’s construction and opening to the public Jan. 23, 1964. Because of its age and condition, it is in critical need of conservation treatment to ensure its long-term preservation.

In spring 2019, the museum kicked off a multiyear project to ensure the long-term preservation of the Philadelphia. The completion of the conservation work for the ship is scheduled to coincide with the nation’s commemoration of the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. The initial funding for the gunboat Philadelphia conservation project was donated by the museum’s board in honor of John L. Gray, the museum’s previous director.

Through incomparable collections, rigorous research and dynamic public outreach, the National Museum of American History seeks to empower people to create a more just and compassionate future by examining, preserving and sharing the complexity of our past. The museum, located on Constitution Avenue N.W., between 12th and 14th streets, is open daily except Dec. 25, between 10 a.m. and 5:30 p.m. Admission is free. The doors of the museum are [always open online](#) and the virtual museum continues to expand its offerings, including online exhibitions, PK–12 educational materials and programs. The public can follow the museum on social media on [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#) and [Facebook](#). For more information, go to <https://americanhistory.si.edu>. For Smithsonian information, the public may call (202) 633-1000.

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