

Art adds historic touch to SSA's new Island Home

By Pat Waring

There's more to greet the eye on the Island Home than the bright upholstery, broad windows, and gleaming food service area. In addition to its sleek and colorful furnishings and décor, the new SSA vessel is adorned with an array of historical images. Courtesy of the Martha's Vineyard Museum in Edgartown, the six tall panels and 16 large photo reproductions will give first-time visitors and long-time passengers a new glimpse into the Island's rich history. And to add a fun, educational aspect to the crossing, especially for younger travelers, the museum is producing a quest. The intriguing scavenger hunt, a word puzzle, will have clues to its answers hidden somewhere in the half-dozen historical panels.

"The thing that's so exciting is here is a chance for people coming to the Island to get a sense of what's here, the heritage and values and scope of the Island," said Matthew Stackpole, executive director of the museum.

The six panels, each 30 by 40 inches, are titled *Diverse Appeal*, *The Wampanoag*, *Arrival of the English*, *The Sea, Ferries and Steamers*, and *Summer Resort*. Each is fascinating to view with the variety of design elements — photos of steamships and sailboats, an ox-drawn cart, a Campgrounds gingerbread house, a Tribal ceremony, historic persons like Capt. Zeb Tilton and Dr. Helen Attaquin, reproductions of historic documents, and much more. Each has several brief paragraphs of text as well.

The large 20- by 30-inch-framed photographs displayed in various parts of the seating areas depict views from around the Island, photographed in the 1880s and early 1900s, each with a short explanatory paragraph. There is the dramatic "Gale of '98," tugboats in Vineyard Haven harbor, Illumina-

tion Night, a 1915 view of the Aquinnah shoreline after the City of Columbus wrecked in 1884. A photo by Peg Knowles illustrates the opening Tisbury Great Pond in 1933. Other show Louis Pease's Fish Market, a view of Indian Hill when the now-treed land was open, the Gay Head lighthouse with its famous Fresnel lens, Harry Reed, who put aside his training as a doctor to become a lobsterman.

The history-themed displays evolved from the inspiration of former SSA member Kathryn "Cassie" Roessel, who died during the planning process for the new boat. Mr. Stackpole said he was excited about the idea when Ms. Roessel and Capt. Ed Jackson, Island Home project manager, came to talk with him about it. "I thought it was great," said Mr. Stackpole. "It's so exciting for us to be able to share part of our collection in such a visible way."

Their first thought was to mount only a collection of photos, he recalled, but then they got the idea of creating more complex informative pieces — panels that would incorporate text, drawings, along with photographs on broad historic topics.

"Ed Jackson was so open as we were talking about it," said Mr. Stackpole. "The Steamship Authority folks were very open to having it bigger than we'd first talked about. It was a great collaboration."

Museum staff members pitched in, forming a team to bring the idea to fruition. Jill Bouck, curator, was part of the group that selected topics and images for the panels. She worked along with Dana Costanza Street, drawing images and artwork from the archives and past exhibits. Intern Anna Carringer focused on the photographs, selecting images with the aim of having all six towns represented. The collection also included several photographs



An arrangement of panels adds interest to the walls of the new ferry.

PHOTO BY SUSAN SAFFORD

of the original steamship *Island Home*, and one borrowed from the Nantucket Historical Association showing the *Island Home* crew in the 1880s.

Ms. Bouck said the process of selecting images and creating informative but succinct text entailed extensive winnowing, editing, and revising.

"Talking about Gosnold discovering Martha's Vineyard in 50 words or less, how do you do this?" Ms. Bouck laughed. "We'd go round and round to get the words right. But it was fun."

Keith Gorman, librarian/archivist and director of programs for the museum, was actively involved, working with Jesse Taggart and Dave Seibert, staff from Museum Design Associates in Cambridge where the panels were fabricated. It was a painstaking process as the mock-ups were sent back and forth for changes and final editing to make sure all details were correct. Mr. Gorman described each panel and the diverse information they contain. "They're



PHOTO BY RALPH STEWART

Matthew Stackpole, director of the Martha's Vineyard Museum, poses on the *Island Home* beside one of the educational panels.

standalone panels but at the same time give an idea of the breadth of the history of the Island," he said.

Mr. Gorman also consulted with Capt. Jackson about the new vessel's interior design and where the art works would fit and be most visible. Communication among the museum, the SSA, Capt. Jackson,

and the design office was very smooth, he said, "It was a really great partnership."

On Friday, Feb. 16, Ms. Bouck and Ms. Street traveled to Fairhaven where the *Island Home* was located temporarily before it sailed for Woods Hole for training runs in advance of the start of reg-

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Festooned for Illumination.

Photographer: Charles H. Shute, 1880's. The first Grand Illumination was put on by the Oak Bluffs Land and Wharf Company in 1869 to draw attention to their new development. By 1880, the lighting of lanterns had spread to the Methodist Campground and the Highlands (now East Chop). This tradition continues today in the Wesleyan Grove Campground on Illumination Night each August.



The Gale of '98. Photographer: John Chamberlain, November 1898. Known later as the "Portland Gale," this late fall nor'easter devastated the New England coastline. In Vineyard Haven harbor more than 40 vessels were blown ashore or sunk and at least 10 lives were lost. Chamberlain documented the British schooner *Newburgh* after it sliced through the steamship wharf.



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE MARTHA'S VINEYARD MUSEUM

Sal and Darcie Clemente of Artwork Art Installation traveled to Fairhaven in February to install the historic photographs on the *Island Home*.