

Jerry Roberts

Museum Professional, Historian, Author

jroberts.history@gmail.com



Jerry Roberts has been an historian, a museum professional and a writer for more than 30 years with more than two decades in executive leadership positions. He has served as executive director for the New England Air Museum, the Connecticut River Museum and the National Lighthouse Museum Project, and as vice president in charge of exhibits and education at the Intrepid Sea Air Space Museum in New York City. He specializes in master planning, strategic initiatives and partnerships, team-building, branding, and creating dynamic exhibits and public programming. "History is nothing more or less than the story of you and me," he likes to say. "It is a never-ending adventure and is in fact the greatest reality show ever produced!"

Roberts has produced over 50 exhibits ranging from simple installations to multi-million-

dollar exhibitions with multi-media and interactive components. Roberts' exhibits work (detailed separately and available upon request) includes master planning, research, scripting and story-boarding, set design, and project management from conceptualization to installation. He is adept at creating engaging hands-on, interactive opportunities for visitors and knows how to get the most value out of every dollar, and impact out every square foot of space.

As a writer, Roberts has authored several books, numerous magazine articles, and has created several specialized historic publications and documentaries. Roberts is a dynamic public speaker and a media savvy spokesperson.

Career Overview

Intrepid Sea Air Space Museum, 1984-2005

Roberts began his career at the Intrepid Sea Air Space Museum in New York in 1984 as an exhibits designer and public programs consultant. He became the museums' first Senior Curator and eventually, Vice President in Charge of Exhibits and Education.

- Designed and built over 30 major exhibits spanning events from the age of discovery to the space age.
- Major exhibits included the nation's first 9-11 exhibit and memorial which involved recovering artifacts and materials from Ground Zero.
- Coordinated the transfer and installation of the last British Airways Concorde, for permanent display at the Intrepid.
- Traveled to London and Moscow to coordinate major international exhibits projects.
- Created a wide variety of public programs and events, which included the annual New York Harbor Tugboat races, the Flight-deck Olympics and more.
- Created and directed Intrepid's underwater archaeology program and visited dozens of historic wrecks off the Atlantic Seaboard in conjunction with the US Naval History & Heritage Command.
- Created immersive experiences, audio tours and a variety of interactive exhibits.

Roberts is a life-long mariner and has navigated small boats and historic ships the length of the Atlantic seaboard from the Gulf of Mexico to Nova Scotia. He was also a founding board member of the East River Historic Ship Trust which worked to make sure that New York's maritime heritage had a place in the redevelopment and gentrification of the Manhattan's West Side piers.

National Lighthouse Museum Project 2005-2006

In 2005 Roberts took over as Executive Director of the National Lighthouse Museum Project in New York where he worked with lighthouse organizations around the nation to help raise awareness of the need to preserve and celebrate our nations' remaining lighthouses and lightships. He managed several lightships and developed a master plan for the seven-building waterfront complex which had served as New York's original Lighthouse Depot on Staten Island.

Connecticut River Museum 2006-2014

In 2006 Roberts came to Essex Connecticut as Executive Director of the Connecticut River Museum where he continued to create and build exhibits and public programs that helped transform this iconic museum into a more dynamic and interactive family-friendly experience.

- Redesigned the museum's core exhibits to more clearly tell the story of the River's rich history and environmental importance.
- Created an ongoing array of temporary exhibits highlighting the museum's unique collections and core themes.
- Opened interior fire escape into a three-story gallery featuring a winding mural of the river, allowing visitors to "climb" the 410-mile course from its mouth on Long Island Sound to its source just 300 yards from the Canadian border.
- Installed full-sized climb-aboard, replica of the Revolutionary War wooden submarine, Bushnell's Turtle, which allows visitors to pedal the pedals, crank the cranks and figuratively, dive into history. Roberts had designed and commissioned the exhibit while at the Intrepid and arranged for its transfer to

CRM, located just a few miles from where the original submarine was built in 1775.

- Brought the historic Schooner Mary E to the museum as well as the environmental research vessel, Project Oceanology, establishing the capability of four-season on-water experiences.
- Coordinated the History and Heritage component of New London's Op-Sail 2012.
- Played leading role in the acquisition of the adjoining 1732, Samuel Lay House and grounds which doubled the size of CRM's waterfront campus.
- Aligned the museum with the town's annual Burning of the Ship's Parade and acquired major state and federal grants to research the village's role in the War of 1812 leading to national recognition.
- Enhanced existing, and created new, public programs and events including Thursdays on the Docks and Privateer's Bash.

Battle Site Essex 2010-2014

Roberts' groundbreaking work in rediscovering the British Raid on Essex spanned both sides of the Atlantic, involved extensive archaeology, and led to recognition of the village of Essex as the State's first War of 1812 battle site. Roberts served as battlefield historian for the archaeological mapping of the battle site funded by the American Battlefield Protection Program in the summer of 2013 and the federal nomination to the National Register of Historic Places. His acclaimed book, *The British Raid on Essex*, was published by Wesleyan University Press. In April of 2014 Roberts helped coordinate a major bicentennial re-enactment of the British Raid.

New England Air Museum 2014-2018

In December 2014 Roberts became the Executive Director at the New England Air Museum at Bradley International Airport, in Windsor Locks, Connecticut, where he served through June 2018.

- Rebranded the museum, with new logo, website, color newsletter, new external signage and wayfinding system.

- Created a strategic vision that helped raise two million dollars to carry out major infrastructure improvements.
- Major construction projects included two major public mezzanines which provide lofty public views of the museum's aircraft collection as well as space for rotating exhibits and special events.
- Worked with United Technologies Corporation and nationally acclaimed Centerbrook Architects to design a major annex museum to be built within the historic hangars at Rentschler Field in East Hartford. That project is still pending funding.
- Created several new exhibits to celebrate region's outsized role in aerospace history.
- Master planning for the New England Aviation Hall of Fame.
- Developed *Stories From the Air* speaker series.

Publishing

Roberts is a widely published writer including dozens of newspaper and magazine articles and several books and documentaries. Magazines have included *Offshore*, *Sea History*, *Connecticut Explored*, *Professional Mariner* and *Skin Diver Magazine*. He authored the "*Amazing Book of Paper Boats*" which introduces both the history and technology of boats and ships to young readers and allows them to construct and float 18 different vessels using waterproof cutout pages within the publication. In 2012 he was a contributing writer for, "*The Rockets' Red Glare, the War of 1812 in Connecticut*." In April 2014 he authored, "*The British Raid on Essex, The Forgotten Battle of the War of 1812*," which was released on both sides of the Atlantic by Wesleyan University Press. In August of 2018, Globe Pequot Press published his third major book, "*The Connecticut River From the Air*". Created with pilot/photographer Tom Walsh, this lavish production chronicles New England's great river through word and images along its 410-mile course.

In addition to books and magazine features, Roberts has been commissioned to create several historic booklets and outdoor graphic display panels for heritage trails.

Other Media

Roberts has appeared in, written, and/or co-produced several documentaries including *Intrepid Wings*, *Sending out the Light (Frontier Productions)*, *Hooligan Navy (for A&E)* and *the British Raid on Essex*. Roberts is a skilled public speaker and story teller. He is at home in front of audiences large and small, as well as on television, radio and social media platforms where he speaks on a variety of topics from aviation, maritime and military history to science and technology.