

Eclectic Collecti

Six lesser known museums await the curious.

BY D.J. PALLADINO



NOBODY SAYS GOOD MUSEUMS have to be big. Though we all love the Louvre and go gaga for MOMA, there are thrills to be had crossing the threshold into a quiet sanctuary of local history or discovering a collection of artifacts collected with passion and utter idiosyncrasy. Small can be beautiful, and here in Santa Barbara County, blessed with a colorful past and cultural riches, we host a wealth of shrines to learning and other passions. Not all of them are well known to the public, however.

Our oceanfront existence being a point of pride, it's no wonder the Santa Barbara Harbor is popular with locals and tourists alike. However, many visitors miss the small but comprehensive—and very diverting—Santa Barbara Maritime Museum, located in the former Naval Reserve Building. Exhibits reference those palmy days of pleasure boating, when white tablecloths and silver were de rigueur in the galley. The focus of the museum, however, is the working relationship the area has with the sea, dating back to the Chumash. Among other historic vessels, it has a full-scale reproduction of a tomol, the plank boat the Chumash used to ply the waters of the Santa Barbara Channel. Much of the museum's historic diving gear was donated by pioneering local divers. If you are down at the harbor and feel like going to the movies, the museum has a state-of-the-art viewing room in the shape of a ship's hull where sea-related films, such as James Cameron's deep-water exploration movies, are shown on a big screen.

Santa Barbara is built on firm intellectual foundations—a world-class university, a renowned city college, a Christian college, and a famed photographic institute, to name a few. The Karpeles Manuscript Library Museum is also world-class, albeit, given its contents, shockingly modestly housed. A former math teacher who invested well in Santa Barbara real estate,

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Pannier doll (opposite page) and jester Kachina bear (below left), at Susan Quinlan's Doll and Teddy Bear Museum. Original draft of the Bill Rights (below), at the Karpeles Manuscript Library Museum (left).

search suspected places, or to apprehend any suspected person without
specifically naming or describing the place or person, are dangerous and ought
not to be granted.

Fifteenth. That the people have a right peaceably to assemble
together to consult for the common good, or to present their representa-
tives; and that every freeman has a right to petition or apply to the
legislature for redress of grievances.

Sixteenth. That the people have a right to freedom of speech,
and of writing and publishing their sentiments, that the freedom of
the press is one of the greatest bulwarks of liberty and ought not to be
violated.

Seventeenth. That the people have a right to keep and bear
arms; that a well regulated militia composed of the body of the peo-
ple trained to arms, is the proper, natural and safe defence of a free
state. That standing armies in time of peace are dangerous to liberty
therefore ought to be avoided, as far as the circumstances and protection of
Community will admit; and that in all cases the military should
under strict subordination to and governed by the civil power.

Eighteenth. That no soldier in time of peace ought to be quartered
in any house without the consent of the owner, and in time of war so such
as he law demand.

Nineteenth. That any person religiously scrupulous of bearing arms
to be exempted upon payment of an equivalent to employ another to
substitute.

Twentieth. That religion, or the duty which we owe
to our Creator and to our fellow men, can be directed only by reason
and conscience, and that every man has the right of conscience, and
that no man ought to be compelled to attend any religious worship, or
to observe any religious observance, or to support any religious institution,
against his conscience, and that no religious test shall ever be required
as a qualification for any office or public trust.





Vintage airplanes (top), at Santa Maria Museum of Flight. Antique diving helmet (above), at Santa Barbara Maritime Museum. Opposite page: Davy Crockett coonskin cap, at Shelbi Ranch Western Museum. 1936 Nimbus, at Solvang Vintage Motorcycle Museum.

David Karpeles used his money to indulge in an obsession with historical documents. The collection is so extensive that Karpeles has opened six other museums around the country and actively moves it around. Here you might find the Emancipation Proclamation, pages from the Gutenberg Bible, Einstein's relativity formula, and the Papal Order launching the First Crusade, among many other parchment treasures. Traveling exhibits, including art, are also displayed.

Another collection that originated in an obsession, this one for the playful and fantastic, is simply not to be missed. Susan Quinlan's Doll and Teddy Bear Museum is the kind of place that defines the small museum as labor of love. Quinlan has widely collected most of her life, beginning with garage sales in the 1970s. Open just one year, the museum in downtown Santa Barbara houses more than 2,500 examples of her passion, imaginatively organized by themes, such as literature, space, Teddy Roosevelt, ethnic cultures, fairy dolls and dragons, and California history. The dolls range from wooden dolls from the 1800s to pop culture figurines including Luke Skywalker and James Bond. One of the extraordinary aspects of the collection is the number of limited-edition dolls and Teddy Bears made by contemporary artists. The museum includes a gift shop and tea room with fabulous murals.

Quaint Solvang, dedicated to recreating Copenhagen in ranch country, seems to be almost a living museum in itself. But for something entirely different from clogs and aebleskivers, the Solvang



Top to bottom: Courtesy of the Museum of Flight; Maritime Museum; Andri Photography; Deja Hsu.

...if God hadn't wanted us to fly he wouldn't have left those birds around to tease us.

Vintage Motorcycle Museum displays a stunning collection of motorcycles assembled by Virgil Elings. Elings came to Santa Barbara to teach physics at UCSB and co-founded Digital Instruments which manufactures Scanning Probe Microscopes. Is it a stretch to go from designing instruments that can “see” individual atoms to a passion for motorbikes? Elings is certainly not immune to the irrepressible zeal that seizes certain collectors. Before opening the museum, he kept his bikes in his garages, living room, family room, bedrooms, and offices. Seeing this surprisingly eclectic collection assembled in one space is stunning. One can examine early prototypes and rare vintages along with flashy modern “hogs,” an awesome testament to mechanical design and an ardent subculture. The collection includes a 1914 Indian, the famed 1960s Honda Black Bomber, and the Vincent Black Lightning, immortalized by folkie Richard Thomson.

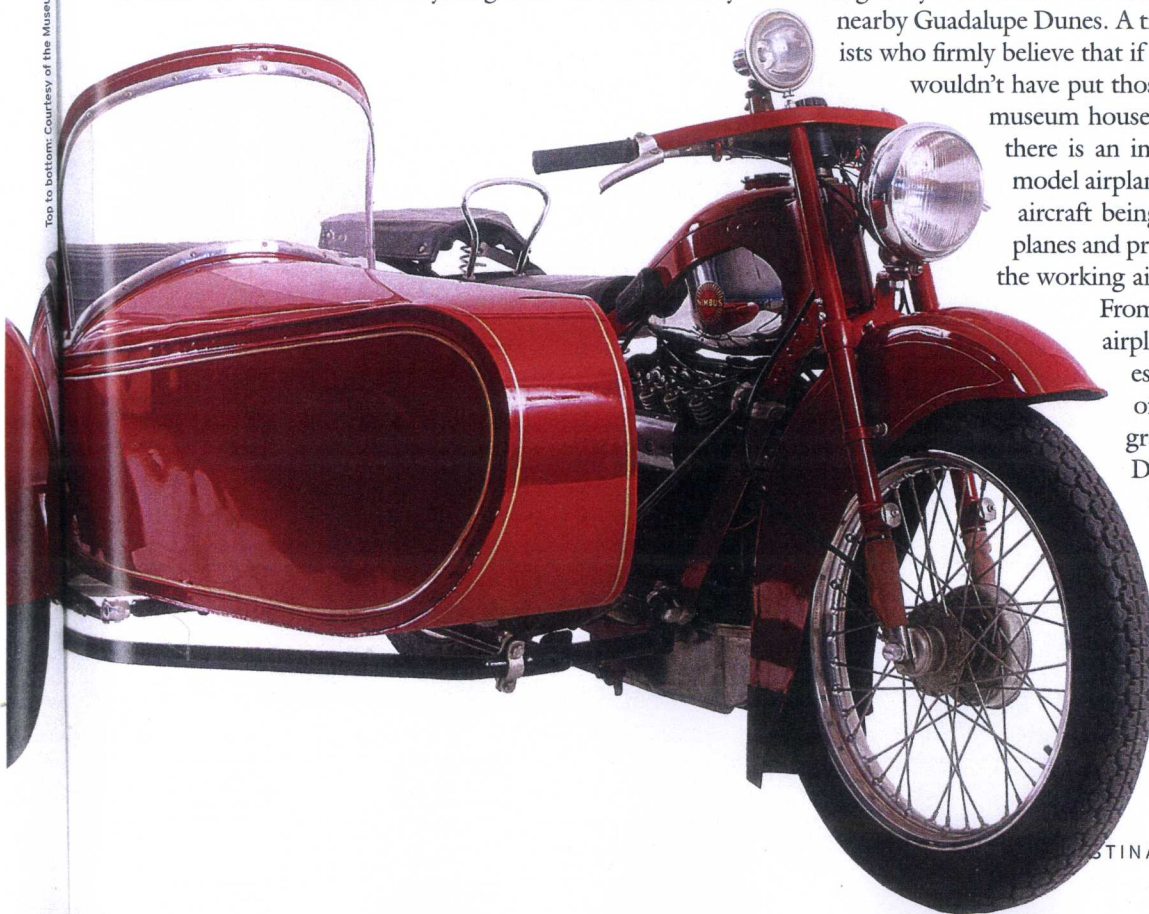
Also in Solvang, a most intriguing private collection of western clothing and memorabilia is found at The Shelbi Ranch. One of the most charming, intricately stocked private museums in the county, it all goes to support the Shriner's Hospital. In this case the building inspired the collection. Owners Shelly and Bill Berman bought a property in Solvang a few years ago and opened an outlet clothing store that sells everything for two dollars and a small restaurant where everything costs one dollar. They

crowned their nonprofit extravaganza with an upstairs museum and started collecting to fill it. With items ranging from Tony Lama boots and outfits by famed Hollywood cowboy couturier Nudie to the holster from *Have Gun Will Travel* and a *Davy Crockett* coonskin cap, the museum is a shrine to Western wear—or at least the Silver Screen's version of it. Various rooms explore U.S. Marshalls, Sidekicks, Saloons, and Cowkids, with exhibits of cowboy stars from Tom Mix to Clint Eastwood. As Bill says: “The tours are free, but we hope they write a check.”

We finish our trip through the idiosyncratic and the spell-binding at Santa Maria's best kept secret, an airstrip once frequented by such pioneers of flight as Wiley Post and that Lindbergh fella. The airstrip is now the Santa Maria Public Airport, and the Santa Maria Museum of Flight, a historical museum with a bit of aeronautical Hollywood gloss, is housed in the hangar seen in *The Rocketeer*. On exhibit are movie star planes, including the one used in Martin Scorsese's *The Aviator* and the Wright Flyer from the movie *Kittyhawk* which was filmed at the nearby Guadalupe Dunes. A tribute to the rugged individualists who firmly believe that if God hadn't wanted us to fly he wouldn't have put those birds around to tease us, the museum houses more than 5,000 books, and there is an impressive collection of original model airplanes. You can even watch vintage aircraft being restored while commuter airplanes and private jets take off and land from the working airport outside.

From the oldest boat and earliest airplane to the newest bike and latest doll, from the original draft of the Bill of Rights to the autographed boots of Roy Rogers and Dale Evans, these passion-driven collections represent a wide range of human ingenuity and imagination, as well as a generosity of spirit. And they make for nice outings for boys and girls all ages. ☺

For museum information, see page 113.



Top to bottom: Courtesy of the Museum of Flight; Maritime Museum; Andri Photography; Deja Hsu.