



News & Features

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KOREA AND SAN PEDRO

Although Separated by an Ocean,
Connected in Spirit and History

The Republic of Korea is nearly 6,000 miles from San Pedro. But history tells us that the two places are far closer in heart and spirit than those miles would indicate.

Korean Bell of Friendship

One of San Pedro's most popular – and beautiful – attractions was a gift from Korea to the United States in honor of the 1976 Bicentennial: the Korean Bell of Friendship. It is situated on a bluff overlooking the Pacific Ocean (and some say symbolically in line with South Korea) in Angels Gate Park at 3601 S. Gaffey Street.

The site houses more than a bell. An ornate pagoda-like pavilion covers the bell, which is a replica of the Divine Bell of King Seongdeok the Great of Silla. The original bell, cast in Korea in 771, is on display in the Kyongju National Museum.

The pavilion was constructed and decorated by 35 Korean artisans and craftsmen – stone masons, tile setters, carpenters, painters – who traveled to the U.S. in 1976, living on site in former military barracks and working 12 to 14 hours a day on the project for some five months.

They brought with them on a ship from Korea, the Los Angeles Times' inimitable feature writer Charles Hillinger reported at the time, 435 tons of stone, tile, and other materials to use in the project.

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And since its construction, Korean craftsmen have returned to refurbish the bell and its pavilion, keeping them in like-new condition.

The bell is 12 feet high and seven-and-a-half feet in diameter, weighing in at 37,400 tons. Its deep resonant tone is created by striking the bell with a large log that swings from the ceiling of the pavilion. It is generally rung five times each year: Korean American Day in January, U.S. Independence Day in July, Korean Independence Day in August, Constitution Day in September, and New Year's Eve.

Looking over the Pacific Ocean, the bell is intended to represent for the West Coast what the Statue of Liberty does for the East Coast.

The site also includes two jangseung, Korean wooden totems that were traditionally used at the edge of villages to guard against demons. The totems represent a man and a woman. Also on site is a newly refurbished art gallery.

Korean Bell of Friendship

Angels Gate Park, 3601 S. Gaffey Street, Peninsula

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SS Lane Victory

She's a San Pedro native and a veteran of multiple wars and peacetime service in the merchant marine fleet. She's the SS Lane Victory, a working steamship built in 1945 that served with distinction during World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War, as well as in times of peace as part of the merchant fleet. The ship had suffered years of deterioration while mothballed.

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But many hundreds of hours of restoration by volunteers of the United States Merchant Marine Veterans of World War II put her back into her original condition.

The ship was named after Lane College, a historically Black institution in Jackson, TN. Notable missions for the Lane Victory in Korea included its evacuation of people from Wonsan in the north in the fall of 1950 and in December of that year its evacuation of more than 3,800 U.S. troops and 1,100 vehicles from Hungnam while under attack during the Battle of Chosin Reservoir. The Lane Victory offloaded troops, vehicles, and cargo under fire with the cruiser Saint Paul and destroyers providing covering fire. After unloading, Lane Victory's crew took on board 7,010 men, women, and children, transporting them safely to the south. But when it arrived in the south, there were 7,011 passengers to disembark – a baby had been born during the voyage

This nationally recognized historic landmark now serves as a living museum and memorial to the service and sacrifices of all Merchant Marine sailors and Navy Armed Guardsmen. Several times each summer she sails into the past on one of her "Victory At Sea" cruises where "old salts" can reminisce, about adventures past, and younger generations can catch a glimpse of bygone times.

SS Lane Victory is located at Berth 49 on the LA Waterfront. Berth 49 is at the southern end of Miner Street beyond 22nd St. There's ample free parking the site.

310-519-9545, www.LaneVictory.org

San Pedro, like other towns across the United States, sent many men to Korea to fight during the conflict there against the Communists. And many, sadly, lost their lives in battle.

One woman, though, who lived in San Pedro, did more than her share to brighten the days of those who were stationed in Korea.

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Anna Seidenberg, whose son Isadore, wrote her from Korea that many of the men did not receive letters, began a campaign to provide word from home, according to an article in the Los Angeles Times.

The project grew from writing to several men whose names her son had provided to 100 a week after news of the project was published in papers across the country. This soon grew to 100 letters a day, which she enlisted the help of neighbors to write.

And she got a letter of her own: from President Dwight D. Eisenhower, thanking her for her efforts.

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