

The Day Book

Volume 3, Issue 4

May-June 1997

A Newsletter for the Supporters of the Hampton Roads Naval Museum

The Steel Navy on Display

The Hampton Roads Naval Rendezvous of 1893

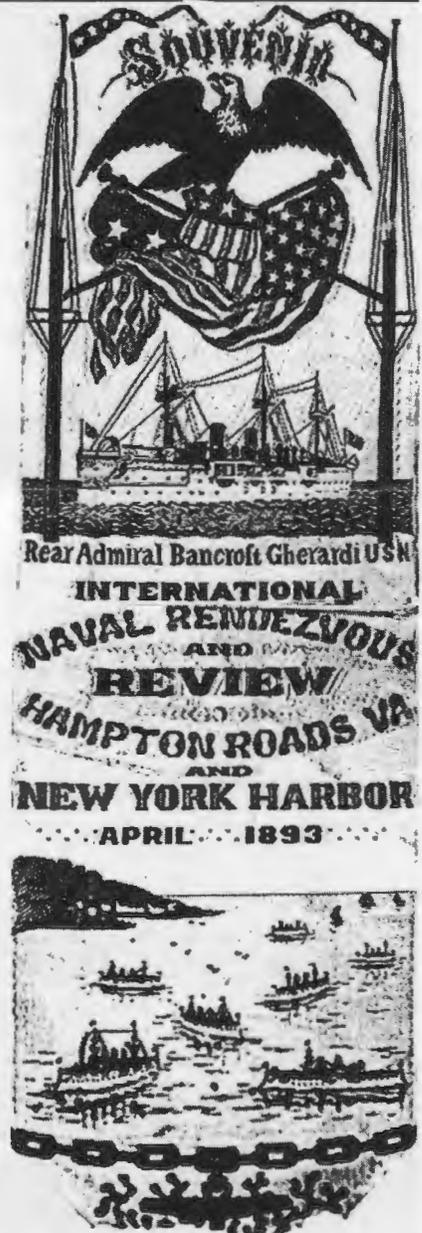
by Joe Mosier

“**T**his is to be the great week in Norfolk’s history. It will be ever known as Rendezvous Week, and the events that will transpire will always occupy a prominent place in the history of this section.” So the *Norfolk Virginian* described the opening of the now largely forgotten Hampton Roads Naval Rendezvous of April 17-24, 1893. Thirty-eight warships from ten countries were to gather in the spacious harbor as the first of a chain of celebrations leading to the Chicago Colombian Exhibition. A smaller naval gathering had been held in New York the previous Fall closer to the 300th anniversary of Columbus’ arrival in the New World. It had been less than imposing, what one ship’s captain called “a lame affair.” The Hampton Roads Rendezvous and the follow-on New

York Review, however, were expected to be the greatest international accumulation of warships since Queen Victoria’s Golden Jubilee of 1887.

The idea for the review came from Col. Alexander A. Anderson who had first suggested a world’s fair in honor of Columbus. Originally planned for Washington D.C., technical considerations had changed the site of the fair to Chicago and that of the review to New York. Congress passed an enabling act on April 25, 1890 stating “the President is hereby empowered and directed to hold a naval review in New York harbor in April 1893, and to extend to foreign nations an invitation to send ships of war to join the U.S. Navy in rendezvous at Hampton Roads and proceed thence to said review.” Helpful Virginia legislators had amended the original bill to include the Chesapeake Bay gathering. At least 20 nations were invited. Some such as China, Turkey, and Uruguay declined as no vessels were available. Haiti was forced to refuse by the fact that it had no navy. For those countries that did accept, the selection of

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Before there was a Jamestown Exposition or the NATO Azalea Festival, there was the International Naval Rendezvous of 1893. Thirty-five warships and their sailors from nine countries came to Hampton Roads to show off their ships to the world. (HRNM photo)

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"I Too Am a Hampton Roadser"

The Director's Column

by Becky Poulliot

On February 28, the Hampton Roads Naval Museum experienced one of its finest hours. We were given the opportunity to host a luncheon lecture with former **Secretary of the Navy, the Honorable John F. Lehman**. More than 130 guests attended the event held at Breezy Point Officer's Club, where Dr. Lehman engaged the audience by commenting on his ties to Hampton Roads and thoughts on the Navy of the 1980's and today. Dr. Lehman turned the presentation into an open forum by keeping the formal remarks short and then encouraging questions from the floor.

Since the formal decommissioning of the Navy's medium attack aircraft A-6 *Intruder* was being held at Oceana Naval Air Station later that day, several questions arose concerning this airplane and how its loss affected the Navy's strike capabilities. Dr. Lehman answered the tough questions deftly, harkening back to the 1950's inter-service fights between the Air Force and the Navy. With the loss of the A-6, according to Dr. Lehman, the battle has been concluded with the Navy no longer being capable of a deep strike mission. The presentation had its humorous moments also, particularly when a former mayor of Norfolk gently

reminded Dr. Lehman that Tidewater was no longer the appropriate term for this area. Dr. Lehman quickly shot back, "Mr. Mayor, to paraphrase President John F. Kennedy, I too am a Hampton Roadser." This presentation was aired on Cox Communication's Channel 11. The museum has a copy available for viewing.

Do not miss the other great luncheon speakers lined up for the next two months. **Rear Adm. D. H. Tesson** will talk about the U.S. Coast Guard in Hampton Roads and the service it provides to the Atlantic Fleet. This lecture is scheduled for Monday, May 5 at 11:30 a.m. It will be held at The Galley restaurant inside Nauticus. The bi-monthly meeting of the Dunderfunk Society will meet on May 29 at 12:30 p.m. at Cracker's Restaurant in Norfolk. The speaker will be **Dave Hazard** of the Portsmouth Regional Office of the Virginia Department of Historic Resources. He will talk about the shipwreck recently discovered in downtown Portsmouth. Then on Friday, June 20 go back in time to reminisce



The 65th Secretary of the Navy, Dr. John F. Lehman, speaks at Breezy Point Officer's Club on Feb. 28. Rear Adm. D.H. Tesson, will speak next on May 5 at The Galley Restaurant. (Photo by Becky Bump)

with two salts about the biggest naval battle of the Civil War-The Battle of Hampton Roads. This presentation will be brought to you by **Living History Associates** of Richmond who portray, both in appearance and actions, historical personages. This vignette will be held on the Norfolk Naval Base's "Norfolk Live!" club. Call 322-2992 for reservations to all three of these events.

Other noteworthy news includes a peer survey to be conducted on June 4-6 by museum professionals recommended by the American Association of Museums. The lead reviewer is **Ralph Eshelman**, former director of the Calvert Maritime Museum in Solomons, MD, and now a noted international consultant. He will be joined by **Lucy Alexander**, marketing director for the Chesapeake Maritime Museum in St. Michael's, MD.

These two individuals will meet with museum staff, Naval Base leaders, members of our foundation board, and museum committee members as part of the Museum Assessment Program (MAP III) for public relations. As noted in earlier columns, the MAP III project will assist us in working toward several long range goals such as projecting a recognizable image, attracting a wider audience, and developing programs and exhibits that our audience finds educational and interesting. If you wish to know more about MAP III or volunteer your efforts in working on this project, call me at 322-2990.

About *The Day Book*

The Day Book is an authorized publication of the Hampton Roads Naval Museum (HRNM). Its contents do not necessarily reflect the official view of the U.S. Government, the Department of Defense, the U.S. Navy, or the U.S. Marine Corps and do not imply endorsement thereof. The HRNM is a museum dedicated to the study and interpretation of 220 years of naval history in the Hampton Roads region. The museum is open daily from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m.

The Day Book's purpose is to educate and inform readers on historical topics and museum related events. It is written by the staff and volunteers of the museum. The newsletter takes its name from a 19th century Norfolk newspaper.

Questions or comments can be directed to the Hampton Roads Naval Museum editor. *The Day Book* can be reached at (757) 322-2993, by fax at (757) 445-1867, or write *The Day Book*, Hampton Roads Naval Museum, One Waterside Drive, Suite 248, Norfolk, VA 23510-1607. The museum can be found on the World Wide Web at <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~VAM/vamhome.html>. *The Day Book* is published bi-monthly with a circulation of 1,200.

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Becky

Jack of Battleship USS *Maine* Donated to Museum

by Joe Judge

It was not an April Fool's joke when a friendly visitor walked in and asked, "Would the museum like to have the jack from the *Maine*?"

"Do you mean THE *Maine*?" the staff replied.

"Well, the one that sank at Havana."

And almost as easy as that, the museum came into possession of the jack from the battleship USS *Maine* (BB-2/c, ex-ACR-1) which was destroyed by an explosion in Havana, Cuba in 1898. The donor, Mr. Everett Conwell of Chesapeake, Virginia, inherited the flag from his grandfather. Mr. Conwell's grandfather was in the Navy and received the flag from one of the divers sent to investigate the wreck immediately after the explosion.

"The diver went down to the wreck and found this flag," Mr. Conwell explained. "He tied it around his waist and when he came back to the surface he asked the officer of the day if he could have it. The officer said yes, and the diver, who was good friends with my grandfather, gave it to him. In that way it came into my family, where it has been ever since."

The flag is the ship's jack, or union jack, a blue field with white stars flown at the jackstaff of a Navy ship at anchor. The 43 stars are all hand sewn. Along the hoist in black military stencils is the following type: "Union No 3 Navy Yard New York Dec 1892." *Maine* was built at the New York Navy Yard, launched in 1889 and commissioned in 1895. Soon after her commissioning, the Navy assigned Norfolk as the battleship's home port.

In 1898, *Maine* was standing by at Havana, ready to assist the U.S. consul as the Cuban revolution against Spain grew more serious. At



The jack of the battleship USS *Maine* (BB-2/c, ex-ACR-1). There are 43 stars on the jack, all hand sewn. There is also the wording UNION NO 3 NAVY YARD NEW YORK DEC 1892. (Photo by JO2 Sykes)

9:40 p.m., the crew heard a noise like the firing of a gun. It was followed immediately by, as one survivor said, "an indescribable roar, a terrific crash, an intense darkness." The forward section of the ship had exploded. Many of the sailors died instantly; others were thrown into the water or trapped and drowned as the ship sank.

Most Americans held Spain responsible, although the evidence was never enough to affix blame officially and certainly. What is certain is that the

explosion of the battleship launched the Spanish-American War, in which the Spanish Empire collapsed and the United States emerged as a world power. "Remember the *Maine*!" was the emotional exclamation point of an era.

The jack is a moving tribute to the sailors who died aboard the battleship. Plans call for it to be cleaned and professionally mounted prior to display. The artifact arrived in perfect time for the museum's centennial anniversary exhibit on the Spanish-American War. 



The second class battleship USS *Maine* (BB-2/c, ex-ACR-1) on watch in Havana Harbor, Cuba hours before her destruction. The explosion which sank the warship is one of the most famous and emotional moments in U.S. Naval history. The jack at the front of the ship has been recently donated to the museum. (HRNM photo of an 1898 painting by Henry Reuterdahl)

The Birth of a Giant

The Founding of Newport News Shipbuilding and Dry Dock Company

by Gordon Calhoun

The importance of Newport News Shipbuilding and Dry Dock Company to Hampton Roads and the U.S. Navy can not be understated. The Peninsula-based shipyard today employs over 18,000 people. It is one of only two yards in the United States that builds nuclear-powered attack submarines and the only shipyard capable of building nuclear powered aircraft carriers.

Like many large American corporations, Newport News Shipbuilding started small. The legend at the forefront of the shipyard's beginnings is the transportation tycoon Collis P. Huntington. A poor but driven entrepreneur from the age of 14, Huntington went on to build one of the largest real estate and transportation empires in the country. This empire included building the first transcontinental railroad in 1861, and founding the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad (now known as CSX Transportation.)

In 1880, the 59 year old Huntington sent a survey team to the Virginia Peninsula to improve the marine and

railroad terminal on the James River. When team leader (and later company president) Walter Post arrived, he found a few scattered houses and very little development. Post, however, was extremely optimistic about what could be done. He wrote, "We were immediately stuck by the possibilities afforded by the harbor. We wondered why this post had not long before been recognized and utilized as a site for a city." Under such a recommendation, work began on the terminal immediately in 1882.

But a marine terminal was not enough. By 1886, it was discovered that a ship repair facility was needed to overhaul cargo vessels loading up at the new terminal. The repair facilities in Virginia for the ever increasingly large commercial vessels were found to be inadequate. Huntington also discovered that it would be cheaper and easier for him to build ships for his shipping company himself. Using money he had earned while building up his railroad and shipping empire, Huntington decided to invest in a new shipyard in addition to the new terminal. It was named the Chesapeake and Ohio Dry Dock and Construction Company. Construction on a 600 foot long and 25 foot deep stone dry dock began in June 1887.

Workers finished Dry Dock No.1 in March 1889. By April 19, the yard opened its door for business by accepting the dredging vessel *Commodore* and the British steamer *Wylo*. The yard also received a new president, Calvin B.



The serious expression of Collis P. Huntington accurately portrays the entrepreneurial drive and wisdom of one of the 19th century's leading tycoons. Along with Calvin Orcutt, Huntington built a new shipyard and a new city in Hampton Roads. (HRNM photo of a 1986 Newport News Shipbuilding painting. Used with permission.)

Orcutt. A tireless administrator, the yard reached new levels of growth and efficiency during his 22-year tenure.

To increase national publicity for the new facilities, the company held a formal public ceremony on April 24 by accepting the monitor USS *Puritan* into the dry dock for a complimentary overhaul. Orcutt and his staff invited over 300 dignitaries, including Virginia's governor, several local, state and U.S. representatives, and several U.S. Navy officers and civilian officials. The *Norfolk Virginian* hailed the ceremony as "a gala day at Newport News, the occasion being the formal opening of the largest dry dock in the United States."

Once the docking of *Puritan* and formal dedication of the dry dock were complete, the guests retired to Huntington's riverside Warwick Hotel for a festive banquet. The guests delivered over four hours of speeches and toasts. Everything from the Commonwealth of Virginia, the Merchant Marine, to the U.S. Navy were praised and toasted.

Along with the construction of the shipyard, the company planned an expansion of Newport News. New streets were planned and built, a bank opened, and a utilities company was founded. To reflect the growth of the new city, the shipyard changed its name to Newport News Shipbuilding and Dry Dock Company. *Giant continued on page 8*



"A gala day at Newport News." The double turreted monitor USS Puritan pulls into Dry Dock No. 1 at the Chesapeake and Ohio Dry Dock and Construction Company for the official opening ceremonies of the company, April 24, 1889. (Photo provided by Newport News Shipbuilding and Dry Dock Company)

HRNM's Upcoming Special Events

The Hampton Roads Naval Museum Lecture Series



Rear Adm. D.H. Teeson, United States Coast Guard Commander Maintenance and Logistics Command Atlantic Sir Arthur Wellesley, the Duke of Wellington, said that it was "necessary to trace a biscuit from London to a man's mouth...or no military operations can be carried out." The Maintenance and Logistics Command makes it happen for both the Coast Guard and the U.S. Atlantic Fleet. Find out how from Rear Adm. Teeson. **May 5th at 11:30 a.m. in The Galley Restaurant inside Nauticus. Call (757) 322-2992 for more information and reservations.**

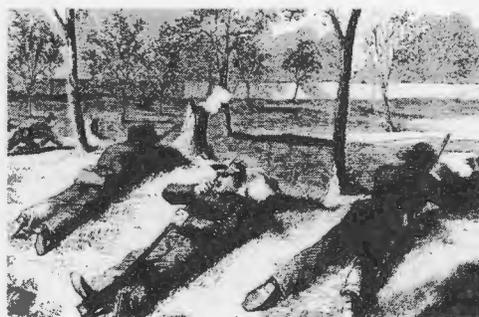
Living History Associates presents "The Battle of Hampton Roads"

Living History Associates presents a first person interpretation of the great battle of the ironclads. Former crew members of CSS *Virginia* and USS *Monitor* share their opposing first hand recollections of the two ironclads fighting in Hampton Roads. *Hold on tight, its going to be a bumpy ride!* **Friday June 20th at 11:30 a.m. at Norfolk Live! on the Norfolk Naval Base. Call (757) 322-2992 for more information and reservations.**

The Scuttlebutt Summer Conversations

The museum staff and its volunteers invite you to a new summer lecture series. All talks will begin at 3pm under the Nauticus Celebration Pavilion. Admission is free.

June 3rd-On to Richmond!-Join Gordon Calhoun, Editor of *The Day Book* and writer of the Museum Sage column, as he tells us about the Army of the Potomac's first attempt to seize the city of Richmond via the Virginia Peninsula. Come hear the Museum Sage's views on some of the more controversial personalities and military maneuvers of the American Civil War.



July 8th-Now Put *That* in a Bottle!-HRNM volunteer and Master Modeler, Bob Comet, will discuss how his career as a ship model builder has helped him

understand three centuries of naval technology. This is for all of us who have spent time negotiating with a bottle of glue and a pile of plastic.



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which warships to send became a delicate diplomatic juggling act. When Russia announced it would send five vessels, England promptly added the cruiser HMS *Australia* from the Mediterranean station to bring its representation to the same number.

The Naval Rendezvous Association, headed by Col. George W. Johnston and former Norfolk Mayor Barton Myers, organized the festivities ashore. In a wistfully remembered show of regionalism, the cities surrounding Hampton Roads each contributed at least \$2,500 to pay for maps, fireworks, boat races, military drills, and band concerts. To house the expected throng of visitors the call went out that "every person who can accommodate any of these visitors should notify the secretary of the Business Men's Association at once." "White companies comprising the National Guard (or militia) of any state in the Union" received invitations to a competitive military drill as part of the show. Renowned companies such as the First Virginia, Fifth Maryland, and National Fencibles of Washington, DC attended. The owners of the four-decked excursion steamer *Columbia* offered her for a free trip for Norfolk school children to view the fleet. Over one hundred



A contingent of U.S. Marines round up three drunk bluejackets and escort them back to their ships through downtown Norfolk during the Rendezvous. (HRNM photo of an 1893 Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper engraving)

businesses from cigar makers to oyster packers entered floats in the Trades Parade. Bicycle races were held on the grounds of the Norfolk Company. The Consolidated Fireworks Company of New York put on a "magnificent pyrotechnic display." The International Naval Ball held on April 26 at Armory



Over 4,000 of these elaborate posters were printed to commemorate the Naval Rendezvous. However only about 50 of them survive today, including one in the museum's Steel Navy gallery. Every ship of the country that participated is shown, as is a proposed statue of Christopher Columbus which was to be built on the Rip Raps. (HRNM photo of an 1893 print)

Hall was declared "a scene of decorative loveliness unequaled by anything ever shown in Virginia." The *Norfolk Virginian* devoted two full columns to the description of "Norfolk's beautiful daughters [who] never looked lovelier or appeared to greater advantage." All in all, the newspaper asserted that "despite predictions to the contrary, from opposing elements in other cities, and the crop of croakers at home" the Naval Rendezvous Week activities were a huge success.

The largest contingent of ships present was the American group of 13 vessels. Although there had been fierce infighting to see who would command, the position ultimately went to 61-year old Rear Adm. Bancroft Gherardi. The senior officer in the US Navy, Gherardi had served on active duty for better than 47 years. Although born in Louisiana, during the Civil War he had helped capture New Orleans as part of Farragut's squadron. Prior to assuming command of the U.S. warships at the Naval Rendezvous, Gherardi had served at the head of the North Atlantic

Squadron. His flagship was the cruiser *Philadelphia*. The ships under him were divided into two squadrons under Rear Adms. Benham and Walker. The first ship to arrive at Hampton Roads did so on March 28. It was the *Newark* returning from Spain with relics of the explorer Columbus. The bulk of the American fleet arrived April 1 from New York. For the next two weeks the vessels were in and out of the Roads, conducting maneuvering drills in the vicinity of Cape Henry.

The earliest arrivals among the foreign ships were the Russian vessels *General Admiral* and *Rynda*. As they passed Fort Monroe on the morning of April 10, the Russians fired the required 21-gun salute, but the gunners at the fort had apparently failed to read the program as it took almost an hour for them to return the honor. The delay apparently did not go unnoticed by the top brass. The newspapers reported that "Admiral Benham went ashore shortly after noon and paid an official visit to the commandant of Fortress Monroe, Lieutenant-Colonel Frank, of the Second Artillery." While the content of their conversation is unreported, no such delays were noted for the rest of the Rendezvous.

By the 17th, Hampton Roads began to fill as the British squadron of five ships

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**Winged Messengers-
Naval Communications
Before Marconi**

The Hampton Roads Naval Rendezvous of 1893 occurred two years before Guglielmo Marconi demonstrated long range wireless transmission. Reporters covering the naval gathering seemed fascinated by the various means of signaling used by the ships present. They wrote of men "wig-waging with red flags," "long strings of crazy quilt pennants," and "the cacophony of signal guns and whistles." What interested them most was the experimental use of carrier pigeons.

The Southern Associated Press reported, "The programme will include relay work from Hampton Roads to Richmond by Richmond birds; thence to Annapolis by the cadet flyers; thence to the office of the Secretary of the Navy by Washington birds." From off Cape May, New Jersey birds were to be released to carry messages in relays to Washington and New York via Newark and Philadelphia. There were concerns. "This experiment is not what it would be a little later in the year as just now hawks are numerous in the middle states and very hungry, and this being the most important time of the breeding season not many birds can be spared."

The big test came on April 22. Two pigeons lifted from the deck of the dispatch boat *Dolphin* at 0700 off Fort Monroe and reached the loft of the owner, R.B. Caverly in Washington at 1220. The birds covered 135 miles in little more than five hours. Mr. Caverly hurried the messages to the White House. The short personal messages were addressed to President Grover Cleveland who expressed his surprise at the speed of the service. The birds were fortunate in that "Uncle Jumbo," as he was known to his younger relatives, did not decide to honor their service by inviting them to dinner.

-J.M.

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were joined that afternoon by Dutch and French vessels. Warships would continue to trickle in over the next week. Some that were expected did not show. Three Russian cruisers were prevented from attending by ice in the Baltic. The

**Steel Naval Power on Display-
The Ships of the 1893 Hampton Roads Naval Rendezvous
(Ships listed with Rate, When launched, and Displacement)**

United States-Rear Adm. Gherardi
USS *Philadelphia* (pc/1889/4224t)

First Squadron -
Rear Adm. Benham
USS *Newark* (flag) (pc/1890/4083t)
USS *Atlanta* (pc/1886/3189t)
USS *San Francisco* (pc/1889/4583t)
USS *Baltimore* (pc/1888/4413t)
USS *Bancroft* (patrol gunboat/1892/839t)
USS *Bennington* (gunboat/1888/1710t)

Second Squadron -
Rear Adm. Walker
USS *Chicago* (pc/1885/4500t)
USS *Yorktown* (gunboat/1888/1710t)
USS *Charleston* (pc/1888/4200t)
USS *Vesuvius* (dc/1888/929t)
USS *Concord* (gunboat/1888/1710t)
USS *Cushing* (torp boat/1890/116t)

Foreign Participants

England - Vice Adm. Hopkins
HMS *Blake* (flag) (1pc/1889/9150t)
HMS *Australia* (ac/1888/5600t)
HMS *Magicienne* (2cc/1888/2800t)
HMS *Tartar* (tc/1886/1950t)
HMS *Partridge* (gunboat/1888/755t)

France - Rear Adm. Libran
Arethuse (flag) (pc/1882/3487t)
Jean Bart (pc/1889/4044t)
Hussard (barque/1877/935t)

Argentine protected cruiser *Nueve de Julio* simply bypassed the Virginia affair and headed straight for New York. But to the immense crowds of onlookers these absentees were unimportant. The population of the cities surrounding the Roads swelled by 50,000. Prices soared. "It costs 30 cents to get shaved, and only the wealthiest are able to afford a hair-cut," lamented the *Virginian*. Local watermen made small fortunes charging \$5 an hour to ferry sight seers among the anchored warships. The Hygeia Hotel at Old Point Comfort turned away enough people to have doubled its occupancy daily. Even bad weather in mid-week could not dampen the crowd's spirits. In the face of high winds, ladies simply sewed lead shot in the hems of their skirts

Italy - Rear Adm. Magnaghi
Etna (flag) (pc/1885/3800t)
Giovanni Bausan (pc/1883/3277t)
Dogali (pc/1885/2050t)

Germany -
Kaiserin Augusta(pc/1892/6218t)
Seeadler (light cruiser/1892/1834t)

Russia -
General Admiral (ac/1873/5031t)
Rynda (pc/1885/3537t)

Spain -
Riena Regente (pc/1887/4725t)
Infanta Isabel (uc/1885/1152t)
Nueva Espana (torp boat/1889/562t)

Brazil -
Aquidaban (battleship/1885/4921t)
Republica (pc/1892/1300t)
Triadentes (torp. boat/1892/795t)

Holland
Van Speyk (uc/1882/3600t)

Abbreviations
2cc=second class cruiser
ac=armored cruiser
dc=dynamite cruiser
pc=protected cruiser
tc=torpedo cruiser
uc=unprotected cruiser

to prevent "an undue display of ankles as they clambered up the steep landing steps of the ships."

The Naval Rendezvous Association had given thought to the needs of the sailors serving in this armada. Special events were organized for their entertainment. Ship's bands joined in concert. Marine detachments held a competitive drill. The crews of the *San Francisco* won every boat race held on the 19th. After noting the prize money was only \$50, the *Virginian's* reporter allowed that "a considerable amount changed hands" in side bets. "The *San Francisco's* men have more money than they can spend in a week's liberty."

Early fears were that so many sailors ashore would fill the jails and turn "this

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gay resort into a howling bedlam." The paper was pleased to report, "With men from six nationalities, it is somewhat remarkable that there have been no disturbances, but all the men seem to be on their good behavior. There has been no restraint upon liberty and the privilege has not been abused."

The good times came to an end at 9 o'clock on the morning of April 24.

Giant continued from page 4

Company, its present day name, on Feb. 17, 1890. Later that year, the yard laid down Hull 1, a tugboat named *Dorothy* for the New York and Northern Railroad.

By 1890, Huntington had moved out to his mansion in California. However, he still kept a close eye on his new enterprise in Virginia with frequent correspondence with Orcutt. On October 7, 1892, Orcutt received one of Huntington's letters that stated the shipyard should be ready to build two 10,000-ton steamers. He also included an article from the *Washington Star* about the Navy's proposal to build two new major warships. Huntington began to see the possibilities of cashing in on Navy contracts for the first time. "I think it may be well to [build] these ships," he commented.

Under Huntington's instructions, Orcutt submitted a bid for the battleship *Iowa* (BB-4) and the armored cruiser *Brooklyn* (ACR-3). Unfortunately, he lost. Orcutt tried to make the case even though Newport News' bid was not the lowest, the quality of their shipyard work was the finest anywhere. The Navy did not accept the argument and awarded both ship contracts to Cramp and Sons of Philadelphia. Feeling somewhat bitter, Orcutt commented that the profit margin on Navy ships was not worth the time anyway and that "none but the hardy need apply."

Work continued on several commercial steamers through the early 1890's. Despite the initial setback, the yard did not give up on warship construction. The next contract Huntington and Orcutt hoped to get included the construction of three shallow draft gunboats, to be later named *Nashville* (PG-7), *Helena* (PG-8), and *Wilmington* (PG-9). This time, they

Excursion steamers from as far away as Baltimore and Washington filled with onlookers to watch the departure of the *Rendezvous* fleet on its way to New York. Thousands lined Sewells Point, Ocean View and Old Point Comfort. The warships pulled out in two columns with American vessels to the left. Following in the rear was a clump of three Brazilian ships which had arrived only the night before. After the fleet

cleared the Capes, the excursion steamers returned to port.

"The beautiful bunting which has bedecked the most imposing buildings in Norfolk has been removed, and Norfolk's holiday celebration is over." But the *Norfolk Virginian* rhapsodically predicted that "the future of Norfolk is safe, and that growth and prosperity will be developed in a more marked manner than ever before in her history." 



The double launching of the battleship USS Kearsarge (BB-5) (shown above) and her sister ship USS Kentucky (BB-6) help make Newport News Shipbuilding one of the Navy's primary builders. (U.S. Navy photo)

succeeded with the lowest bid and the shipyard was now in the warship business.

While he was happy that his shipyard won the contract, he reminded Orcutt about the correct away to conduct business. "I would rather lose money on a first class ship than to make money on one that did not give satisfaction to the Government. I find there is more money is doing things this way, and, outside of money, there is a great satisfaction in doing things well, and it would be humiliating to me to have anything turned out from our yard that was not first class."

Ironically, Huntington did not want the yard to get bogged down with Navy contracts. He wanted to stick with commercial contracts, but an economic recession had hit the country in the early 1890's and commercial contracts were increasingly hard to come by. As a result, bids were made on two new battleships. After a month of hearings and debating over the design of the new battleships, the Navy awarded Newport News with both contracts. Several other competing yards cried foul and leveled charges of government corruption, since both contracts were awarded to the same

yard. Huntington denied all charges of wrong doing and believed that the process was fair. ~~The yard was cleared~~ of all charges and work on the battleships *Kearsarge* (BB-5) and *Kentucky* (BB-6) went ahead as scheduled. Newport News launched both battleships on March 24, 1898.

The contracts had a lasting effect in two ways on the yard. From this point forward, the Navy became one of Newport News Shipbuilding's primary customers. The yard would continue to turn out commercial ships, but warship construction became a larger portion of its business than originally planned. The contracts also brought hundreds of more workers, leading to the growth of Newport News itself.

Huntington's enterprise on the James River is still paying dividends today to the Hampton Roads region by employing thousands of people and turning out first class ships. Many of Huntington's 19th century competitors went out of business. But a 110 years after the first ground was broken on Dry Dock No.1, Newport News Shipbuilding remains a lasting monument to one of America's leading tycoons, and to its workers. 

Volunteer News & Notes

by Bob Matteson and
Becky Poulliot

The Class of '97

In April, we graduated and welcomed five new docents into our extended museum family. We would like to introduce them to you now.

Between 1939 and 1945, **Bill Wagner** served in the U.S. Navy and achieved the rate of Chief Pharmacist's Mate. He is a veteran of the Japanese air raid on Pearl Harbor and served in the Pacific Theater until 1944. In July of that year, he was assigned to the 2nd Marine Division at Camp Pendleton, CA.

After the war, Bill attended Seabury-Western Seminary in Evanston, Illinois. He graduated in 1950 and was ordained as an Episcopal Priest. He married **Cordeila Ruffin** of the old Norfolk Ruffin family in 1964.

Bill's last church, before retiring from the clergy, was the Portland Trinity Episcopal Church, where he served as the Rector from 1977 until 1990. His historical interests range from the American Revolution through the American Civil War periods.

Jim Reid retired from the U.S. Navy as a commander on April 1, 1980. He is a 1957 graduate of the Naval Academy and spent his career as a Naval aviator. He served two tours in Vietnam between 1967-1971. Jim has a master's degree from George Washington University and a second bachelor's degree in computer science from Old Dominion.

Jim married **Jean Burns** of Richburg, South Carolina in 1962. Following retirement from the Navy, he taught math and computer programming for ten years. Jim is particularly interested in WWII history.

James W. Jolly, better known as "Bill," served as a shipfitter in the U.S. Navy from 1943 until an injury forced his retirement after 17 years and nine months. Retired with 100% disability, Bill left the Navy and opened up a home improvement company in Great Bridge.

A native of Baltimore, MD, Bill



HRNM docent Preston Turpin and Tom Duggan give a presentation of life at sea during the Age of Sail during the museum's 3rd grade program. (Photo by Gordon Calhoun)

married Norfolk-native **Annis Cutherell** in 1944. Both graduated from Norfolk's Maury High School. Annis' family came to this area in the late 1600's. In 1745, a family member of Annis founded the Oak Grove Methodist Church in Great Bridge. Bill has a general interest in naval history.

Sally Tobin is a Navy wife of 36 years and has traveled around the world. She is married to **Rear Adm. Byron "Jake" Tobin (Ret.)**, one time Commander, Naval Base, Norfolk. A native of East Orange, New Jersey, she has two children, a son and a daughter.

Sally holds a Bachelor of Arts from Cornell University in French Literature and attended the Sorbonne in Paris. For the past several months she has been serving as the museum's volunteer coordinator. Additionally, she has become part of the museum's interpreter program and has taken on the persona of a visitor to the Jamestown Exposition of 1907 from New Hampshire.

The 3rd Grader Program

This Spring season, our galleries have been filled with school students and families. The museum has been fortunate to work with Nauticus on a pilot project for all third graders in the Norfolk school system. The museum is filling one of the three learning segments the students undertake while at Nauticus. If you have a chance, drop in one weekday morning through June 5 and see your fellow docents in action teaching

the students about life at sea aboard a sailing ship. You will not be disappointed. The docents use replicas of marlin spikes, holystones, mess kits, and ditty bags to allow the students to learn about the Navy in a hands-on way.



Every student who participated in the museum's third grader program this Spring received the above sticker. (Designed by Marta Nelson)

It is a delight to see these children engage. Special thanks to the docents and staff who have made this possible: **Bob Matteson, Joe Judge, Paul Bohn, Miriam Burgess, David Dashiell, Tom Duggan, Bill Ely, Harrell Forrest, Jud Hill, Hunt Lewis, Al Petrich, Ralph Preston, and Preston Turpin.**

Next Docent Meeting

The next quarterly docent meeting has been scheduled at the Chrysler Museum of Art on June 12 at 10 a.m. A tour of the Chrysler's maritime collection will follow the meeting. Look for details in the mail. 🚢



The Sage Speaks Out-The State of the Fleet in 1861

A disturbing charge has come to the attention of the Sage. It has been recently suggested that in the years leading up to the American Civil War, commissioned warships of the U.S. Navy were purposely sent to far away stations by pro-Southern politicians, who saw war as inevitable, so that the ships would be not be in position to suppress the rebellion. This belief is rooted from the fact that in March, 1861 only seven of the Navy's 40 commissioned warships were in American waters. A conspiracy of pro-Southern politicians is not a new concept. As early as 1883, one historian listed the state of the fleet in 1861 and commented that "No one versed in naval matters can read the above disposition of force without feeling indignant at the fact that it was so solely to favor the conspirators."

At the center of these charges is the man who directed the Navy from 1857-1861: Secretary of the Navy Isaac Toucey. Toucey was a Connecticut Democrat, who as a congressman, supported several pieces of pro-slavery legislation, including the enforcement of the fugitive slave law. It was his belief that so long as slavery was the law of the land it should be enforced and not ignored because of a "higher law." Because of this view, he gained a reputation of being a Southern sympathizer. It does not help Toucey's cause when one looks at the make up of President Franklin Buchanan's cabinet. All the department heads were either Southerners or "Southern-sympathizing." More recent historians dismiss the conspiracy theory, but replace

The Museum Sage

it with the belief that Toucey simply was an incompetent fool for not seeing a war on the horizon and recalling the fleet from overseas stations sooner than he did.

A common mistake of historians is to look back at an event, assume it was inevitable, and then critique people for not seeing this event on the horizon. The secession of the Southern states and the war between North and South was not a certain event until Abraham Lincoln was elected President in November, 1860. Up to this point, Toucey and the Navy had their normal obligations of protecting American interests and commerce. The Navy assigned ships to six different squadrons. There was a squadron off the coast of Africa suppressing the slave trade, much to the dislike of Southerners. One was in the Mediterranean, one was stationed in Brazil, two were in the Far East, and one was stationed in home waters. All of these were justified deployments as foreign powers threatened American interests in these regions.

Even before November, 1860 some ships were being recalled. The ill-fated sloop-of-war USS *Cumberland* and

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several other sloops were being recalled from their stations off Vera Cruz, Mexico as early as the fall of 1860. As for the other ships, 19th century communications were still painfully slow. For example, when the ships were recalled from the East Indies station in Hong Kong on March 4, 1861, many like the steam sloop USS *Hartford*, did not arrive home until December. For these

The State of the Fleet-March 1861

Home Squadron (Patrols around United States and Mexico)-1 frigate, 1 sloop-of-war, 3 steam sloops, 2 sloops, 4 steam gunboats, 1 storeship.

East Indies Squadron (Patrols suppressing the Malaysian pirates)-1 steam frigate, 3 steam sloops, 2 sloops.

Mediterranean Squadron-3 steam sloops.

Brazil Squadron-1 frigate, 1 steam sloop, 1 steam gunboat.

African Squadron (Patrols suppressing the slave trade)-4 steam sloops, 3 sloops, 1 storeship.

Pacific Squadron-3 steam sloops, 1 steam gunboat, 3 sloops.

New Construction-14 steam sloops, 23 gunboats, 12 steam gunboats.

Decommissioned ships later refitted and recommissioned-3 sail frigates, 4 steam frigates, 5 sloops, 2 brigs, 3 steam sloops.

ships to have been to arrive at the moment of hostilities, orders would have had to gone out at the latest by June 1860. This would have been foolish. All of the Navy's big ships, namely the 48-gun steam frigates, were at home in a decommissioned state and not out on a foreign station. These ships were key factors in the capture of several Confederate forts. Except for *Merrimack*, all of them were ready within two to three months after the outbreak of war.

If there was a conspiracy of Southerners to undermined the readiness of the U.S. Navy in 1861, then why did not Southern captains turn their ships over to the South when they had the chance? For example, in early 1861, Capt. John Newland Maffitt, a North Carolina resident and future captain of the cruiser CSS *Florida*, had the option to deliver his ship, the 8-gun steamer USS *Crusader*, to the Alabama Navy. Maffitt

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threatened to scuttle the ship rather than turn it over. The ship served the rest of the war under the United States flag.

As for the issue of Toucey's incompetence, his tenure as Secretary of the Navy was a very productive one. He believed that the Navy was ineffective and needed several reforms. Under his direction, the Navy received 14 shallow draft steam powered sloops which were used with great effectiveness in the Civil War. These ships included USS



A naive fool? A traitor? A conspirator? The Sage does not think so. Secretary of the Navy Isaac Toucey was a loyal and competent administrator. (Navy Historical Center photo of a George Matthews' painting)

Hartford, Kearsarge, Brooklyn, and Wachusett. Several gunboats and other shallow draft ships which were used on the rivers during the war were laid down during Toucey's administration. Toucey issued several other reforms including introducing Dahlgren cannons, purging ineffective officers from the Navy, and increasing the number of midshipmen, pursers, and Naval surgeons.

There was no conspiracy. The Navy was strung out for good reasons. Let us not judge in hindsight things that we perceive today as obvious. Let us also not jump into the conspiracy pitfall simply because circumstantial evidence suggests it. Toucey was neither incompetent nor a fool. He was part of an administration which felt it had no Constitutional power to stop the South from the leaving the Union. Even under such circumstances, Toucey went ahead with several reforms and programs which ultimately put the Navy in good standing to fight and win a war.

The Capture of CSS Florida-Harper's Weekly Issues an Apology...Kinda.

The career of the cruiser CSS *Florida* came to an abrupt end when the steam sloop USS *Wachusett* quietly sneaked into the harbor of Bahia, Brazil, fired a few shots, and captured her. The cruiser was then taken back to Hampton Roads where it sank under mysterious circumstances. The Brazilians were furious (they burned down the American consul in Bahia to give you an idea of just how mad they were) that their rights as a neutral power were violated by *Wachusett* and demand that *Florida* be returned. Other foreign powers, such as England, also demanded that the United States make reparations. The official U.S.

hostile journals we have happily learned to despise; and certainly in the present instance no intelligent American can hear it without smiling. Unfortunately the sinking of the Florida has prevented the possibility of her restitution to Brazil, should that course have appeared to be required by our own precedent and by international understanding. If it shall be proved that her seizure was a plain violation of a neutral port, we have no doubt that every faithful American citizen expects that the most ample and honorable apology will be made.

What all honest men desire is that justice shall be done to the friendly State of Brazil, and honest men do not feel their honor wounded by frankly apologizing when they see that they are in the wrong."



The steam sloop USS Wachusett escorts the cruiser CSS Florida back to Hampton Roads after being seized inside the port of Bahia, Brazil. (HRNM photo of an 1864 Harper's Weekly engraving)

Government view was that since Brazil supplied and assisted a ship of an unrecognized country, thereby classifying *Florida* as a pirate ship that had no international rights, that the United States was in its power to seize the ship. Since the ship sank in Hampton Roads, however, no compensation was made to Brazil.

Harper's Weekly, the famous pro-Union New York newspaper, added its two cents to the controversy in a Dec. 17, 1864 editorial. Here is an excerpt:

"We have forborne any remarks upon the seizure of the Florida, because the facts have been very inadequately stated, and because we were very sure that the same skills which so wisely adjusted the Trent case would be fully competent to deal with this.

The obstreperous scolding of English

Sage Stumper VI-The Lost Ironclad of Hampton Roads

Much attention was given in March of the two most famous ironclads in the world: CSS *Virginia* and USS *Monitor*. However, there was a second Union ironclad, the steam sloop USS *Galena*, on its way down from Mystic, Connecticut in 1862 to assist *Monitor* in containing *Virginia*.

There was yet a third Union ironclad in Hampton Roads during the spring of 1862 and this ironclad even exchanged shots with *Virginia*. The Sage asks his readers to name this relatively unknown ironclad. As always, the winner gets a Hampton Roads Naval Museum coffee mug. Call the Sage at (757) 322-2993, or fax at (757) 445-1867, or write to the museum at One Waterside Drive, Ste.248, Norfolk, VA 23510-1607. -G.C.