

History of the Washington Navy Yard Civilian Workforce

1799 - 1962



JOHN G. SHARP

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Naval District Washington
Washington Navy Yard
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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Washington Navy Yard Civilian Workforce Project was initiated in 2002 at the suggestion of Rear Admiral Christopher Weaver, then Commandant of the Washington Navy Yard (WNY). Admiral Weaver always proud of the history of the WNY had asked for a historical narrative that would focus on and commemorate the history of WNY's civilian workforce. In answer to his request the Human Resources Office-Washington collectively wrote and researched the *History of the Washington Navy Yard Civilian Workforce 1799-1945*. That volume, of which I was the principal author, was published in 2003 by the Naval District of Washington. Dr. Vincent Vaccaro, Director of the Human Resources Office Washington, provided administrative oversight for this collective effort. Dr. Vaccaro is my mentor, former boss and friend. Truly an *Optimus Princeps*, Vincent encouraged me to extensively revise the original volume and extend the narrative to the closing of the Naval Gun Factory in 1962. After nearly thirty years with Department of the Navy, I retired from my position at the Washington Navy Yard in April of 2004 and continued to research and write this history.

While working at the Washington Navy Yard (WNY), I was fortunate to have many wonderful colleagues and friends who freely gave me their help and support: Mr. Stephen Peyton and Mr. Herman J. Gadson Jr., both gave valuable assistance with archival research and helped interview former NGF employees; they also patiently taught me to use the scanner and always somehow managed to untangle my computer.

My colleague O. Tom Crane prepared the WNY demographic charts plus provided valuable help with archival research and transcription of documents. My oldest friend at WNY, Thomas Randall, Director of Labor and Employee Relations read the initial manuscript and made many insightful suggestions. While working at WNY Ms. Jeanna Hamilton and Ms. Angie Abell provided me with the logistical support and encouragement. Another longtime friend, Ms. Connie Finney Dunwell helped me secure copies of documents, made valuable suggestions while helping check historical references and sources for me once I retired and moved to California.

Finally my thanks to my wife Gene Kerr Sharp who has lived with this book, helped with the research, provided valuable suggestions and sage counsel, and as always gave me her unswerving love, encouragement and support.

I sincerely hope that I have done the men and women of the Washington Navy Yard justice and that this narrative provides a more thorough picture of the WNY civilian workforce as human beings, I have tried. Despite the gracious help and assistance received from so many kind friends and colleagues, any historical inaccuracies, rest upon my shoulders alone and I assume full responsibility for them. (Most 19 and early 20th century Yard employees were fine writers but spelling and grammatical usage has changed over time. In quoting from employee letters and documents their original spelling and punctuation have been preserved without interpolation of *sic* unless needed for clarity.)

I would like to thank the following individuals and organizations for their help and support in the research for the *History of the Washington Navy Yard Civilian Workforce 1799-1962*.

Rear Admirals Jan C. Gaudio and Christopher Weaver, 83rd and 84th Commandants, Washington Navy Yard, were both enthusiastic supporters of this project and are true leaders, mentors and champions of the civilian workforce.

Captain Kathleen Cummings, former Deputy Commandant, Washington Navy Yard, for her leadership, support and concern for the civilian workforce

Mr. John Imparato, Naval District Washington, Director of Corporate Information, for his encouragement, suggestions, and review of the manuscript as well as for his assistance with its publication.

Dr. Edward J. Marolda, Naval Historical Center, whose important book *The Washington Navy Yard an Illustrated History* was my inspiration.

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Mr. Edward Finney and Mr. Robert Hanshew of the Naval Historical Center (Photographic Archive) for sharing their deep knowledge of the NHC photo collection and the many kindnesses they extended.

Dr. Diane Putney, Office of the Secretary of Defense, for her assistance and advice with securing old Department of Navy official personnel folders and generously sharing her knowledge of the early history of civil service and oaths of office.

Essential to the preparation of this history was the wonderful staff at the Martin Luther King Library, Washingtoniana Division, Washington DC. I particularly want to thank Collections Librarians Ms. Peggy Appleman and Ms. Margaret Goodbody, for their knowledge and kindness in answering my many questions and their help in locating obscure items regarding the Washington Navy Yard's history.

Mr. Ryan Shepard, Librarian, District of Columbia Historical Society, for graciously answering my many questions regarding Michael Shiner and the Meyers Gibbs MA dissertation.

Ms. Virginia Steele Wood, Reference Specialist Naval and Maritime History, Library of Congress, for her suggestions and recommendations regarding Commandant Isaac Hull and Naval Constructor William Doughty and their era.

Mr. Andrew Vaccaro, Project Intern, whose skill and patience deciphered and transcribed many of the 18th & 19th century primary sources.

In writing this history, I have been extraordinarily fortunate to have at my disposal the immense resources of the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) I want to thank the NARA staff for showing me so much that is available and for allowing me to copy many original Navy Yard documents and letters. Three NARA members deserve special mention they are: Ms. Rebecca A. Livingston, Mr. Charles W. Johnson, and Mr. Nathaniel S. Patch. Each helped me with access to many of our nation's historical treasures and actively gave me their endless help and support.

Mr. Gibson Bell "Sandy" Smith gave me a superb tour of the NARA College Park, MD and explained its extensive WW II holdings and Mr. William Wade helped me with the NARA College Park Photo Archive.

Mr. Willie Brown and Ms. Rossanne Mersinger of the Reference Service Branch NARA (Civilian Personnel Records), St. Louis, MO. Both provided valuable help in locating the Official Personnel Folders of former Naval Gun Factory employees.

I owe a debt of gratitude to the Brooklyn Navy Yard web page by Professor J. Stobo Columbia University www.columbia.edu/~jrs9/NY-bib.html. This site is a wonderful compilation of current scholarship on federal workers, shipyards and labor issues. The bibliography was incredibly useful to my research and understanding of WNY work and labor issues.

The internet genealogy search engine www.familysearch.org proved a wonderful source for research former WNY employees. Their unique web site made it easier to track down census and genealogical records concerning Washington Navy Yard and Naval Gun Factory employees.

Congressional Cemetery maintains an interesting web page on one of Washington DC most historic and fascinating cemeteries www.congressionalcemetery.org with close links to WNY. My thanks to Congressional Cemetery Manager Bill Fecke for responding to my queries on the burials of Robert H. Alcorn and Thomas Howard.

In researching this volume I was fortunate to work within two blocks of The Department of Navy Library. The Navy Library is our nation's oldest federal library and houses a treasure vault of material, artifacts and rare books pertaining to the Washington Navy Yard and Naval Gun Factory civilian workforce. I especially want to thank the following Navy Library staff members: Ms. Barbara Auman, Mr. Davis Elliot, Mr. Glenn Helm, Ms. Jean Hort and Ms. Tonya Simpson for their many suggestions and their generosity in sharing their immense knowledge of their wonderful collection and readily answering all my many inquiries.

Ms. Michelle M. Sawall for sharing photographs of her grandfather, Naval Gun Factory Machinist, Lyle Vernon Cook.

Mr. Carl Brown (Machinist) and Mr. Jack Webb, (Electrician) two former Naval Gun Factory (NGF) employees to whom I owe a very special debt of gratitude for sharing their memories and recollections of working in NGF during its heyday.

I plan on revising this volume at a later date and would very much appreciate reader's suggestions, comments, recollection or copies of WNY /NGF photos. My e-mail address is www.sharpig@yahoo.com.

This volume was completed at Stockton, California, on St. Patrick's Day 2005.

John G. Sharp



Naval Gun Factory circa 1908 authors collection

To the Civilian Employees of the Washington Navy Yard, Past, Present and Future.

In Memoriam Michael Shiner (1805 – 1880)



History of the Washington Navy Yard Civilian Workforce, 1799 - 1962

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- Appendix F *The Log* 1 September 1951 p.3 and 9. Photograph of the Joint Retirement Committee of the Naval Gun Factory circa 1920. Front Row L.to R. Charles Love Frank Goodman, C.V. Lewis, **Robert H. Alcorn**, C. E. Reed & H.K. Griffin. Second Row L. to R. James P. Mc Ardle, R.W. Mathaney, George Cooke, Frank Lee, Wm. J. Ruckert, Thomas Finner & Bernard Ladd. Back Row L. to R. Virgil Pitman, E.A. Kline, William Keeler, Henry J. LeClair, Edward Scott & John J. Trumbo
- “View in Miscellaneous Shop Looking West” Post Card Circa 1910, author’s collection, back cover

HISTORY OF WASHINGTON NAVY YARD CIVILIAN WORKFORCE 1799-1962

Introduction:

"The past is another country; they do things differently there."¹

From its beginning, civilians have played a vital part in the development and operation of the Washington Navy Yard. The Washington Navy Yard is now the U.S. Navy's oldest shore establishment. Founded in 1799, it evolved throughout its 200-year history from shipbuilding center to major ordnance manufacturer and finally to the ceremonial and administrative center for the modern Navy. This history traces the growth of the Yard's civilian workforce and examines civilian work life at the Yard both as a distinct phenomenon and as a mirror of American history.

My purpose in this narrative is to record not only the history of the Yard's civilian workforce but also to convey something of the workers' experience over the past two centuries. Wherever possible, reliance has been placed on the worker's own accounts of their lives. In letting the Yard mechanics, laborers and clerks "speak for themselves," I have sought to avoid undue dependence on present-day judgments of human motivation or what one distinguished historian has

labeled the "condescension of posterity."² To understand civilian history at the Navy Yard we will first look at the material and social conditions of the early shipbuilders. Next, we will examine the political and economic changes on the workforce after the Civil War when the Navy Yard and Naval Gun Factory became the nation's principal producer of naval ordnance and weapons. Thirdly, we will look at the civilian role in the two world wars and the period between them up to the close of the Naval Gun Factory in 1961. In a future volume, I intend to pursue the history and development of the modern civilian workforce as it exists today, providing administrative, technical and ceremonial support to the Fleet and to the nation.

Sources for the Civilian History of the Washington Navy Yard

For over two hundred years, the Washington Navy Yard has played a major role in our

national life, and its thousands of civilian workers have been an essential part of that history. The Navy Yard as an institution has been recorded in three excellent studies. All three are well written and each offers unique insights. Chronologically, the first of these is: *Original History of the Washington Navy Yard* by Henry B. Hibben;³ the second, *Round-shot to*



¹ L. P. Hartley, *The Go-Between*, 1953, p. 1.

² E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, 1963, p. 12.

³ Henry B. Hibben, *Original History of the Washington Navy Yard*, 1890.

Rockets: a History of the Washington Navy Yard and U.S. Naval Gun Factory by Taylor Peck;⁴ and the most recent *Washington Navy Yard: an Illustrated History* by Edward J. Marolda.⁵ Together they provide interesting information and insight. In 1888, the Navy Department asked Henry Hibben to write the first history of the Navy Yard. As a Navy chaplain, Hibben was diligent in his search for primary sources. He not only used what original sources were available but also supplemented these with accounts from contemporaries who remembered first hand the Navy Yard from the 1840s to the 1880s. Taylor Peck's history was written for the Navy Yard's 150th anniversary and Edward Marolda's for its 200th. Peck and Marolda both described the Yard's military, technological, and architectural history and development and both authors added interesting discussions of various aspects of the Yard's civilian workforce. Marolda, in particular, provided useful updates for the reader on the role of the Yard's women and minorities.

Civilian Workers: "Forgotten Men"?

Robert G. Albion's *Brief History of Civilian Personnel in the U. S. Navy Department* described the civilian

⁴ Taylor Peck, *Round-shot to Rockets; a History of the Washington Navy Yard and U.S. Naval Gun Factory*, 1950.

⁵ Edward J. Marolda, *Washington Navy Yard: an Illustrated History*, 1999.

Today no one single volume exists that records the history of the Washington Navy Yard's civilian workforce.

workers as the "Navy's stepchildren," and pretty much "forgotten men."⁶ Today no one single volume exists that records the history of the Washington Navy Yard's civilian workforce. Primary source material about civilians is scattered; most written documents concerning the early civilian workforce come not from the workers' own hands, but rather from the letters and memoranda of the Navy Yard's Commandants. Busy leaders, such as Thomas Tingey, Isaac Hull and John A. Dahlgren, often left extensive written records of their decisions and thoughts on civilian issues. Gideon Welles, Secretary of the Navy during the Civil War, also wrote a good deal of insightful correspondence concerning his dealings with civilian employment matters.

Those interested in the Yard's civilian workers may also look at other official contemporaneous sources that include the Washington Navy Yard's Daily Logs and various Naval Annuals. Where does one, however, find the authentic voices of the mechanics, tradesmen, laborers and clerks that worked at the Navy Yard throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries? Fortunately, numerous documents including official personnel records and letters are still being maintained in several archives. Some of these documents really stand out: foremost among them is the exceptional diary of Michael Shiner which is an invaluable source for the

⁶ Robert G. Albion, *A Brief History of Civilian Personnel in the U.S. Navy Department*, 1943.

period 1814-1869.⁷ The National Archives and Records Administration maintain a wonderfully wide variety of letters to and from Yard employees. In addition, I have used a small collection of autobiographical accounts left by employees who entered the workforce in the 1880s (written in the 1920s). The creation of the modern civil service retirement system in 1920 meant that employment records, Official Personnel Folders (OPFs), were retained at the National Archives and Records Administration in a systematic fashion for each employee for the first time. While some OPFs contain only a bare sketch of the employee's job classification and related compensation data, others, such as those of Michael Lynch, Charles Smithson and Nellie Stein, provide extensive autobiographical information. As part of my research for this history we were also able to record and transcribe the recollections of some employees who worked for the Naval Gun Factory from the 1930s till it closed in 1962. Wherever possible I have made extensive use of contemporary newspaper interviews and magazine features to provide insight into workers' lives and history.

When all of these diverse sources are combined, it is my hope that they can provide a continuous, accurate narrative of the rich history of the Washington Navy Yard's civilian workforce. Most importantly, I hope that this brief history will once again place the Yard's civilian workforce on center stage.

I have titled this volume *History of the Washington Navy Yard Civilian Workforce 1799-1962*. Technically this is something of a misnomer since during the period August 1886 to 1959 the Navy referred to the Command as "The Naval Gun Factory". In 1959 the name was changed to reflect the diversity of weapons produced to: "United States Naval Weapons Plant." In 1962 this reverted to Washington Navy Yard again when the factory closed. To add to the confusing nomenclature in 1965 the Navy created the "Naval District of Washington," headquartered in the Washington Navy Yard. For this volume I have used Washington Navy Yard (WNY) till 1886 and Naval Gun Factory (NGF) thereafter. The workers always like the residents of Washington, DC fondly used the term "*The Yard*"

⁷ Michael Shiner, *Manuscript Diary 1814-1869*, Library of Congress.

The Early Washington Navy Yard, 1799-1860

“This is one of our old and necessary navy-yards.”⁸

Why was the Washington Navy Yard located so far from the sea? The Navy Yard’s founding and its location can be ascribed to two fortunate circumstances. First, Congress never specifically appropriated any money for the establishment of the Navy Yard. Secretary of the Navy Benjamin Stoddert encouraged President George Washington’s enthusiasm for a naval establishment in the District of Columbia. Stoddert suggested to the President that he use the money from an appropriation for ship construction to found the Washington Navy Yard.

In 1798 then President John Adams approved the use of public land on the western banks of the Anacostia River for the site. The new Washington Navy Yard was officially approved on 2 October 1799.

It was our third president, Thomas Jefferson, who really fostered the development of the Washington Navy Yard. Ironically, Jefferson’s ideal citizen was the yeoman farmer, not the shipyard mechanic or tradesmen, and he retained a profound distrust of possible unchecked military power. Consequently, he was favorable to the novel idea of a large military establishment next to the nation’s infant Capital. Here, not far from Capitol Hill, the President reasoned the Executive and Legislative branches of

the new government could both keep a watchful eye on the infant Navy.

The newly hired yard workers quickly settled in the southeastern part of the new Federal city. In 1800 Washington, DC was barely a city at all let alone a nation’s capital. Critics of Jefferson’s choice pointed to its inaccessibility and the poverty of the new shipyard site, specifically the new capital’s lack of prime artisans, seamen, or ample naval resources.

The Federalists of New England, and even the planters of Virginia, questioned the wisdom of Jefferson’s decision to develop the Navy Yard in Washington. They raised concerns over diverting the nation’s scarce naval resources from already functioning harbors and ports in their home states. One example was the objection of a Federalist who declared “that ship timbers and naval stores were repeatedly sent to the Yard from Norfolk to be worked on by men brought in from Baltimore, Philadelphia, and other ports only to be returned to Norfolk as a ship.”

Moreover, Federalist critics pointed to the inconvenience of ship passage to the sea from Washington. Despite his critics, Jefferson insisted that the Navy Yard be built, and it was.

Once established, Jefferson made the Yard the Navy’s chief supply depot and repair base and brought seven of the ships of the infant Navy to lie in reserve.

⁸ Hibben, op. cit., p. 211.

A Poor Choice of Location?

In 1800, the banks of the Anacostia River were not necessarily the best location for a shipyard or for most human habitation. The river was subject to silting up and in years with high rainfall, the river was prone to flooding, making the passage of large ships all but impossible. Medical reports for the next hundred years would reflect that this area was a very poor choice. As late as 1901, the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery's *Annual Report of the Navy Department* states:

The flats of the Anacostia River continue to exert a strong influence on the health of this yard. During this year 1900 from a complement of 260 (sailors) there were 59 admitted to the sick list with Malaria troubles. This does not include reappearances of the disease but simply represents the infected during the year.⁹

Navy Department annual reports did not often speak of civilian employees but similar figures must have applied to them as well. Although it is now a rare disease in the western world, malaria was a great scourge of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and was wide spread in Washington, DC. Indeed, until the mystery of this dreaded disease was solved in the early twentieth century, malaria would take a constant toll on the shipyard community.

Another continuing health concern was the disposal of human waste and other

offal directly into the river and its nearby streams. The use of the river as a sewer resulted in polluted drinking water and made for fertile breeding grounds for diseases such as cholera and typhus.

The Original Boundaries

The Yard's original boundaries were established in 1800 along 9th and M Streets Southeast, and were once marked by a white brick wall that surrounded the Navy Yard on the north and east sides. The north wall of the Yard was built in 1809 along with a guardhouse. After the fire of 1814, the Yard's first Commandant, Commodore Tingey, recommended that the height of the eastern wall be increased to ten feet, since the fire had led to looting by the local populace. The southern boundary of the Yard was formed by the Anacostia River, then called the Eastern Branch of the Potomac River. The west side was undeveloped marshland. A landfill was added to the land along the Anacostia over the years as it became necessary to reclaim additional land for use.

Early Success as an Employer

The first years saw the Washington Navy Yard quickly become the new nation's largest shipbuilding and ship fitting facility, with twenty-two vessels constructed on the banks of the Anacostia. These vessels ranged from small 70-foot gunboats to the 246-foot steam frigate *Minnesota*. The USS *Constitution* came to the Yard in 1812 for repairs. When the Yard opened for business in 1800, the civilian workforce totaled approximately 200 employees. Most of these employees

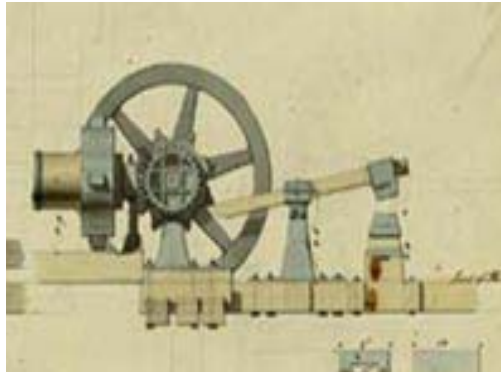
⁹ *Annual Report of the Navy Department for the Year 1901*, U.S. Government Printing Office, p. 1186.

were primarily engaged in traditional trades and crafts involved with shipbuilding and refurbishing -- carpenters, shipwrights, joiners, mast makers, blacksmiths, sail makers, rope makers, and caulkers. "In 1806, I came to this District in my youthful days with a large family, wife and three children two sons and one daughter I was poor but still fond of work to enable me substance."¹⁰

Ignatius Holoe, a millwright who worked at the Yard for over thirty-five years wrote these reflections about 1840 to the Secretary of the Navy. Holoe's reason for working at the Yard, i.e., subsistence and steady work, must have been shared by many of his fellow laborers and skilled craftsmen.

In the early District of Columbia, the Yard was the only large enterprise. This new government establishment quickly earned the reputation as one of the town's most reliable employers. Because it hired whoever had the needed skills, many African-American and immigrant craftsmen and laborers achieved financial independence working there. The Yard even in its infancy was a center of the new steam technology. Benjamin Latrobe writing in 1811 observed (that the new machine): "the Steam engine had been constructed, not only to do the work of the Smiths shop, but to drive the Saw mill, to make blocks and perform

much other work."¹¹ Latrobe was among the new nation's earliest proponents of steam power. He supervised the construction of a pioneering industrial complex at the Yard powered by steam. With the new technology came new occupational categories such as Steam Engine Operator. By 1822, the Navy Yard would employ four steam engine operators who kept the new engine going around the clock.¹²



The first workers' high regard for their employment opportunity is evident in their letter to President Thomas Jefferson, which was signed by thirty mechanics. They wrote, "We cannot affect with gratitude on that Supreme Being who has placed us in a land of Equal Rights and Liberty's (sic) where the honest industry of the Mechanics is equally supported with splendor of the Wealthy."¹³

Indeed the mechanics were so enthusiastic in their support for the President that they marched with him accompanied by military music and the tools of their occupations from the Congress to the White House, thereby founding the inaugural parade as a

¹⁰ Ignatius Holoe to the Secretary of the Navy, circa 1840, NARA RG45.

¹¹ Benjamin H. Latrobe, *The Papers of Benjamin Henry Latrobe*, Vol. 3, p. 8.

¹² *American State Papers*, Vol. 2, p. 848.

¹³ Thomas Jefferson, Jefferson.

Correspondence Collection, Library of Congress, 4 March 1805.

tradition.¹⁴ Some of the President's critics suggested that his popularity among the mechanics was directly related to the amount of shipbuilding he had secured for the yard prior to the election of 1804.¹⁵

Early Washington, DC was a site of considerable building activity and skilled workmen were in demand. On 31 August 1805 writing to Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Latrobe, the architect of the new capital and chief engineer for the Yard related that some people had complained that competition for the labor of some skilled Yard workers slowed completion of the capital.¹⁶ The wages paid at the Washington Navy Yard in June 1806 are as shown in the accompanying chart.¹⁷

Occupation	Number	Amount (per day)
Ship-carpenter (1st rate)	41	\$2.00
Ship Carpenter (2 nd rate)	8	1.75
Apprentices	*	1.25
Laborers	70	.70
Ships and house joiners	19	1.50
Caulkers	11	1.75
Riggers	5	1.50
Blacksmiths	*	1.70
Coopers	*	1.25
Painters	*	1.25

* Number not given

By 1810, the chief manufacturing establishment in the city was the Navy Yard. Work at the Navy Yard was a source of equilibrium to the DC community. In the early 19th century when the industrial enterprise in the

¹⁴ Dumas Malone, *Jefferson, The President Second Term 1805-1809*, p. 4 & *National Intelligencer*, 4 March 1805.

¹⁵ Helen Nicolay, *Our Capital on the Potomac*, p. 90.

¹⁶ Latrobe, op. cit., Vol. 3, p. 32.

¹⁷ Hibben, op. cit., p. 32. & Wages Appendix

District was at low ebb, the Navy Yard was employing 380 civilians in addition to 67 officers and enlisted men. Although workmen had to accept wage cuts (1818-1819), the yard with its many smithies and anchor shops maintained large payrolls.¹⁸

Appendix (A) contains some comparison data concerning employment levels at the Washington Navy Yard from 1808 to 2003.

The Board of Naval Commissioners and Administration of the Yard

While Commandant Tingey and his successors were in charge of the workforce, by 1815 Department of the Navy had established The Board of Navy Commissioners, which was made up of three senior captains who reported to the Secretary of the Navy.



The Board's charter gave it power to direct and oversee the operations of the navy yards. Their charge emphasized insuring uniformity in repairing and refitting vessels. As time went on the Board of Commissioners would often come into conflict with the Commandant. This was particularly true in the Yard Commandant's relationship with the "Naval

¹⁸ Constance Mc Laughlin Green, *Washington Village and Capital 1800-1878*, pp. 36 & 85.

Constructor” (this position was comparable to that of a modern naval architect or engineer) who was appointed by and reported directly to the Board of Commissioners. The Naval Constructor was an important figure in the early Washington Navy Yard and was responsible for new ship design and the refitting of existing naval vessels.

There were built-in tensions between the civilian naval constructors and the senior naval officer. The former were appointed by the Secretary of the Navy and at least in the early days were assigned to work directly for him. The constructor therefore felt they were outside the chain of command. On the other hand, civilian shipwrights were hired and supervised by the Commandant, but they were responsible to the constructor for the quality and efficiency of their daily labor, a situation fraught with potential difficulties. The absence of regulations governing such matters created a situation in which bad relations could fester.¹⁹

In the case of William Doughty (1773-1859), Naval Constructor in the 1830s, the contradiction of a divided chain of command became clearly evident. In March 1835 a much-frustrated Commandant, Isaac Hull, wrote to the Chairmen of the Board of Commissioners:

This Mr. Doughty resides at a distance from this yard and does not visit it except when it suits his convenience. I

¹⁹ Virginia S. Wood, *William Doughty Naval Constructor in New Interpretations in Naval History. Selected Papers of the Twelfth Naval History Symposium*, ed., William Cogan, pp. 114-119.

am at a loss to decide whether he is responsible for the proper construction of the ship now building or the orders of the Commissioners. Will you please inform me if I am to consider him attached to this yard and what are the duties to be assigned to him?²⁰

The Daily Routine

The Yard’s hundreds of mechanics and tradesmen often devoted their whole careers to Yard employment. In early Washington, DC, unlike the Boston or New York shipyard, there was little, if any, private sector competition. The nearest shipyards were located in Baltimore, Maryland and Norfolk, Virginia. Each day early in the morning before first light, the workers would be roused by the Yard’s bell and would walk from their nearby South East residences toward the Anacostia River. There they would enter through the Latrobe Gate and leave by the same route twelve hours later. As per diem employees Yard Mechanics were placed under the direct control of the Superintendent of the Yard and his principal civilian assistant, the Clerk of the Yard. Regulations issued in January 1804 required a daily muster:

It shall be the duty of the Clerk of the Yard, daily and every day at morning, noon and evening to muster every person that may appear to be attending to their duty or employment, and their particular occupation and the object of employment, as well as such as may appear to be absent with cause of absence (if understood). Having a due regard in making the said Muster to the convenience of the persons employed and in the Interest of the

²⁰ Isaac Hull to John Rodgers, 6 April 1835, NARA RG 45.

Public, attending for the purpose, whatever circumstances may render it necessary, at the Shops or places of employment; and to deliver one copy of the Muster role so made out to the Superintendent, retaining another copy in his possession.²¹

Yard employment in the District quickly became a tradition. In some cases three generations of one family might exist at the Navy Yard concurrently; where one man rose from apprentice to master just as his father and grandfather had done before him.

How the Yard Appeared / The Yard as a Community of Life and Work in early Washington.

Early Washington, DC was a small town. In the new federal city there was no public transportation, paved roads or street lamps. Those people wanting to travel had to walk, go by stage, or own/rent their carriages and horses (something few workers could afford). Thus, most mechanics lived by necessity near the Yard's boundaries within the District's 6th Ward. Most lived in small lodgings, shopped for their groceries in nearby stores and went to church in the surrounding area.

This Navy Yard settlement or 'Navy Yard Hill', as it was called, became early in the century one of the most flourishing settlements within the limits of the District of

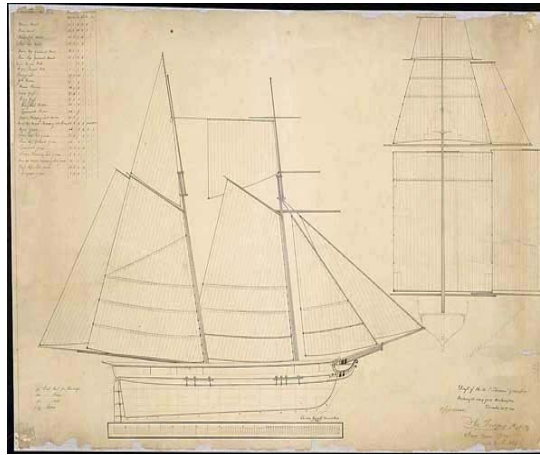
Columbia; it has been described as having the characteristics of an English village with its public market, its village green, its public wells and springs, and its little churches among the trees. The streets were green lanes bordered on either side by fields of grass or grain. Fruit and shade trees were numerous, and there were few row houses. The fields, the swimming places, the skating ponds and river coves, the distant woods and hills for hunting were all among the finest in America. When the bell rang in the early dawn, it called the yard workmen to repair and equip

for sea ships such as the United States, Constellation, President, New York and Chesapeake.²²

Even in the mid-nineteenth century, large parts of the Yard property were still green. Yard regulations prescribed, "The pastures in the Yard are for benefit of

the officers attached to the Yard. (They) may not be used indiscriminately by all, unless otherwise particularly directed by the Commandant.²³" For recreation, workers often fished and played games, such as 'rounders' (an early form of baseball), in the still undeveloped rural countryside.

By mid-century a visitor to the Yard could see a large complex of specialized buildings and shops. There was a rolling mill, rigging lofts, anchor



²¹ Peck, op. cit., p. 25.

²² Peck, op. cit., p. 32.

²³ Department of the Navy, *Yard Regulations 1843-1851*, NARA RG45.

shop, pyrotechnics shop, paint shop, puddling shop and naval store. An early newspaper account, in somewhat ornate prose of the day, compared the Navy Yard to a microcosm. It was:

...the very life of southeastern district of our city. It may be likened to a great heart throbbing in the bosom of the Sixth Ward and imparting to it its energy, activity and happiness. Its influences are seen and felt in the neat and unpretentious dwelling that surrounds it, cheered by the presence of happy and contented families in the several handsome church edifices that adorn that neighborhood, its schools public and private that have sprung up in its vicinity and in its official and other useful societies.²⁴

Organization of Work

By 1856 there were over 1100 employees working at the Yard. Commissioned naval officers provided the Yard's leadership, administration and supervision.

The early Yard had but few "white collar" administrative or clerical civilians. Those few, like Mordecai Booth and Thomas Howard, both Chief Clerks, were paid fixed annual salaries, unlike mechanics and tradesmen who were paid wages on daily or per diem basis. Booth, as

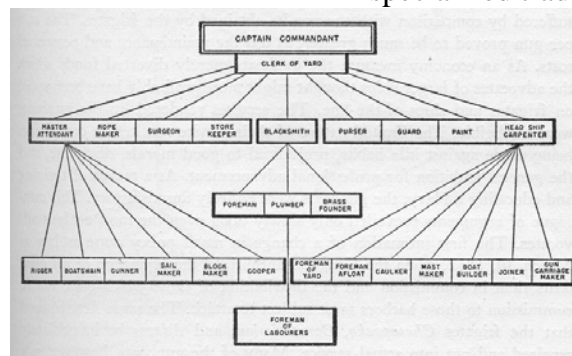
Clerk to the Commandant, was responsible for the Yard's official correspondence, while Howard as Clerk of the Yard conducted and recorded the daily musters and insured that official correspondence was properly logged and disseminated.

Early Yard records show civilian mechanics, from the beginning, vastly outnumbering the active duty military.²⁵ Mechanics or tradesmen were those who had learned a specialized trade, such as carpenter,

plumber, machinist, rigger etc., usually under a five-year apprenticeship. For this reason, senior "blue collar" mechanics and tradesmen provided day-to-day work assignments and

direction. This practice continued well into the twentieth century. For much of that time each Yard shop had its hierarchy of master, quartermen (lead of several crews) lead man (or crew leader), mechanics, apprentices and a few boys (before child labor laws eliminated such positions).

Apprentices were usually allowed to begin their training at about age 16 and would continue to work and learn under the tutelage of master mechanic until they had successfully completed their indenture. The records of the early Washington Navy Yard reflect that most mechanics were able to read, write and use basic shop mathematics in their day-to-day employment.



²⁴ *Washington Evening Star*, 15 December 1856.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 16 and 18 December 1856.

The Daily Station Log

The Daily Station Log²⁶ was kept by the WNY Officer of the Watch and gives us a concise reflection of the early Yard work routine and events. Many of the events chronicled by these watch officers refer to the civilian workforce. Below are those entries for the week of 15 January 1827. Of special note is involvement of Navy Yard personnel in assisting at a fire-fighting effort in Alexandria, VA on Thursday 18 January 1827.

Monday, Jan. 15th 1827 – The first part moderate & fair weather. Winds inclining to the North the middle and latter part moderate weather & variable winds. Laborers and Carts, employed in filling up the wharf from the bank. Oxen drawing the Carpenter and Saw Mill. Riggers darning and knotting yarn. Ordinary men [non rated seamen] scraping Ship Potomac and doing other duties of the yard.

Tuesday, Jan. 16th 1827 – The first and middle parts of these 24 hours fresh gale from the N.W. cold the latter more moderate and clean frosty weather. Laborers employed digging the earth out of the bank and leveling earth on the wharf. Horse carts hauling earth from the bank to the wharfs. Oxen moving timber from one part of the Yard to the other. Riggers employed knotting yarn. Ordinary men in scraping of Ship Potomac.

Wednesday, Jan. 17th 1827 – These 24 hours fresh gales from the N.W. and very severe cold frosty. The Laborers and Carts, Oxen & Riggers employed as above. Ordinary men employed in getting timber into the Saw Mill.

Thursday, Jan. 18th 1827 – These 24 hours, fresh gales from the N.W. very severe cold frost morning. Laborers, Riggers, Ordinary Men, Carts & Oxen working as above, until half past 11 o'clock A.M. when Bell rung, a letter from the Secretary of the Navy, read aloud to the Workmen requesting Commandant Tingey to send all the force within his power to Alexandria to extinguish a large fire that took place there; the men took two fire engines and proceeded to Alexandria where they arrived about two o'clock; at about 3 o'clock they had orders from Capt. Booth to proceed home with the fire engines as all fire was extinguished by the exertions of the people of Alexandria, City of Washington, & Georgetown; they got the engines back to the Navy Yard about 5 o'clock PM. One of the Engineers got broke in some respect in going down but was temporary mended.

Friday, Jan. 19th 1827 -- These 24 hours weather as above, Laborers employed in digging at the Banks, Rigger at work in the Rigging Loft (Ordinary Men shelling corn the weather being so cold they could not scrape).

Saturday, Jan. 20th 1827 – These 24 hours fresh gales from the N.W. extremely cold weather, Laborers employed in digging at the bank. Carts hauling dirt to the wharf; Riggers darning yarns and knotting them for Spun Yarn. Ordinary men on various duties of the Yard. Capt. Booth mustered the Workmen at the Yard in the rigging Loft and gave them a handsome oration on the utility of organizing themselves in companies for the purpose of using the fire engines in case of fire in any part of the City or neighboring towns, which they did.

²⁶ Department of the Navy, WNY Station Log 1822-1830, NARA RG 181.

Features of Early Yard Life

As noted above, the early Yard Station Log often described civilian workers as participating in local public events. Similarly Michael Shiner's diary recounts his helping to put out a fire at the Library of Congress, and helping his fellows to move stones to the new Washington Monument.²⁷ After a long day, many workers spent their time at local taverns and restaurants where they could meet friends, gossip and discuss current events. Sundays were the one day of rest for Yard workers and many would go to nearby churches such as Christ Episcopal at 6th and G Streets.

Each winter throughout most of the nineteenth century, one of the workers' principal tasks was to cut river ice. The Yard depended on this cut ice for refrigeration. Until the 1880s, river ice was the only way to keep food and drinks cool. When the Anacostia River froze over, workers would be assigned to cut the ice and move it to the Commandant's icehouse. The ice was then used by the officers and also given to various naval ships.

Oxen were a constant presence at the Yard during much of the nineteenth century. They were used in the heavy transportation of munitions and large objects within the Navy Yard. An old-timer remembered: "Ox teams were a feature of the yard and were pointed

out to visitors. The oxen of one yoke were named Buck and Bill."²⁸

Naval custom allowed Yard workers, unlike most non-Federal mechanics and tradesman, to receive emergency medical treatment. This custom was later confirmed by order of the Secretary of the Navy in 1813,

It is however understood that if any Master or laboring mechanic or common labor employed in the Navy yard shall receive any sudden wound or injury while so employed, he shall be entitled to temporary relief.²⁹



Commandant Tingey

Old Customs, "Refreshments" and Good Whiskey.

In the early nineteenth century, drinking beer and stronger spirits in the workplace was an accepted practice and very common. (Rum Rations on U.S. Navy Ships were only abolished in 1852 and all alcohol aboard USN ships in 1914.) In an age when potable water was often foul and noxious tasting, Navy workers often preferred their libations mixed with whiskey or rum. As early as 1805, Naval Constructor Josiah Fox warned his Carpenter Quartermaster and Foreman to, "[t]ake care that none of his company get intoxicated and discourage use of spirituous liquors among them during hours of work." Supervisory personnel were further enjoined "...not to suffer any person to

²⁷ Shiner, op. cit., 1827.

²⁸ *History of the Navy Yard Washington 1799-1922*, Unpublished manuscript, p. 248.

²⁹ William S. Dudley, *The Naval War of 1812*, Vol. 2, p. 32.

bring such liquor to his company unless necessity may require it.”³⁰

On 6 August 1812, the chronicles of the Navy reflect that “Mr. John Ellison of Georgetown sold to the yard for Navy use, one hundred and twenty barrels of ‘Good Whiskey’ at fifty cents a gallon.”³¹ Naval establishments of the 19th century were pretty well supplied with grog and other spirits. At the Navy Yard, a custom had grown up among the civilian mechanics to bring in liquor for their own use during the day.

A practice had also developed among the blacksmiths of sending young apprentices out to bring in additional liquor. Commandant Tingey objected to this practice, considering that such errands interfered with the work and caused loss to the Government of the men’s time. The blacksmiths of the Yard sent in a formal complaint to the Secretary of the Navy stating that:

The petition of the undersigned now of the public at Washington Navy Yard respectfully represent that your petitioners conceiving themselves very much aggrieved in being deprived of the privilege of sending for necessary refreshments during their hours of work as blacksmiths, although this business is of such a nature as frequently to require that some refreshments be allowed, when the constitution is relaxed by the excessive heat or exertion.³²

³⁰ Josiah Fox, “Proposed Organization of Ships Carpenters Under His Charge at Washington Navy Yard,” circa 1804, NARA RG 45.

³¹ Hibben, op. cit., p. 47.

³² Petition of Washington Navy Yard Blacksmiths to Secretary of the Navy Paul Hamilton, circa 1812, NARA RG 45.

The commandant later responded by compromising and issuing an order “that as such indulgence were necessary the liquor might be brought into the yard at bell-ringing” [breaks].³³ Nonetheless in this hard drinking era and despite the Commandant’s best efforts, drinking on the job would remain a problem.

“The Custom of Punch Drinking”

A few years later, Naval Constructor William Doughty, a fixture at WNY and a bit of a gadfly, wrote the Department asking for repayment for funds expended:

In consequence of having raised the 74 gun ship, the carpenters, conforming to an old custom determined upon a punch drinking, and broken off from their work a half day on Saturday last for that purpose. This they had determined to do at their own expense without saying anything to me about it, but after it was over I requested them to produce their bill (which is enclosed) and I would endeavor to obtain your consent that the Department should defray the expense. This custom of punch drinking at raising a ship was always obtained, in Philad, within the circle of my acquaintances and if I did not believe that it would rather promote than impede the public economy, I would not propose at all to allow this thing, which has as always been considered as an indulgence, exclusively for the carpenters, at the expense of the Builder.³⁴

³³ Dudley, *The Naval War of 1812 A Documentary History*, Vol. 1, p. 524, Commodore Thomas Tingey to Navy Secretary Hamilton.

³⁴ William Doughty to Secretary of the Navy, NARA RG 45.

Early Yard regulations continued to include reminders: “The watchmen are not to allow any man who is drunk, to pass below the flag staff, but must report him....The Sentinel at the gate is forbidden ever to pass a man into the yard who is drunk.”³⁵

The Navy Yard Mechanics and the Yard Rifle Company

In 1807, as a result of the martial fervor aroused by the British government impressments of American seaman from the USS *Chesapeake*, citizen militias were rapidly formed in many major cities. The mechanics at the Navy Yard responded by forming their own Navy Yard Rifle Company (later known as: Stull’s Rifle Corps).³⁶ Like many militia units, the Yard’s had little military experience but much enthusiasm. The leadership for Yard Rifle Company was decided by election in which all the unit members voted for their officers. The new officers, not surprisingly, were drawn from the Yard Foremen. William Smith, a Shipwright Foreman, was elected to head the group.

Benjamin Latrobe, after contemplating the list of the new militia officers observed:

Upon the whole I find that the Navy Yard cannot produce a single good rifleman. But if there were more than one to be found, no one knows better then yourself that to acquire

competent skill as a marksman much leisure devoted to constant practice is necessary. This leisure the mechanics of the Yard can only obtain by sacrifice of their time and pay, a sacrifice, which they neither can nor will make. If they had only organized themselves into a Company of Artillerist, they would I think have made a better choice, and the Department, I do not doubt would have assisted them with part of field pieces, and perhaps have furnished powder.³⁷

The fact that that Yard workers were able to organize a militia company at all is remarkable. The Yard Rifle Company was very much a volunteer organization and its members were never paid for their drills nor were they given any time from their normal Yard work assignments (twelve hours a day, six days a week). Neither the federal government nor the District of Columbia contributed anything in support of the Company. When the Company was activated during the War of 1812, Commandant Tingey, became alarmed that his valuable mechanics and foremen would be lost to the Army. In 1814, when British troops invaded Maryland, the Company was placed on the Army rolls and went with the regulars in a futile attempt to stop the British Army at the Battle of Bladensburg. Here the American army and militia were unable to halt the advance of well-trained veteran British regulars. The American rout was so spectacular that the battle was derisively referred to as the “Bladensburg races.”

This militia service performed by Yard employees quickly raised questions of

³⁵ Manuscript Department of Navy, *Yard Regulations 1843-1851*, NARA RG 45.

³⁶ *The Militia and Volunteers of the District of Columbia 1783-1820*, Columbia Historical Society Records 50 (1948-50), pp. 337, 396, and 408.

³⁷ Latrobe, op.cit., Vol. 2, p. 454.

pay for the Navy Yard workers. Most especially, the Yard master mechanics requested that their salaries, paid on an annual basis, should continue while they helped defend the young nation. On 3 August 1814, they wrote: “Sir when we the undersigned are called out as volunteers to us our best exertions for the safety of this place when menaced by the enemy...we think it’s extremely hard that any pay should be stopped...” Secretary of the Navy, Jones replied and consequently denied their claims.³⁸ “Why the Master Mechanics who are compensated sum per annum should claim peculiar privileges and continuance of pay while no service to their vocations in the Yard, I cannot conceive.” The issue of militia and reserve service and how and when to compensate Yard employees who were activated as militia or detailed would continue as a problem well into the twentieth century.

The War of 1812 and the Burning of the Yard.

During the War of 1812, Navy Yard workers played an active part in helping delay the British advance on the capital. At the order of Commandant Tingey, they helped burn the Washington Navy Yard’s buildings and ship stores to keep them from falling into the hands of the advancing

³⁸ Michael Crawford, *The Naval War of 1812*, Vol. 3, p. 178 & Peck, op. cit., p. 49.

“Why the Master Mechanics who are compensated sum per annum should claim peculiar privileges and continuance of pay while no service to their vocations in the Yard, I cannot conceive.”

British Redcoats.³⁹ Among those who assisted Commandant Tingey set the conflagration on 24 August 1814 (an arduous and heart breaking task) were Yard civilian clerks Benjamin More and Mordecai Booth. Commandant Tingey later cited Booth for voluntarily riding out to scout British troop locations while exposing himself to enemy fire.⁴⁰

As the fire burned to ash the shipyard buildings and work sheds, lamentations could be heard “what is to become of us all.”⁴¹ While the

Yard’s destruction was tragic, for many Yard workers like Booth and More, it was doubly so. All Yard workers lost their livelihoods as shipyard employees, and until work resumed, all pay and allowances stopped.

Following the War of 1812, the Navy Yard was slowly rebuilt, but it never regained its former prominence as a shipbuilding activity. The waters of the Anacostia River were simply too shallow to accommodate the new larger vessels, and the Yard was deemed too

inaccessible to the open sea.

Social Relations from 1800 to the Civil War.

Workers at the Yard quickly established their own social world, which was in many ways a microcosm of Washington D.C. This small world

³⁹ Anthony S. Pitch, *The Burning of Washington*, p. 102.

⁴⁰ Hibben, op. cit., p. 54.

⁴¹ Shiner, op. cit., 1814.

had its own hierarchy and customs. Shipyard workers, carpenters and shipwrights were part of the trade elite, while blacksmiths, anchor smiths, caulkers and painters were considered less skilled. Those earning the least among free workers were unskilled laborers. These men were often hired for temporary work and did the heavy work like building wharfs in all weather and conditions. At the bottom of the shipyard social pyramid were the slaves.

Military/ Civilian Relations

Commissioned Officers administered the Washington Navy Yard. They made day-to-day decisions based on the Commandant's directives and the policies of the Department of Navy. As noted previously, from its beginning civilians have always outnumbered military personnel and performed most of the actual labor of the Yard. Naval officers assigned to WNY typically served two and three-year tours while most of the civilian workplace remained at the Yard throughout their adult lives. Some officers like Commandant Tingey remained for very long periods, but they were the exception. Most Yard workers looked to their Foremen and the various Chief Clerks for work direction. These individuals provided the essential continuity amidst an ever-changing military management cadre. Military/civilian relations reflected the hierarchal nature of the Yard and the larger society. Most civilian workers had only limited if any social interaction with officers. Some Yard officers who had spent most of their



Isaac Hull

careers at sea found civilian concerns puzzling. Officers who were used to instant obedience often chafed at having to explain actions to their civilian subordinates; but for most part relations remained cordial. Sometimes politics and economics created friction between the two groups, especially the imposition of political patronage and worker demands for higher pay and job security.

Racial Relations

At the Yard, white, free African Americans and slaves worked together; sometimes harmoniously, but not always. While by the 1830s Naval regulations prohibited officers from holding slaves, except as servants, custom deemed otherwise. A report from Commandant Hull to the Board of Commissioners gives some sense of how the issues that slavery presented were construed.

I have understood from Captain Shubrick that when you were last in the Navy Yard you enquired of him whether Slaves belonging to Officers were employed at the Yard and at the same time informed him there was a positive order against employing Slaves belonging to Officers. I have caused a search to be made but can not find any such order either by circular or by letter receipted for this yard and I have found all the Slaves now in the yard and many others that I discharged since I took the Command here, I took it for granted they were employed by Special Permission and that permission given because while men could not be found to work in the Anchor Shop. I now have the honor to forward a list of all the Slaves now

employed in the Yard. Those belonging to the ordinary might be discharged and White Men or free Blacks taken to fill their places but I fear we could not find a set of men White or Black or men even Slaves belonging to poor people outside the yard to do the work the men now do in the Anchor Shops. The competent mechanics have long known them and I have no cause to complain, on the contrary, I consider them the hardest working men in the yard and as they understand their work they can do much more work in a day than new hands could and I should suppose it would require many weeks if not months to get a gang of hands for the Anchor Shop to do the work that is now done.⁴²

In a separate report Hull lists a total of 13 slaves employed at the Washington Navy Yard.⁴³ Some slave masters rented their slaves to work at the Yard and allowed them a portion of their wages for their own personal use. Free African-Americans earned the same wages as white workers but generally had to work in a world of racial prejudice with little real hope of advancement. Most African-Americans were confined to unpleasant, less skilled work, such as laborer, caulking or the anchor shop. White workers frequently resented their African-American coworkers and were especially fearful of slaves, whom many saw as a threat to their livelihood.⁴⁴ In times of apparent

danger or stress, such as the “Nat Turner rebellion,” the District’s white workers occasionally resorted to violence and riots to intimidate free African-Americans and slaves. This is reflected in Shiner’s diary for the years 1835-36. As a former slave, Frederick Douglass knew this situation first hand, having worked as a caulker in a Baltimore shipyard, where he was badly beaten by four white apprentices. Douglass later reflected, “The competition and injurious consequences will one day, array the non-slaveholding white people of the slaves states, against the slave system and make them most effective workers against the great evil.”⁴⁵

Michael Shiner, His World as Slave and Freeman at the Washington Navy Yard

As noted in the introduction, autobiographical accounts of the early history of Washington Navy Yard are scarce and for most not particularly informative. An important and fortunate exception is Michael Shiner’s diary. Michael Shiner was born a slave in Maryland about 1805. From the year 1814, he worked at the Navy Yard as slave to the Yard’s Chief Clerk, Thomas Howard. Shiner gained his freedom about 1840⁴⁶ and he continued working at the Yard as a freedman until 1869. He lived in Washington, DC until his death on 19 January 1880. Shiner’s diary, which covers the period 1814-1869, provides us considerable information

⁴² Commissioners Reports, Estimates and Surveys Washington, Isaac Hull to John Rodgers, 5 April 1830, NARA RG 45.

⁴³ Ibid, Isaac Hull to the Board, *List of persons employed at Washington Navy Yard*, 8 May 1829.

⁴⁴ Reports, op.cit., Petition of Washington Navy Yard Blacksmiths.

⁴⁵ Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 1855.

⁴⁶ *Will of Thomas Howard of Washington Co, DC*, 18 November 1832, Book 4, pp. 172-173. O. S. 1621, Box 11 & Shiner Appendix.

about early working conditions. Conditions at the Navy Yard were for most part, like those in the rest of the young republic, rough and dangerous.⁴⁷ Through his diary, Shiner gives us a glimpse of the social and political scene, his daily work at the Yard, and his successful journey to rescue his wife and children who were sold to a Virginia slave dealer after their master died in 1832. For additional details about Michael Shiner's life, see Appendix (B).

Shiner's diary also describes hard work, friendship and camaraderie. Despite his status he appears to have been a popular individual, well liked by both African-American and white employees. His diary reflects the perils of numerous sudden workplace mishaps. Falls and explosions were some of the more common yard accidents. From the diary of 1853, Shiner writes:

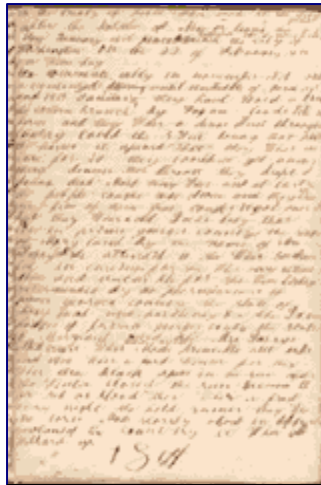
...the death of George Young a bricklayer, a native of Baltimore fell about 30 feet from the scaffold at the North West corner of the new ordnance buildingthe 26th day of April 1853 the death of Patrick Kane a native of Ireland in the rolling of a pile he was killed between the piles along side the new ship house.....On the 6th day of May 1853 on Wednesday, Charles Tansil, a boy was accidentally shot ...by Sgt Luskey's boy, by discharge of a musket. Tuesday 12 December 1853 the explosion of a

boiler of Steam Engine No. 1 scalded an apprentice machinist by the name of Charles King ... he died on 15 December 1853. [Shiner was philosophical] "when we part from each other for our daily occupation we don't know weather (sic.) we will ever return in life again."

Despite its rigors, Shiner and others like him were attracted to employment at the Yard since the work, while hard and often difficult, was year round and the federal government was considered a dependable employer. Yard workers

were paid a daily wage for a twelve-hour day. Like other American workers they worked a six-day week with no retirement or health care plans, but many were still able to improve their lot. Shiner, through both diligence and hard work, was able not only to free his family from slavery but also to buy a then modest house in the District on 9th Street, Southeast. His dwelling is listed in the 1860 census as valued at \$800.00.⁴⁸ An article in *The Washington Post*, 14 June 1905, reports Shiner's estate increased

substantially by the time of his death. In 1867, he had purchased a large property consisting of 9000 square feet of ground with frontage on D Street and Tenth Street and Carolina Ave Southeast. *The Washington Post* relates that he developed the property by filling in a former skating pond and building on it. The report describes Shiner as "industrious and enterprising." (For more on Shiner see Appendix B) After the Civil War,



Page from the Diary of Michael Shiner

⁴⁷ Shiner, op. cit., 1853.

⁴⁸ 1860 U.S. Census for Washington, DC.

Shiner took an active part in political life and represented the 6th Ward at the Republican Convention.⁴⁹

At the time of his death, Shiner's manuscript somehow came into the hands of Army captain, W. H. Crowley. Crowley annotated the following tribute: "This book is a very valuable book and is very interesting. It is worthy of perusal. The author, Michael Shiner, was a Patriot may he rest in peace."⁵⁰

While Shiner was unique in having documented his life and struggles at the Yard, there were other early African-Americans who also left their mark. Among these were three former slaves who worked at the Washington Navy Yard, specifically George Bell, Nicholas Franklin

and Moses Liverpool. In 1807, the three used their own limited personal funds to establish the first school for African-American children in the District of Columbia.⁵¹

The Strike of 1835

In the early nineteenth century, strikes or work stoppages were illegal almost

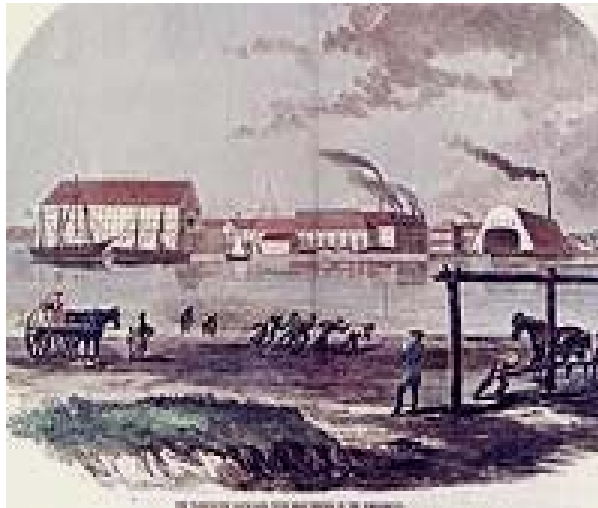
everywhere in the new nation. Yet the Washington Navy Yard had one of the first strikes in U.S. labor history. A peculiar set of circumstances brought on this incident. The new Yard Commandant, Isaac Hull, made many changes upon assuming command in 1829. Hull, a former Captain of the USS *Constitution* and hero of the War of 1812, was known for running a "tight ship." In contrast to Commandant Tingey (who was popular with the men), Hull was of a taciturn disposition. In 1835, he was nearly 60 years old and suffering from

hearing loss due to his many exposures to cannon and shell noise. After his appointment, Hull rapidly found that mechanics at the Yard enjoyed many freedoms in setting work priorities, and that some civilian members of the Yard work force, like William Doughty, would not

follow his orders or take his commands.

On 29 July 1835, Commandant Hull issued a new regulation forbidding workers and mechanics from entering shop spaces during their lunch break and from bring lunches on the yard property. Hull described the circumstance of his order to John Rodgers of the Board of Naval Commissioners as follows:

Complaints have been made to me by the Master Workmen at the Yard of the disappearance of tools, copper etc. so frequently that I was induced to



⁴⁹ Gibbs Myers Dissertation Research & Papers, 1938-1988. District of Columbia Historical Society, MS 616.

⁵⁰ Shiner, op. cit., 1853

⁵¹ Constance Mc Laughlin Green, *The Secret City; a History of Race Relations in the Nation's Capital*.

direct a watch to be kept in the workshops during the hours allotted for meals to ascertain if possible by whom the articles were taken. One of the laborers was detected in the act of secreting a copper bolt; the circumstance was immediately reported to me. I caused examination to be made by the officer of the yard who found at the dwelling of this person copper to a considerable amount with tools of various description, the individual referred to had before this been looked upon as an honest trustworthy man had been indulged and allowed to bring meals into the yard in a basket in which no doubt he was in the habit of taking the articles stolen. The property found was restored to the yard and the thief given up to the civil authorities.

In consequence of this and other irregularities among the men employed in this yard and to give additional security to the public property entrusted to my care, I directed certain regulations to be published, a copy of which is herewith enclosed.

The regulation has met with disapprobation of the workmen generally and without stating their objections and without assigning their reasons for doing so have left the yard and ended their work. I cannot conceive of any good reason and I believe that the mechanics of this said yard have been acted upon by other causes.

But with regard to the regulation they contain no reflection upon the men, do not impose any hardship upon them and I apprehend are absolutely necessary for the safe keeping of the public property in this yard.

[Hull's order read] "Order the Commandant of the Navy Yard of

Washington, D.C., finds it necessary to adopt the following regulation, VIZ: The Mechanics with the exception of the Anchor Smiths and Engineers and Laborers employed in the Navy Yard are prohibited from entering the workshops, ship houses, and other places where public property, tools, etc., are deposited during the hours allotted for meals.

The Mechanics and Labors are forbidden to bring their meals into the Yard either in baskets, bags, or otherwise, and none will be permitted to eat their meals within the Yard unless specifically permitted by the Commandant."⁵²

Commodore Hull was particularly sensitive to any hint of misappropriation. In his former position as Commandant of Boston Shipyard Hull had been falsely charged with negligence regarding missing government property. Although eventually exonerated, he continued to feel the issue deeply. The events of 1835 were to prove that the timing of Hull's order was not fortuitous. The Yard Mechanics had recently received a circular letter from the Ship Wrights of Philadelphia, complaining that working in the Navy Yards was worse than "*Egyptian Bondage*," and pressing them for a general strike in support of a 10-hour work day. In January of 1835 Yard workers received word that mechanics at the Boston Navy Yard had dropped their tools and struck for higher wages.⁵³ The yard labor climate was reaching a critical stage.

⁵² Isaac Hull to John Rodgers, *Papers of Commodore Isaac Hull*, ed. Gardner Weld. Allen, 1 August 1835, pp. 68-69.

⁵³ *Charlestown Navy Yard*, National Park Service, p. 22.

When the morning muster roll was conducted on 31 July 1835, the strikers stood outside the Latrobe Gate yelling to the men inside, “Don’t answer! Don’t answer!” Many men left and joined the strike, but 123 remained and continued working after a fashion.⁵⁴

The strikers then formed a committee and took their petition to Secretary of the Navy, Mahlon Dickerson, and they also sent a delegation of mechanics to Rip Raps, VA where President Andrew Jackson was vacationing. To Dickerson they stated their objection to Commandant Hull’s behavior:

The very first step of his administration was marked by his despotic power, by parading us all before him to try the tempers of the men swearing in a most blasphemous manner that if the men did not march before him he would march them out of the yard dam-d quick and he has from time to time during his administration either in a direct or indirect manner accused us publicly of stealing the public property. He has now gone so far that forbearance has ceased to be a virtue.

The Secretary replied:

Commodore Hull is held responsible for the public property entrusted to his care. If he is not permitted to make regulations for the preservation of that property, he ought to be relieved from his responsibility. If however, he

adopts regulations which are inconvenient to those employed in the Yard, they have their remedy by refusing their services. While the Commandant remains in charge of the Navy Yard he must be permitted to regulate it.⁵⁵

About the same time articles recounting the workers’ situation quickly appeared in the *National Intelligencer* and other national papers. Commandant Hull came under some pressure to revise his decision, but he

remained firm in his conviction that some of his men were pilfering tools and supplies. He had a watch put on the premises, and one of the laborers was caught in the act of stealing a copper bolt. The man was later investigated and a large quantity of copper and tools were found in his dwelling. Commandant Hull then published additional regulations to insure Yard and public property were secure.

Yard employees were not mollified and remained angry at Hull for casting suspicion on them. They laid down their tools and suspended their work. Fortunately for all, a trusted member of the community, Dr. Mc William, was able to mediate the disagreement. The workers after some apparent consideration to their increasingly precarious financial and legal state wrote the Commandant: “While you have the power to make laws for the protection of public property, we have

“While you have the power to make laws for the protection of public property, we have it within our power to refuse our services...”

⁵⁴ Linda Maloney, *The Captain from Connecticut: The Life and Naval Times of Isaac Hull*, p. 437.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

it within our power to refuse our services when those laws oppress us and in their nature will cast a shadow of suspicion on our characters.” They went on to state they had learned from Dr. Mc William, “You disclaim any intention on your part of casting any imputation on our characters; but on the contrary you entertain the highest opinion of us as regards our honesty and integrity.”

They further went on to explain that although they still considered Hull’s original order offensive, “since the order was altered to take out anything derogatory to the feelings of any man and that all the men who are willing shall be allowed to return to the Yard.⁵⁶”

They concluded by stating their willingness to withdraw the charges before Secretary Dickerson and suspend all further publication against Hull.⁵⁷

“May the Lord Bless Mr. Van Buren.” The Creation of the 10-Hour Day

On 31 March 1840 the 10-hour day became law for Federal employees. Prior to this, the early Navy Yard workforce, like the rest of working classes, labored a twelve-hour day, “dark to dark”. It was not until the administration of Martin Van Buren (1837-1841) that Federal workers were granted a 10-hour work day on federal public works without a reduction of wages. At the Navy Yard the *Yard Regulations* specified that:

⁵⁶ Peck, op. cit., p. 97.

⁵⁷ Hull papers, op. cit., pp. 72-73.

The hours for labor in this yard, will therefore be as follows, viz; From the 1st day of April to the 30th day of September, inclusive from 6 o’clock a.m. to 6 o’clock p.m.- during this period the workmen will breakfast before going to work for which purpose the bell will be rung and the first muster held at 7 o’clock a.m. – at 12 o’clock noon, the bell will be rung and from 12 to 1 o’clock allowed for dinner from which hour to 6 o’clock p.m. will constitute the last half of the day. From the 1st day of October to the 31st day of March the working hours will be from the sunrise the bell will ring to summon the workmen. The bell will ring for breakfast, at 12 o’clock noon, the bell will again be rung, and one hour allowed for dinner from which time, say 1 o’clock till sun down, will constitute the last half of the day. No quarter of a day will be allowed.⁵⁸

Horace Greeley, the famous 19th century journalist and avowed friend of workers, wrote: “We do not regard this measure as promising or a great benefit.” He went on to state his belief that the length of a day’s labor should be left to mutual agreement “What have government and presidents to do with it?”⁵⁹”

Unlike Greeley and similar critics, from his first hand experience Michael Shiner understood the President’s action in a very different light. Writing later on the anniversary of the ten-hour day’s passage, Shiner exclaims:

⁵⁸ *Yard Regulations 1843-1851*, NARA RG 45.

⁵⁹ Arthur M Schlesinger, Jr. *The Age of Jackson*, p. 265.

The working class people of the United States, mechanics and laborers, ought never to forget the Honorable President Van Buren for the ten hour day for when youngsters have to work in the broiling sun from sun to sun when they work building the Treasury Office from six to six ... until the President issued a proclamation that all the mechanics and laborers that employed day by day, the federal government should work ten hours system from six to six. May the Lord Bless Mr. Van Buren it seems like they have forgotten Mr. Van Buren, it ought to be recorded in every working man's heart.⁶⁰

Setting Wages at the Navy Yard and "Prevailing Rate" for Mechanics and Tradesmen

The new federal government had no consistent method of adjusting the wages of mechanics and tradesmen. Decisions regarding workers' wages are not very well documented and what evidence there is tends to suggest that the Yard Commandant would attempt to set wages in light of those prevailing in the shipbuilding industry. For much of the early Federal period there was little inflationary pressure and since the early Navy workforce was rarely effectively organized, from its first hand experience Department of Navy appears to have given little thought to the issue of wage setting.

Unions were simply non-existent and shipyard wages could rise as well as fall

Economic Hardships: Wage Reductions and Layoffs

In the early nineteenth century, shipyard workers both public and private had few job protections. In fact, in the early United States, a worker's wage or conditions of employment were never guaranteed by any legislation. Unions were simply non-existent and shipyard wages could rise as well as fall, which occurred in 1808. Since wages were paid on per diem basis most workers found it difficult to put aside any income toward savings. The year 1808 was marked by the order of the Secretary of the Navy to cut WNY wages 12½ %. This was supposed to have saved the Yard \$1,540.24 per month.⁶¹ Although the Yard had the reputation for steady employment, there were layoffs. Three hundred Yard

employees were laid off in 1844 when curtailed naval operations reduced the whole force. These workers had to look to private charity for relief.⁶² Prior to the Civil War shipyard employment was often tied to the number of ships under construction and weather conditions. Spring and summer were the main times for building or repair while fall and winter were marked by substantial decline in job orders and a consequent decline in employment.

Real stability in wage setting did not become an issue until the Civil War when both inflation and worker protests regarding their declining living standard forced a change.

⁶⁰ Shiner, op. cit., 1840.

⁶¹ Hibben, op. cit., p. 37.

⁶² Green, op. cit., p. 165.

Early Yard “Clerical” Salaries

The salaries for clerks, like the wages of mechanics and laborers, were subject to considerable fluctuation. In 1832, Modecai Booth (the same clerk to the Commandant who had risked his life scouting the advancing British forces in 1814) had his salary reduced by 25% from a \$1,000.00 to \$ 750.00. Only after the direct appeal of Commandant Hull to the Secretary of Navy was Booth’s salary restored. The Congress set salaries for clerks, such as Booth and Thomas Howard, Michael Shiner’s master. Clerk jobs in the early 19th century shipyards were typically administrative in nature and such work was well paid on an annual basis versus the per diem rates for mechanics and laborers. These clerical salaries sometimes fell significantly behind those paid by the private sector. In 1836, the situation became such that the First Clerks of each of the naval yards wrote a joint petition to the Congress pleading for an increase in their salaries. They noted these “very arduous and responsible duties to perform requiring the utmost industry and attention. Our whole time (frequently not excepting Sabbaths and nights) is devoted to the service and we humbly conceive that an adequate or proportionate compensation is ours.”⁶³

These salary petitions however were of no avail and it was not until 1853 that Congress saw fit to change clerical salaries. In 1853, clerical salaries within the Navy Department were set according to the following:

The respective clerks in the office of the said department shall receive the same compensation, and be subject to the same regulations, as are provided by for an act, supplemental to the act establishing the Treasury Department.

	Act of Mar. 3, 1853	Act of Apr. 24, 1854
Class 1	\$ 900	\$1,200
Class 2	1,200	1,400
Class 3	1,500	1,600
Class 4	1,800	1,800

Authority of Navy Yard Master Workmen.

In 1858, the Navy formally delegated the authority over the mechanical laborers to master workmen. The new Navy Regulations of 1858 not only entrusted them with the inspection of stores and keeping account of labor performed, but also stated that:

They shall have the immediate control of, and be vigilant to insure constant diligence from all those who may be employed under their special direction. They will be allowed the selection of the operatives to be employed in their respective branches of labor, subject to the approval of the chiefs of departments and the sanctions of the commandant, and will be held accountable for the proper execution of the work under their charge, and none but efficient and competent men be employed.⁶⁴

Commenting upon these new arrangements in 1860, the Navy

⁶³ *American State Papers Navy 1831-1836*, p. 813.

⁶⁴ Albion, op. cit., p. 24.

Secretary voiced his laissez-faire labor policy:

Under this system it is impossible that abuses should exist without involving the commandant and the corps of naval officers under his command. Even if it should happen, as may sometimes be the case, that a few men of the laboring classes in public employment, earning a subsistence by the sweat of the brow, should receive somewhat more than an equivalent for the labor of their hands, it would not by any means be the greatest evil that happens under government, nor be a sufficient reason for abandoning convenient and necessary public works. All history shows that the classes of workingmen do not usually receive too high a reward for their labor, and if government never suffers peculiarly except by them, the extent of the injury will not be alarming.⁶⁵

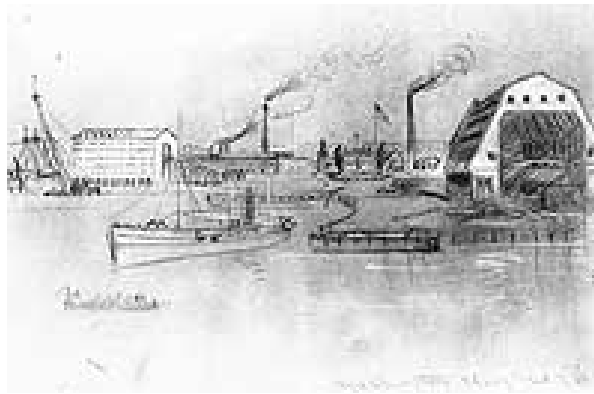
Given this remarkable and candid admission, no one should have been surprised that this regulation and others like it throughout the Federal government came to permit such flagrant political abuses that would only be changed a quarter century later with the “Pendleton Act.”

⁶⁵ Ibid.

The Civil War to the Era of Scientific Management, 1861-1913

The Civil War: Doubts, Fears and Impact

In 1861, the nation found itself deeply divided over the issues of slavery and the right of states to leave the Union. When hostilities got underway many Navy officers chose to “go south” including a significant number from the Naval Ship Yards.⁶⁶ Some officials in the new Lincoln government expressed doubt about the loyalty of workers at Washington Navy Yard. They feared that many employees had sympathy toward the South. In June, William Clark, a Federal judge, was sent to administer a loyalty oath. All Yard workers were required to take the oath. The oath was as follows: “I do solemnly swear that I will bear true allegiance to the United States of America and that I will serve them honestly and faithfully without any mental reservations against all enemies or opposers whatsoever, that I will observe and obey orders of the President of the United States and the officer appointed over me; according to the rules and articles for government of the United States.”⁶⁷



Over 400 Yard workers swore allegiance while 37 chose not to take the oath and were dismissed.⁶⁸ Michael Shiner, now a freeman working at the Yard, recalled in his diary: “I was the first colored man that had taken the oath and.... that oath still remained in my heart.”⁶⁹

Commandant John A. Dahlgren made plans to use Yard employees to guard the gates during the tense summer of 1861, when rumors swept Washington of southern mobs descending on the Yard to capture its guns and arsenal. “In the event of an actual attack by the mob, volunteers can be had from the mechanics which I can arm.”⁷⁰

Fortunately, the government’s concern for the Yard’s safety proved to be unfounded.

Government concerns about Yard workers’ loyalty were to continue

throughout the Civil War. In November 1864, two quartermen, Lawrence Tuell and William Pritchett, were accused of being “disloyal.” The men apparently were accused of being “copperheads” or pro-Confederate sympathizers. These disloyalty accusations were forwarded to the Commandant for his investigation. The Commandant gathered statements from various people who knew the men, and

⁶⁶ William S. Dudley, *Going South: U.S. Navy Officer Resignations & Dismissals On the Eve of the Civil War*, p. 1.

⁶⁷ Hibben, op. cit., p. 103.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Shiner, op. cit., 1861.

⁷⁰ John A. Dahlgren to Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles, 14 January 1861, NARA RG 45.

it is from these documents that we can derive some information regarding the accusations and the limits of free speech in wartime Washington:

Report of the Chief Clerk Samuel Cross:

I have known Tuell, a long time. He has always been a Democrat, and during the administration of President Buchanan acted as Secretary to the Jackson Democratic Club of the Sixth Ward, and was especially active in proscribing all those who differed from him politically. Although I have never heard him say anything against the policy of the present administration or against the war, I would pronounce him a copperhead, as all the "Democracy" (as they call themselves) in this section with few exceptions are copperheads. I know nothing of Pritchett.

Report of Master Joiner J.M. Downing

I pronounce the charges against the two quartermen in my department malicious falsehood. Keilse [the accuser] has a mania on the subject, and is a habitual falsifier. He at one time went to the Department and preferred charges of disloyalty against Admiral Joseph Smith. He is and his pusillanimous associates would do or say anything to gratify their malice or prejudice. The charges against these men, I repeat are without a shadow of foundation. I believe them without spot or blemish.

P.S. It is needless for me to inform you of Keilse's misdemeanors while employed in the yard.⁷¹

There is no further record of any action taken against the two employees. Chaplain Hibben concluded that despite the accusations, the Commandant chose to retain both employees.

In the case of Mr. John Stuart

For John Stuart the Commandant came to a very different conclusion. The evidence for Stuart's allegiance to the new Confederacy was considered conclusive. The following is from the inquiry regarding Stuart's loyalty.

About five weeks ago Mr. Stuart said to me Government had no business to imprison Mayor Brown and Ross [Brown was the pro-southern Mayor of Baltimore MD. Brown and Ross a local secessionist leader, had encourage a mob to violently resist the Union army] He said they were good men and good to the floor and that he also said that it made his blood boil to see the Mass' troops come through Baltimore on the 19th April last and he had almost a mind to follow the crowd with his gun. For if they had left old Maryland alone she would have come all right in the end. I know nothing further, and to the above statement – I am willing to take oath.

Testimony of J. J. L. Blanchard

About six weeks ago Mr. Stuart while on a spree said there were certain men in Baltimore (whose names he would not mention) who would send him South whenever he wished to go. He did not say whether he wished to go South or not.

⁷¹ Hibben, op. cit., p. 143.

Further than this I know nothing and to the above statements I am willing to take oath.
Testimony of W. Cook

Yesterday and this morning Mr. Stuart told me that he was a Southern rights man and when I asked him what he meant by his declaration he replied he did not believe in having his Negroes free. I know nothing further and to this statement I am willing to swear.
Testimony of Dan W. Bates

I find that Mr. Stuart took the oath of allegiance in October last.

Discharge Mr. Stuart
Dated 1861

Comdr. J.A. Dahlgren
Comd. U.S. Navy Yard
Washington, D.C.

The Yard in Wartime: Inflation and Strikes:

During the war there was plenty of work for Yard employees building new ironclad vessels. Employees appear to have regularly worked beyond the 10-hour day. The war also brought rapid inflation as commodities became scarce or hoarded as the Union currency depreciated. When the greenback lost value, workmen lost real purchasing power. The cost of living doubled in the Washington, D.C. area. Yard workmen became so concerned over the declining value of their wages that several hundred mechanics and laborers assembled in the Anacostia firehouse near the Yard. There the workers elected a committee and drafted resolutions requesting some adjustment to their plight, which

were sent to Commandant Harwood.⁷² The men requested the Secretary of the Navy to address their concerns for what they considered overtime work:

Since last June, we have given our services cheerfully to the Department from four to six nights and parts of nights of the week, as well as the Sabbath, doing everything in our power to advance the best interest of the government during the current trials, etc.⁷³

On 14 January 1862, Congress responded setting new legal hours for government shipyards. The hours were to follow those prevailing in the private sector. Commandant Dahlgren issued:

Rules for the bell which shall regulate the working hours at this ship-yard. The bell shall be rung the following hours every day except Sunday: At 7 o'clock a.m., 12 o'clock noon, 1 o'clock p.m., 6 o'clock p.m. When the sun rises later than forty-five minutes after 6 o'clock, the bell must be rung fifteen minutes after sunrise, and when the sun sets before 6 o'clock it must be rung at sunset. The standard clock in the yard will be regulated by the time at the National Observatory.⁷⁴

Prevailing Rate for Ship Yard Employees

On 16 July 1862, a regulation was issued that remained in effect for the next eighty years. This new

⁷² *History of the Navy Yard, unpublished manuscript*, 1945, p. 46.

⁷³ Hibben, op. cit., p. 111.

⁷⁴ Ibid, p. 112.

Department of the Navy Regulation stated:

That the hours of labor and the rate of wages of the employees in the navy yards shall conform, as nearly as is consistent with the public interest, with those of private establishments in the immediate vicinity of the respective yards, to be determined by the commandants of the Navy Yards, subject to approval and revision of the Secretary of the Navy.

The new law was intended to provide a rational basis for wage fixing and allow the market economy to determine wage levels. While this was the theory, the practice was often very different.

The First Wage Boards

In 1864 the Department of the Navy required Yard Commandants to appoint a wage board composed of a line officer, one head of division and one master workman. Their duty was to inquire of the private companies in the area to determine hours of work and the wages paid to each class of workmen. The board then prepared a proposed schedule of wages that was submitted to the Commandant. After the Commandant gave his approval, it was posted about the Yard for the workforce and allowed them to give their thoughts on the proposals to the Commandant. The Commandant would then forward the schedule for the Yard to the Secretary of the Navy

for his approval and implementation within two months.

Introduction of the Income Tax

To finance the Northern war effort, the Lincoln administration levied the first Federal income tax in American history. This new tax was progressive and imposed a 3% tax on an income of \$800.00 or more per year. Most laborers and some mechanics were therefore exempt. There is evidence

however that the Yard officials withheld income tax from per diem laborers and mechanics.⁷⁵

Clerical and White Collar Employees

Clerical employees were however not covered by this new regulation. The

Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles expressed his concerns when he wrote:

In consequence of the greatly increased prices that prevail, many who are in the clerical employment of the government, at compensation established prior to the war, are receiving remuneration wholly insufficient. The state of currency, with other causes, has so affected prices that these men are receiving relatively but about one-half the pay of former years, and the effect has been such as to compel many of the best clerks in this department to leave the government service.

This is a public injury, especially in the crisis like the present. The place of an experienced and



⁷⁵ Register of Discharged Civilian Employees 1862-1869, Box 1, Entry 618, NARA RG 181.

accomplished clerk is at no time easily supplied; but when such place is vacated for the reason that it is not remunerative, or that the pay is below corresponding positions in private establishments, the difficulty is increased.

It is therefore suggested that the salaries of the clerical force, or a portion of the clerical force, be increased until the close of the war, or until the currency shall return to a specie standard. This recommendation is made with some reluctance and only under a sense of its absolute necessity at this time.⁷⁶

Nothing happened; a year later he renewed his plea, but by that time the war was over.

Early Yard civilian personnel files reflect the type of problems referred to the Commandant. The case of clerk Manuel Moreno is informative since it is representative of the problems and concerns of the clerical and administrative workers.

Vice Admiral
D.D. Porter U.S.N.

October 11th 1869

Admiral

I was prepared on Saturday last when I had the honor of being admitted before you, to explain to you in a very short time, what I now submit for your favorable consideration; but I could not say any thing to you for the reasons that you had official business to attend.

I had every reason to believe that you are

disposed to assist

me, and therefore, I suggest, that I am now and have for some time past been doing and performing other duties besides those incumbent upon a writer. As a writer, I copy the correspondence, reports etc, and I call the roll in the morning at 7 o'clock a.m. But I am the only one in the Yard who keeps the Books in which are recorded all the proceedings relative to the examinations of Inventions, Target Practice, Torpedo Book and Book of Gun Practice of every description; and consequently, I am the Recorder of all operations at the Experimental Battery etc. and besides, I keep the Book of Measurements of Naval Ordnance. These Books are neatly kept and each one has an Index.

I am not positive, but I do really believe, that there is no other such a set of Record Books kept in no other yard, and if it is in your power to recommend, that I shall be called the "Recorder of the Gun

PL
Wm. Navy Yd. Ensign.
Washington D.C.
October 11th 1869
Vice Admiral.
D.D. Porter U.S.N.
Admiral ...
I was prepared on Saturday last, when I had the honor of being admitted before you, to explain to you in a very short time, what I now submit for your favorable consideration, but I could not say any thing to you then, for the reason that you had official business to attend.
I have every reason to believe that you are disposed to assist me, and therefore I suggest, that I am now, and have been for some time past doing and performing other duties besides those incumbent upon a writer. As a writer I copy the correspondence, reports etc, and I call the roll in the morning at 7 o'clock a.m. But I am the only one in the Yard who keeps the Books

Letter from Manuel Moreno

⁷⁶ Albion, op. cit., p. 5.

Practice etc” and my pay may be judged just.

I expect that an effort will be made to obtain an appointment for some one else as 2nd or Assistant Clerk; in such an event I beg you to bear in mind that I am the Oldest one in the office of all the Clerks in the Ordnance Department except Mr. Norton Chief Clerk.

This will be the last time I expect to trouble you with my private business and I hope you make an effort to assist me, which will be not only a favor but an act of charity to myself and family.

Sir: With highest degree of respect, I have the honor of subscribing myself. Your most Obedient Servant

Manuel Moreno

Despite his impeccable handwriting there is nothing in Mr. Moreno’s file to indicate that Admiral Porter ever agreed to change his pay or job title.

The Strike of 1864

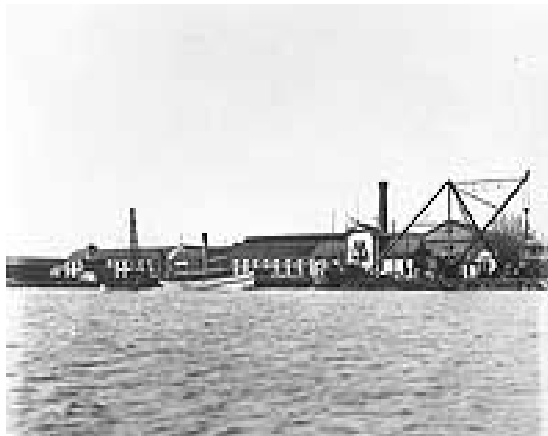
By spring 1864, the Civil War had entered its third year. Inflation still continued to be a problem, and workers at the Yard were concerned that the new Prevailing Rate Law was not adequately measuring the real cost of labor. Commandant Montgomery reported to the Navy Department that nearly every Yard department was asking for increased pay. Ninety-five of the helpers in the chain-shop were striking for higher wages. Secretary Welles, ordered Commandant

Montgomery: “...that none of them be allowed to return again, also that the Master and Quartermen pay be stopped until hands can be procured elsewhere.”⁷⁷

Montgomery wrote back asking his superior for leniency since skilled workmen were so hard to find. Welles, clearly exasperated, relented.

If the helpers who have returned acknowledge their error in setting such insubordinate example by

striking they may be continued in the shop.....It’s a general rule when so large a proportion of the journeymen strike the Superintendent’s pay should be stopped till the others can be found to supply the strikers.⁷⁸



Next Welles received a letter from the iron foundry workers listing their grievances:

Sir, we the undersigned would respectfully call your attention to a subject of vital importance to us in these trying times, viz., an inadequate compensation for our services. With the most rigid of economy our wages fail to meet our actual wants. It is claimed that the law requires us to be governed by the pay in the shops of our immediate neighborhood. This would do if these shops were all of

⁷⁷ Welles to Montgomery, 17 February 1864, NARA RG 45.

⁷⁸ Welles to Montgomery, 22 February 1864, NARA RG 45.

the same class. But there is not a foundry in or near Washington that is prepared to do the work we are required to do. They have not the facilities for doing it, and therefore have no need to keep in their employ first-rate mechanics.

Moreover, we do not see why private shops ought to be the first movers in advancing the wages of workmen rather than the Government, for certainly Government ought to be a pattern for all the people, etc.⁷⁹

Throughout the remainder of the war the Commandant continued to have problems with wage fixing. He reported to the Secretary that he was having “vexatious difficulties” with the requirements of law in setting monthly wages. Secretary of the Navy Welles was also frustrated with the process of wage fixing as he relates in his letter to Commandant Montgomery.

The effect of this law causes continuous applications to the Department for changes in the pay of workman in the Navy Yards and creates much embarrassment and annoyance to the Department.⁸⁰

Indeed the Secretary became so upset that he ordered the Commandant to appear before the Senate Naval Committee to explain to the Committee the difficulty of fixing wages. Despite the best intention of

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Gideon Welles to Commandant Montgomery, 20 May 1864, NARA RG 45.

both men, these problems were never resolved.

The Union victory and the end of the war resulted in large reductions in the Yard labor force. These eventually drove down war wage levels thereby pushing aside the entire question of wage equity for another generation.

Yard Workers Help Defend the Capital against General Jubal Early's 1864 Raid

Gideon Welles, Secretary of the Navy, telegraphed Commandant Montgomery asking how many Yard workers he could provide “to go to the trenches.” The Commandant replied, he “could muster about 800.”

In July 1864, Confederate General Jubal Early conceived a bold plan to attack Washington, DC. His plan relied on the fact that the majority of Union troops were besieging General Lee's army at Petersburg and that the approach to Washington was only lightly defended. Moving with great speed, his army rapidly advanced and defeated the only sizable Union force in their path at Monocacy, MD.

On 11 July 1864, Early's troops appeared before Fort Stevens, just miles from the Capitol Dome. Everywhere, citizens were alarmed lest the nation's capital fall to Early's army.

Gideon Welles, Secretary of the Navy, telegraphed Commandant Montgomery asking how many Yard workers he could provide “to go to the trenches.” The Commandant replied, that he “could muster about 800.”⁸¹

⁸¹ Hibben, op. cit., p. 139.

On July 12th those men were placed under the command of Rear Admiral Goldsborough and moved to the front.

At the Yard, preparations were made for siege. Cannons were placed near the walls and portholes were carved so the cannons would have clear fields of fire. In 1890, when Chaplain Hibben was writing his history of the Yard, these portholes were still visible. Becoming aware of the vast preparations and not wanting to fight a major engagement with the now superior Union forces arriving by steamer from the Petersburg front, General Early withdrew his troops across to the Virginia side of the Potomac River. While the Confederate threat against the Capital had ended, Commandant Montgomery still had to get a specific authorization from the Navy Department to pay his volunteer Yard employees.⁸²

The Yard Downsizes and Veterans' Preference is introduced. The Introduction of Women to the Workforce and "The Gilded Age"

After the war the Yard began to immediately downsize the civilian workforce.⁸³ The continuing cutbacks in work and manning levels took their toll. One writer has described the period following the Civil War as one of the most depressing periods in Navy history. The one highlight for veterans of the war was the introduction of veterans' preference for all honorably discharged veterans.⁸⁴ Veterans' Preference was accorded to all those who served in the Union Army or

Navy during the Civil War. "Persons who have served in the Army or Navy and have been honorably discharged will be preferred. Such persons as relinquished their places in the yard to enter the naval or military service during the war will be permitted if they wish to resume their former position."⁸⁵ Former Confederates could only rely on political or personal connections if they hoped to regain employment. Some applicants were perplexed about what to state on their applications for employment. J. W. Smith, a young man who desired a position at Washington Navy Yard, is typical. In his letter he writes: "My father unfortunately for him and his family took sides with the South in the late rebellion and by so doing has brought his wife and six children to needy circumstances. But all of my mothers brothers was with the Union."⁸⁶

The Congress was absorbed with reconstruction of the defeated South and nearly all members believed that the Navy was simply too big. Consequently, Navy funds and therefore wages were dramatically scaled back. This period 1869 to 1882 is referred to by historian Robert G. Albion as "those dark ages." During this time, the Naval Annual Reports have no mention of civilians, but an act of Congress in 1876 provided for a possible "future" bright spot:

Whenever, in the judgment of the head of any department, the duties assigned to a clerk of one class can be as well performed by a clerk of a

⁸² Ibid, p. 140.

⁸³ Ibid, p. 150.

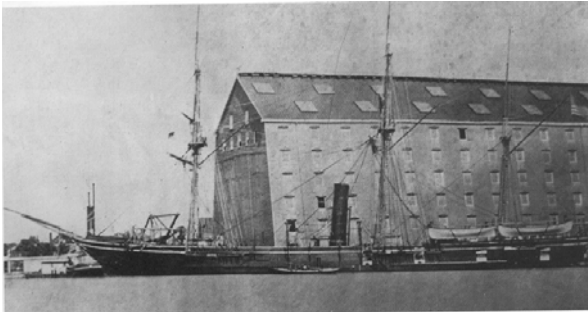
⁸⁴ Ibid, p. 151.

⁸⁵ Ibid, p. 488.

⁸⁶ J. W. Smith to Commandant WNY, 14 January 1878, NARA RG 45.

lower class or by a female clerk, it shall be lawful for him to diminish clerks of the lower grade within the limit of the total appropriation for such clerical service.⁸⁷

The Navy *may have* allowed for the possibility of "*female clerks*" but there is no record of the Yard having hired any. The position of "stenographer" first appears in the Navy personnel lists in 1878, but the first ones were apparently men. According to tradition, the first woman clerical /administrative employee on the Navy Department payroll was a Miss Barney of a prominent naval family, who became librarian around 1890. It was not until WWI, that women were employed in significant numbers in clerical positions at the Navy Yard.



Mark Twain and Dudley Warner had written about this period right after the Civil War as the "*Gilded Age*,"⁸⁸ which they described as an age of corruption in politics and business. Political influence was always a factor in a shipyard so close to the Capital. Gideon Welles and Commandant Dahlgren complained of this in the 1860s as they tried to manage ship contracts and insure the integrity of the

workforce.⁸⁹ In 1863 Secretary Welles noted privately in his diary about the interference of political representatives and the corruption of senior Yard officials:

Contentions and rivalries in the Washington Navy Yard give annoyance. Twenty percent of the workmen are dismissed by order of the Department, and the Senators and Representatives of Maryland object that any Marylander should be of the number [dismissed]. These strife's among the men and their friends in the different cities are exciting and drawing out attacks and intrigues against me. The interference from members of Congress is injurious.... A strange tale of refuse copper took place in September at the Washington Navy Yard. I have had the subject investigated, but the board which I appointed was not thorough in its labors and did not pursue the subject closely. But the exhibit was such that I dismissed the Commandant of the Yard, the Naval Storekeeper, two of the masters, who are implicated, yet I am by no means certain I reached all or the worst.⁹⁰

During the postwar slump in shipbuilding, the argument of steady employment at the Navy Yard would be even greater. Though the Navy Yard work was drastically curtailed, the slump in merchant shipping, such as that in Baltimore, was even more severe.

The employment decline was to some extent exacerbated by a change in

⁸⁷ Albion, op. cit., p. 6.

⁸⁸ Twain, Mark, *The Gilded Age*.

⁸⁹ Welles, Gideon. *Diary of Gideon Welles*, p. 225.

⁹⁰ Ibid, p. 483.

technology. At the Washington Navy Yard this change was signaled on 30 July 1868 when the Secretary of the Navy issued a general order abolishing the post of Master Sail Maker at the Washington Navy Yard. This order reflected the new preeminence of machine propulsion, the great age of sail was now becoming the stuff of legend as the wooden ships and frigates became obsolete.⁹¹

Patronage in the Gilded Age

After the war complaints abounded that the federal government was simply not getting the quality of workmen which it should have received for the money it was paying. Mark Twain and other critics brought public attention to what they charged was the low standard of Federal ethics.

Congressional committees were asked to look at the navy yards. Accusations were made that Federal navy yards had become choice sources of political plums and places where unscrupulous politicians gained control of navy yard personnel through the appointment of henchmen as master workmen, who had the power of appointing the mechanics and laborers. As early as 1865, Secretary Welles complained of "Yard Masters who collected money from their respective Departments, a sum equal to a day's labor for party purposes."⁹² Secretary Welles called such a "reprehensible and wholly and absolutely prohibited."⁹³

⁹¹ Peck, op. cit., p. 166.

⁹² Gideon Welles to Commodore William Radford, 5 October 1865, NARA RG 45.

⁹³ Ibid.

Another method of manipulating employment for tainted political ends was to hire large numbers of workers just prior to an election in the expectant hope of a windfall of goodwill come election day. During the administration of President Grant a circular was issued by the Navy which required Commandants to investigate to see if men hostile the administration were being employed. Politics and corruption were both integral in the employment process. The circular stated that preference in all cases should go to those that belonged to Union Party. The yard executive was charged with responsibility of seeing that none but good and loyal men were hired.⁹⁴

This new decentralized structure of yard administration and the Washington Navy Yard's proximity to Congress made patronage and influence a fact of daily life. The examples in Appendix (C) illustrate how patronage replete with influence and politics was practiced at the Yard.

Congressmen became so tied up in this system that more than one yard was known as "*Mr. So-and-So's yard.*" Commandants had grave difficulty trying to remedy the situation. The quality of work at the Yard naturally deteriorated.

The Administration of the Navy Yard in the 19th Century

In 1842 the Congress had mandated a new structure for Department of the Navy. Gone was the Board of Navy Commissioners replaced by five

⁹⁴ Peck, op. cit., p. 167.

bureaus: Yards and Docks, Equipment and Recruiting, Navigation, Ordnance and Construction and Repair. Most prominent among them was the Bureau of Yards and Docks, which was tasked with the oversight and management of all navy shipyards. As the mission of the Yard changed from one of ship repair to ordnance production, the Bureau of Ordnance would have significant sway in all decisions. Each Bureau was operated independently and the authority of each Bureau extended by an act of Congress in 1868 to the administration of all navy yard. What these changes did as a practical matter was decrease the autonomy and authority of the Commandant. Each Bureau received separate Congressional appropriations and governed their own manpower, job classification and compensation. Naturally in such a decentralized structure the heads of the various yard departments and the employees themselves tended to look toward their Bureau rather than the Commandant for guidance.⁹⁵ One historian of Naval Administration summarized these changes as follows: “the bureau system pulled out all of the teeth of the Commandant and made him sort of a head postmaster whose duty was to pass order between the department at Washington and its representatives at the Yard.”⁹⁶

Congressmen
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yard was known as
“*Mr. So-and-So's
yard.*”

From the Yard Log

By 1869 the nature of work had begun to change. The age of sail was over and iron ships were the order of the day. Yard workers were now spending more time in the production of ordnance and related items. The *Nipsic* (mentioned below) was the last ship to be built at the Washington Navy Yard. Here is an excerpt from the Yard Log for Monday 4 October 1869.

This day commences with rainy weather. Light wind from the North East 0935a.m. The schooner *Swan* arrives at the Yard with oak timbers from Newcastle Delaware for construction. Middle past clear weather with moderate wind from the North West. At 1216 p.m. the Barge W. Hutchens arrived at the

Yard to try a Patent Boat. At 0110 p.m. the U.S.S. Tug Rescue left the Yard to try a Patent Boat. At 0115 the Packet Anne left the Yard at 2.00 p.m. The schooner *Monmouth* arrived at the Yard from New York with stone flagging for Yards and Docks. At 3.00 p.m. the tug Rescue returned to the Yard.

Operations in the Yard

Reported Sick: Jones, William, Heugh McCleang provost marines. J.M Megee and George Eldridge Landsman.

Civil Engineers Department: working on Ordnance Museum, repairs to dredge, water pipes, wharf and tools, and hauling coal and water.

⁹⁵ Charles Black , *Charlestown Naval Shipyard 1890-1973*, Vol. 1, pp. 4-39.

⁹⁶ Ibid, p. 14.

Ordnance Department: working on fuse stocks, howitzer, field carriages, elevating screws, scraping and painting shot and shell. Fitting howitzers, packing metallic cartridges, and overhauling ammunition. Removing freight from Steamer Anna setting fuses, laboratory boxes and howitzer wheels.

Sailmakers Department: working on hammocks and bags for Mare Island Navy Yard Calif., Awnings for U.S.S. Nipsic, Yacht America's sails for Navigation Office.

Painters Department: working on Ship House roof, Commandants and Officers Quarters, Water Closets, Clothes making putty and grinding paint.

Yard Laborers Department: working on moving Kansas boilers, handling coal for galley shop, discharging coal from U.S.S. Kansas, cleaning Monitors machinery.

Carpenters Department: working on Nipsic, Kansas and Yacht America.

Caulkers Department working on the Nipsic

Riggers Department: working on the Nipsic yards, stopping blocks

The Plight of Yard Workers

While the federal government pensioned its sailors and soldiers and provided them retirement facilities and helped to care for their widows and orphans, there was no provision in case of death or disability for Yard employees. This dilemma was the same for almost all workers in

industrial America until the passage of the Social Security Act in the mid-1930s. For over a century Yard staff members could be dismissed no matter how long or how faithfully they may have served the government. If Yard employees were injured or killed on the job, they were stricken from the rolls the next day with no allowance for their survivors. Two examples

below illustrate the problems of Yard workers.

In 1856 Edward Wayson (who had worked for the Yard almost since it's founding as Blacksmith and Mechanic and had signed the 1812 petition requesting higher wages) was to be let go apparently due to his age and health.

If Yard employees were injured or killed on the job, they were stricken from the rolls the next day with no allowance for their survivors.

Honorable J. G. Dobbin

Washington, 29 March 1856

Dear Sir

I respectfully request that you will authorize Commodore Forest of the Washington Navy Yard to grant such indulgence to Edward Wayson, now 82 years of age and in feeble health, as may be compatible with the needs of the service and the dictates of humanity. Mr. Wayson has been for more than fifty years a faithful and skilled mechanic in the Yard and assisted in fitting out some of the best ships of the Navy. His life remaining must necessarily be short, but he is too poor to surrender his place as long as he can stand on his feet. He has a

widowed daughter dependent upon him. Commodore Forest is disposed to grant the indulgence if authorized.

With great respect your obedient servant.
John S. Gallagher

The case of Charles W. Shafer illustrates the situation of Yard employees who were seriously injured prior to the passage of on-the-job injury compensation laws.

232 F St
Washington DC

Vice Admiral D.D. Porter
U.S. Navy Department

May 2, 1869

Admiral:
I have taken the liberty of calling your attention to the case of Mr. Charles W. Schafer, the bearer of this note,

Mr. Schafer was employed in the Chain Department of the Washington Navy Yard and while forging a cable, a clot of hot metal pierced one of his eyes and passed within the ball of the eye that was impossible to remove it. Of course, the agony of the hot scald of metal, within the eye may be imagined, by anyone but the sufferer.

I gave him constant attention but could only save the shape of the ball being destroyed by the red-hot metal. When the accident had been controlled as possible after his protracted agony that sound eye had been made so sensitive he could not stand the glare of light in the Cable Shop. He could have obtained work then but he was totally unable to do it.

I am sorry to say, that this servant of the Republic maimed for life in her

service with his wife the children suffers severely last winter and this moment is destitute.

He has sought work, everywhere but there is no private shop in which chain cable is made or forged

Now it seems to me, that if his great suffering and maiming in the service and the severe wound was brought to the notice of yourself your generous heart would not allow the poor fellow to suffer so, for it was not his own fault.

There is a great deal to be done about the Washington Navy Yard in and about the Chain and Cable shop, in the Washington Navy Yard as he was maimed there, some kind of work – even if he can't forge might be found which would give his family bread. The man is so pressed that he doesn't care what he does – even if he could get a watchman position he would be most grateful and content.

Still it seems that if he was injured in the Cable Shop some puttering light work should be given him there.

I have known the government to make reparation to those who suffered in the U.S. service.

It is useless to apply to the Master Workman of the Yard often they are men, who have no sympathy for the suffering and so time has been wasted in making local application.

I have asked employ for him from uncle William Southhall Chief of Construction but he has nothing to do with the Yard. My old friend Admiral Joseph Smith has resigned his post as Chief Docks and Yards so therefore I am at a loss as to where to turn. Fortunately, I remembered that you were here and have not forgotten your

universal reputation for kindness to those under your command.

His sufferings have been such both physical and in his family in consequence of his wound that I am sure even though you dislike to interfere personally a few words from you to the Secretary, will ensure his employment.

I take the greatest interest in this poor fellow from having attended him all through his long suffering. I will feel myself under the greatest personal obligation if you will interest yourself in his case.

Believe me Admiral with the greatest respect your obedient servant.

Robert King Stone MD

The letter contained this subscript: "Note refer to Admiral Poor [Commandant WNY] who will please give this case his earnest consideration and give the bearer some employment in the cable shop. "Signed David D. Porter."

Fortunately for Mr. Schafer, Dr. King's intervention and the Admiral Porter's personal endorsement resulted in his being reemployed although at a much lower wage.

The Rocket House Explodes

One of the most dangerous work assignments in the 19th century Navy Yard was the "Rocket House." Here rockets and ordnance were armed. The arming process was fraught with peril;

an errant spark or light could ignite stockpiles of rockets and ordnance. On at least three separate occasions, namely, 7 September 1841, 22 July 1861 and 21 October 1881 there were premature explosions of gun shells and rockets which resulted in fatalities. In each instance an investigation was conducted afterward. The following is from the report of 1881 explosion:

The explosion was primarily due to the ignition of a rocket which was on a reamer and being reamed out. The ignition may have occurred from the reamer becoming heated, or from the presence of grit in the fuller's clay used to close up the tail end of the rocket. The damage was the complete destruction of the building, involving a loss of about \$600. They were fully aware of the dangerous nature of the work and exercising unusual caution. A flash of fire was observed at the table where the reamer was fasten. The flash was immediately followed by an explosion. The flame of the burning rocket filled the house with furnace like heat. The first explosion blew out the south side of the house and shortly two other explosions followed in quick succession.⁹⁷

George Lawrence, Mechanic first class was killed and Marion Thompson and George G. Gates, his coworkers, were seriously injured.

The Eight-Hour Day

The eight-hour day for Federal workers came into being in 1868. At first, the law was limited to laborers,

The eight-hour law was limited to laborers, workmen and mechanics. It was not until the 1890's that the law was extended to Federal office workers.

⁹⁷ Hibben, op. cit., p. 180.

workmen and mechanics. The law was often not enforced. Three hundred and forty nine WNY workers brought suit against Navy for violating the overtime provisions, sadly it took more than fifty years for their claims to be successfully adjudicated.⁹⁸ In May 1883 workmen at the Naval Gun Factory requested an audience with President Cleveland. They were trying to get presidential assurance that the provisions of the eight-hour law were fully implemented.⁹⁹ As late as 1899 Navy was still deciding how to apply the law to contractor employees working at the Naval Gun Factory.¹⁰⁰ It was not until the 1890s that the law was extended to Federal office workers. Commander Jewell, first superintendent of the Naval



Gun Factory, felt the new law was no hindrance to factory production. "Notwithstanding the limit of a day's work to the statutory eight hours and the fact that the same if not higher wages are received by the mechanics of the same grade in neighboring private industries the government is enabled to do the same work at a smaller cost than could be obtained in private establishments."¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ *Washington Post*, 30 November 1935 p. 15

⁹⁹ *Ibid*, 27 May 1883, p. 1.

¹⁰⁰ *New York Times*, 21 August 1899, p. 3.

¹⁰¹ *Harpers New Monthly Magazine*, July 1894, pp. 251-261.

The Creation of the Gun Factory

On 5 August 1882, the government gave the first authorization for the "New Navy" of modern steel ships. After the Act's passage, the age of wooden ships was effectively over. When the Naval Gun Factory was established on 14 August 1886, it was the government's and the nation's most modern ordnance factory.

"Business Necessity to Business Results"

The conversion of the Washington Navy Yard into a great ordnance foundry for the manufacture of steel guns signaled the end of the age of sail and the beginning of the modern era. When the new factory opened, unemployment in the District was high. Many employees who had been laid off at the time of the change over from a general navy yard found regular employment again. Richard Jones, who was first employed in 1884, recalled that "1888 was the year that the age of specialization hit Uncle Sam's navy yard instead of having various activities at each yard Washington was picked to manufacture ordnance, Boston to be a dry-dock center, etc." He noted that the old sail loft's work was transferred to Brooklyn Navy Yard and the galley shop disappeared as well as the production of anchors and chain.¹⁰² Michael A. Lynch, who rose to the position of General Master Mechanic, remembered "the yard was practically turned over to Ordnance over night and all the other departments were practically abolished and distributed to other navy yards. Ordnance then had

¹⁰² *Washington Post*, 19 October 1936.

the right-of way to take possession of all shops that could be utilized for the manufacture of ordnance.¹⁰³,

The new Gun Factory emphasis was on productivity and for the first time a business ethos pervades decision-making. "Business methods as distinct from quarterdeck methods so far as manufacture is concerned." The Yard Commandant R.W. Meade put the proposition succinctly: "The rule at this time is to take the shortest cut from business necessity to business result."¹⁰⁴,

The Age of Reform Begins

Real reform of Navy Yard hiring practices began in 1883. During most of the next decade, those reforms would figure prominently in the Secretary of the Navy's annual reports and would produce changes of lasting value. This was the immediate result of two separate movements - the first steps toward the "New Navy" and the beginning of Civil Service Reform. The reform ideal was expressed by Secretary of the Navy Chandler in his annual report:

These establishments must first be thoroughly reorganized in such a way as to exclude all political

considerations from management; otherwise bad and expensive work will be the result. We cannot afford to destroy the speed of our naval engines in order to make votes for a political party. While other governmental agency may be conducted with partisanship, a great naval workshop, dealing with the hull of a modern steel steamship, its fittings and equipment, and with the complexities of its machinery, cannot be successfully so managed.¹⁰⁵

Hiring practices in the mid-nineteenth century were often casual and frequently depended on connection rather than merit. One worker who

entered a position at the Washington Navy Yard in 1872 remembered:

I, a small barefooted boy, was standing on the corner of a street intersection near the yard, when a gentleman

driving by stopped and called to me to mind his horse while he went into the Navy Yard to attend to business. He stayed one-half hour, and when he returned he paid me a twenty-five cent note. I was about to jump out of the carriage, but he insisted that I ride back to where I met him and on the way I asked him if he had any influence in the Navy Yard and he said a "a little!" Upon telling him I would like to learn a trade, he told me to call and see him. Later I secured a position.¹⁰⁶ (For more on patronage see Appendix C.)



¹⁰³ OPF Michael A. Lynch, memorandum to Secretary of Navy dated, 17 April 1919, NARA.

¹⁰⁴ Hibben, op. cit., p. 195.

¹⁰⁵ Albion, op. cit., p. 27.

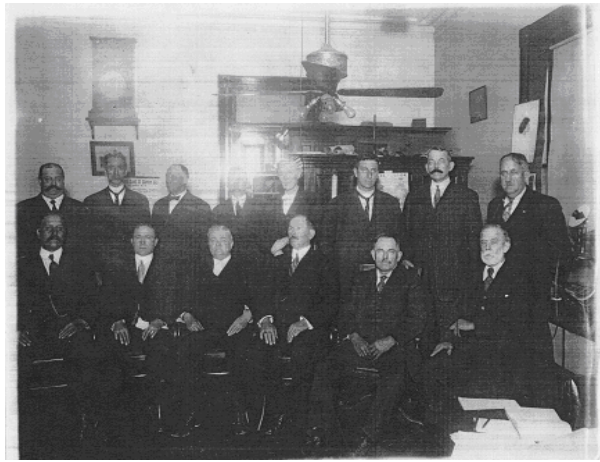
¹⁰⁶ *History of the Navy Yard Washington 1799-1922*, Unpublished manuscript, Navy Library,

The Pendleton Act

In addition to changes in mission and equipment, employment practices also changed dramatically. The passage of the “Pendleton Act” on 16 January 1883 inaugurated Civil Service reform. The Pendleton Act was important because it classified certain jobs, removed them from the patronage ranks, and set up a Civil Service Commission to administer a system based on merit rather than political connections. As the classified list was expanded over the years, it provided the American people with competent and permanent government workers.

In 1883, fewer than 15,000 civilian jobs were classified; by the time McKinley became president in 1897, 86,000 -- almost half of all federal employees -- were in classified positions.¹⁰⁷

Today, with the exception of a few thousand policy-level appointments, nearly all-federal jobs are handled within the civil service classification system.



Employment Practices Change at the Washington Navy Yard and Gun Factory

Prior to the Pendleton Act Yard and Naval Gun Factory Foreman and Master Mechanics possessed nearly absolute power to hire and fire. General Master Mechanic Michael Lynch remembers, “In the early days of the Gun Factory, both political parties were very active and the result was we did not obtain the most efficient men.”¹⁰⁸ Since the unchecked power of Master Mechanics was the focal point of the old system, through Congressional influence and the persuasions of city ward bosses,

political parties could readily dictate the names of successful applicants to Master Mechanics and Yard officials. After the Pendleton Act the creation of a new independent civil service commission with

its own regulations and procedures governing merit appointments and promotions spelled the demise of patronage and cronyism. In summary, the introduction of impartial registers maintained by a board of yard officers and the introduction of competitive examinations gradually removed blatant political manipulation and effectively took politics out of the supervisory hierarchy.

p. 250.

¹⁰⁷ Ari Hoogenboom, *Outlawing the Spoils: A History of the Civil Service Reform Movement, 1865-1883*; Paul P. Van Riper, *History of the United States Civil Service*.

¹⁰⁸ Lynch, op. cit., n.p.

New Employment Procedures.

Applicants for jobs at the Navy Yard now had to submit application forms and certificates attesting to their character, education and work experience. In addition, proof of United States citizenship was now a requirement. If applicants were claiming military service and veterans status, they were required to submit evidence of their honorable discharge. Mechanics and other skilled tradesmen now had to submit evidence of a successfully completed apprenticeship.

The immediate effect of those two movements was felt particularly at the Navy Yard with the creation of the Naval Gun Factory (NGF) in August 1886 and the introduction of "merit" rather than patronage as a principle of employment at the Navy Yard. These two changes made for a more modern flexible organization that could focus more readily on ordnance production.

New Merit Hiring Practices

In 1891, new merit hiring practices went into effect.

Secretary of the Navy Tracy reported that the building of wooden and steel ships was "as different as making a bucket and making a watch" and that the day was past when "any man who could bore and mortise could render some service more or less valuable to the Government."

He then proceeded to explain the two steps taken in April 1891 to improve the situation:

It became evident to me, after two years experience in the Department, that in order to obtain the kind of workmen required in the navy yards a specific change of organization was necessary and a plan for the selection of foremen and other superintending mechanics was put in operation in April last. All the superintending positions at the yard were declared vacant, and a board of officers, whose impartial character was universally recognized, and whose members were practical men, most of them experienced in manufacturing, was appointed to find out the best mechanics to fill the places. Public notice was given, and all mechanics were allowed to compete.¹⁰⁹



On 2 November 1896 President Cleveland embodied this in an Executive Order. It was not, however, until 1912 that the U. S. Civil Service Commission acquired control of the industrial labor force comparable to that of white-collar civil service. In the end, what the Pendleton Act accomplished was the shift of power from the nearly absolute authority to hire and fire held by Foremen and Master Mechanics to a system of competition and merit.

¹⁰⁹ Albion, op. cit., p. 28.

The use of impartial registers maintained by a board of Yard officers and the use of competitive examinations gradually removed blatant political manipulation and patronage.

The Naval Gun Factory

The Naval Gun Factory received glowing praise in articles of *The Scientific American* and *The Century Illustrated Magazine*. *The Scientific American* stated:

the Gun Factory where all naval guns are now fabricated is the outgrowth of the old Washington Navy Yard and is very favorably situated because of its proximity to the control of the department and the inspection of the Congress. It is reasonably secure from foreign invasion, in good railroad communication with the steel factories and is connected by water with the Proving Grounds at Indian Head on the Potomac 26 miles from Washington.¹¹⁰



The Century reporter noted that the work at the Gun Factory was some of the most advanced in the world. "The mechanical processes required great skill and care from the skilled machinists and mechanics. The workman is held by constant and strict inspections, to the dimensions given by the thousands of an inch, from which departures are tolerated only in the largest parts, where they are not important." The Factory was over 600 feet long and had the best machinery the country afforded. It employed

overhead cranes, one of which could lift and carry a weight of 110 tons. Workers manufactured the largest guns using improved equipment and processes.¹¹¹

Writing in 1889 Chaplain Henry Hibben felt that "[t]he place selected for this ordnance establishment is a most favorable one. It is located at the capital of the nation. The click of its busy hammers can almost be heard in the halls of

Congress and the officers and employees of the yard, while engaged in their daily duties may look up and behold floating from either end of the capital our flag of stars, the ever shining emblem of the Union which the

¹¹⁰ *The Scientific American*, May 1891, p. 1599.

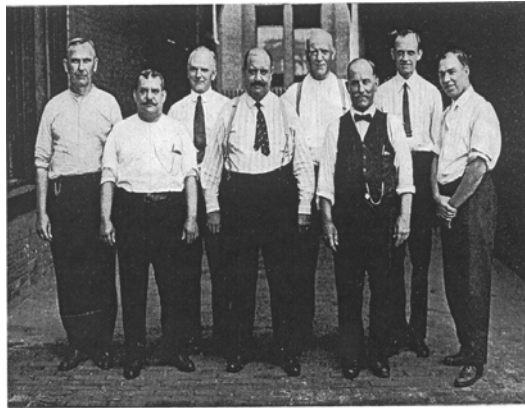
¹¹¹ *Century Illustrated Magazine*, September 1896, p. 667.

Navy has hitherto been successful in defending against foreign and domestic foe, and which probably, no one but ourselves can ever destroy.¹¹²

Phones, Electric Lights and Trains

The 1880's saw three new important technologies introduced to NGF. On 27 May 1881 the National Capital Telephone Company installed the Yard's first telephone. The new service was on a trial basis: "The Government being under no obligation to continue use of the instrument." The company originally charged the yard \$60 for each phone and 3 cents for each phone call. The Commandant deemed this too expensive. And the Yard officially moved to discontinue telephone service later that year considering the new technology exorbitantly priced. The utility of the telephone and a timely rate reduction eventually persuaded the Commandant to retain the new service.¹¹³

In December 1889, the Brush Company installed the first electrical light plant and a dynamo house erected by the Yard employees. Suddenly the Yard was connected to the world.¹¹⁴



In 1886, the oxen that had pulled heavy loads about the Yard for generations began to be replaced by NGF's first railroad. This first railroad was a spur track of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad. The creation of the Gun Factory meant that oxen that had for generations moved timbers, spars, sail cloth and cordage all about the shipyard were no longer capable of moving the new heavy guns and munitions produced by the factory. Over time, the Naval Gun Factory's

railroad system stretched to 11.3 miles of track and by World War II would handle thousands of rail cars per month. The railroad's civilian engineer and firemen were all employees of the NGF. The railway

was no place for Casey Jones-type highballing since crews had to be constantly alert for automobiles and pedestrians.¹¹⁵



Adjusting to Change

There may have been progressive changes in mission, equipment and regulations, but work at the Naval Gun Factory was

still demanding and inherently dangerous. Always present were superheated metals and noxious gases. Everywhere overhead leather belts

¹¹² Hibben, op. cit., p. 197.

¹¹³ Ibid, p. 181.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, p. 194.

¹¹⁵ *The Log*, 15 April 1951, p. 7.

were used to transfer power to machinery and there was always a danger to the unwary. By its very nature as an industrial complex the factory would always remain a dangerous work environment. As a manufacturer of ordnance, NGF employees were often exposed to the hazards of dangerous munitions and explosive devices. In September and again in December 1899 loud explosions rocked the Gun Forge Shop. In both incidents the explosions shook the building, blew out shop windows and overturned heavy forge equipment. Miraculously, there were no fatalities because the mechanics had left to take their half hour lunch. Navy investigators later found the cause of both accidents to be escaping gasoline vapors from a generator used to run shop equipment.¹¹⁶

In contrast, factory management found the new system of hiring and promotion by “merit” a success, as Commander Thomas F. Jewell Superintendent of the Gun Factory declared:

No branch of the government service is conducted on a more thoroughly business basis than the Gun Factory. The old system by which the navy yards were mere political machines has no place in the modern establishment.... Political affinities are not considered in the employment of mechanics, and the superintending force-foreman, master mechanics and the like have obtained their positions through competitive examinations, merit and fitness for the required duties. No incompetent or indolent man can have his name retained on the

rolls by virtue of the good offices of a friend at court, while the industrious and worthy.¹¹⁷

The Naval Gun Factory Band

At 7 pm on the evening of 2 July 1904, a new sound was heard, the dulcet music of the first open air concert of The Naval Gun Factory Band.¹¹⁸ That July evening the thirty-three member civilian band gave its first open air concert on the Navy Yard grounds at Leutze Park. The assembled crowd of workers, their families and nearby residents heard the bands rendition of the “Waldmere Waltz” the “Cecilia Polka,” “The Pioneer March” and other favorites of the day.

An NGF Band Member Remembers



Several musically inclined Gun Factory mechanics formed the Naval Gun Factory Band. One old-timer speaking to a reporter remembered his time with the band.

There had been talk of organizing a musical activity of some sort prior to that date but nothing concrete had been done about it. A new impetus was given by the arrival on the scene of a Mr. Charles Stanley, a retired minstrel man, who had entered the employ of the Navy Yard in the East Gun Carriage Shop. He had grown

¹¹⁶ *Washington Post*, 1 September 1899, p. 1 and 28 December 1899, p. 2.

¹¹⁷ *Harpers New Monthly Magazine*, July 1894, pp. 251-261.

¹¹⁸ *The Washington Post*, 2 July 1904, p. 9.

very much overweight and hoped to get back into good physical condition again. Mr. Stanley was a very thorough and scholarly musician and after exploring the possibilities among the Yard employees we soon had the nucleus of a band ready.

It became evident however that we were weak in some of the lead parts and we decided to look outside for additional recruits. We obtained some from the Government Printing Office, the police department, the Patent Office and few from private industry. We ordered marching uniforms, a bass drum and cymbals. (The members owned their own instruments with these exceptions). We secured all the popular marches and easier concert numbers and worked industriously to perfect ourselves. By this time we had permission to hold our rehearsals after hours in the Sail Loft. This became our permanent head quarters and we afterwards gave a series of public dances during the winter season in the Sail Loft under proper authorization. We soon began to secure occasional marching jobs such as Washington Birthday, parades in Alexandria Fireman Conventions in Richmond, and Confederate Veterans Reunions in the Shenandoah Valley.

We played many summer evenings in the Band Stand inside the Navy Gate and frequently played concerts for Captain and Mrs. Pendleton on boat trips down the river when they were entertaining friends.¹¹⁹

The new band continued to enjoy wide popularity. They played and marched in parades, played concerts and even election night soirees throughout the capital region. The Band was finally

¹¹⁹ Recollections of J.M. S. Kaufman, *The Log*, 15 September 1951, p. 11.

disestablished in 1922; the same year Department of Navy established the Washington Navy Yard Band composed exclusively of active duty sailors. This new military band was later redesignated as the official U.S. Navy Band.¹²⁰ For more on the Band see Appendix E.

Early Private Sector Competition

In the years following 1900 private sector armament manufacturers began to pressure Congress for some of the work performed at NGF. The Department of the Navy came to believe that giving some work to private arms manufactures was a prudent step and would help that sector develop the necessary skills to insure production and repair orders were rapidly filled. One result of this policy was a steep decline in work going to the Gun Factory and as a consequence the factory mechanics were reduced to only 339 employees.¹²¹

John Simering the Mechanic who phoned the President

Following the Great White Fleet's circumnavigation of the globe, Gun Factory orders for guns and ammunition declined. In February 1908 the Navy announced that 1,000 mechanics were to be laid off at NGF. Machinist John B. Simering, an active unionist, phoned the White House and asked to speak with President Theodore Roosevelt. Simering had met the President years before when Roosevelt, as Assistant Secretary of

¹²⁰ *The Log*, Ibid, *Washington Post*, 23 February 1906, p., 23, and 8 November 1905, Part 2, p. 1.

¹²¹ Peck, op. cit., p. 199.

the Navy, had negotiated with various labor officials to resolve a dispute. Simering told Roosevelt that the Yard Mechanics were willing to share the loss by working only part time at the foundry. After a personal meeting with Simering, Roosevelt considered his request and ordered the layoff revoked, and Simering's plan adopted.¹²²

Badge? What Badges? Identification Badges Create a Controversy

For nearly a century the Navy Yard had been a small community where at most everyone knew each other. In August 1899, this changed. The Naval Gun Factory now supplied each of its employees with a badge for the first time. The mechanics were told to wear their badge at all times while on duty or on the shop floor. *The New York Times* reported that soon the men were "growling" that they did not like this new requirement. Some employees did not wear them and stated that if they were asked to put them on they would strike. An officer of the Gun Factory is quoted as saying, the machinists "should consider carefully before they struck on such grounds as work at the in the Navy Yard is always sought for by more men than the government can employ."¹²³ Although the machinists

growled, they went back to work with their badges.

General Master Mechanics/The Ruling Powers

As the naval civilian workforce grew ever larger and technically more complex, the factory chain of command with over a dozen specialized trades became unwieldy. Master Mechanics and their workgroup leaders looked to a small cadre of naval officers for planning and work direction. The factory superintendent recommended these tasks would be better performed under

civilian administrative oversight. In 1909, the Department of the Navy authorized the classification of "General Master Mechanic." The Department of the Navy allocated two of these positions for NGF. The Superintendent chose Charles G.

Robinson and Michael A. Lynch to fill these critical jobs. Both men turned out to be inspired selections. Robinson, born in 1857, started his career in 1877 as fourth-class brass and iron finisher. Michael Lynch was born in 1858 and first went to work at NGF in 1884 (having worked 12 years in the private sector) as a brass and iron finisher second class. Both men rapidly established themselves as expert tradesmen and innovators and were promoted to Master Mechanic by 1890. Later, as General Master Mechanics each had helped redesign



¹²² Ibid, pp. 202-203.& *Washington Post* 31 March 1908 p.2

¹²³ *New York Times*, 31 August 1899.

and modernize NGF's physical plant, replacing steam with electric machinery and coal-fired forges with oil. As General Master Mechanics, Robinson and Lynch each directed workforces of over 2,000 employees. They made most of the day-to-day decisions regarding NGF employees' pay, training, career progression and promotions and decided most disciplinary and performance matters. During WWI the Department of the Navy commended both Lynch and Robinson for exemplary leadership that dramatically increased ordnance production. In the factory's hierarchical world their longevity and tenure as General Master Mechanics made them second only to the Commandant. NGF records for the first two decades of the 20th century reflect that these two men ran the organization for all practical purposes.

The Senate Subway

In 1912 the workers at NGF were asked to manufacture subway monorail cars for the new U.S. Senate Subway. The cars when completed were the perfect match for the new subway and were maintained by the NGF employees until the 1960s.

The “Taylor System” or “Scientific Management” theory clashes with the Navy Yard Mechanics

In 1912, rumors spread all over the Gun Factory that management would apply the Taylor System to the production of armaments. The “Taylor System” was the dominant management theory for much of American business in the early twentieth century. As American

industry pursued ever-larger markets, business leaders felt they needed experts in production, distribution and labor. Large businesses were now thought too complex for generalists to run. The need for such expertise led to the advent of the management consultant.

The most highly regarded consultant to arise out of this era is Frederick Winslow Taylor. Frederick Taylor's name was synonymous with "scientific management," a theory that proposed the reduction of waste through the careful study of work and the processes of production. Taylor claimed most American factories were inefficient and skilled workers operate too slowly. Taylor proposed solutions that he believed would solve both problems. He and his followers believed by studying the time it took *each worker* to complete a step in a process, and then by rearranging equipment, they could discover what an average worker could produce under optimum conditions. The promise of higher wages, Taylor figured, would create added incentive for workers to exceed this "average" level. Taylor's emphasis on breaking up work into its component parts, timing and standardization impressed management. Scientific Management was rapidly became the panacea for higher production and increased efficiency.

Taylor's theories found support with then Secretary of the Navy Truman H. Newberry. Newberry approved a test of Taylor's ideas with the Norfolk Naval Shipyard selected as the test site for the Navy. The test raised workers' concerns and resulted in a strike and

work stoppages. The Navy however decided to expand the test to the other Yards and the Gun Factory.¹²⁴ The Gun Factory workers felt that Taylor's systems were an insult and that they were working at peak efficiency. They pointed to the fact that NGF had the highest production level of any government ordnance facility already, and they resented having to work faster than they thought was healthy or fair. The mechanics protested against the Taylor System of shop management in a letter to Acting Secretary of the Navy Beekman Winthrop. The committee of Yard mechanics stated, "[t]he leading idea, which unmistakably pervades Mr. Taylor's system is ...the complete elimination of all consideration for the welfare of the employees that the manufacturer may profit seems to be the fundamental principle of the system."¹²⁵

The employees' committee concluded their letter by reiterating that NGF workers were incensed at "the latest fad of the officials" and their intent to fight it to the end. NGF's high production levels eventually prevailed and the adoption of the Taylor System for the factory became unnecessary. While the Department of the Navy bowed to the workers' concerns and chose not to introduce the Taylor System per se, it did adopt many of Taylor's methods, especially his ideas regarding the necessity of monitoring individual worker's productivity through systematic performance and

work measurement reviews.¹²⁶ All of these changes made NGF a different place. In a 1913 report the Navy conceded that despite its workers receiving higher wages (average \$ 3.93 per day) that management of the Gun Factory was different from the other Yards "owing to the fact that the work is so greatly in excess of all other industrial activities of the yard combined."¹²⁷

In a similar situation at another ship yard the Navy summarized the lessons of the Taylor controversy.

Efficiency can best be promoted by the supervision of methods, processes and operation in ship and office work when intelligent and efficient supervision is exercised in shops it will probably be found that it is done by foremen or quartermen who actually know how to do the work themselves. Such supervision is thus exercised by the men who understand the spirit and tradition and not by the men whose knowledge of shop methods is often academic in nature.

The report then concluded, "when planning and supervision is entrusted to draftsmen, efficiency specialists and other presumed experts, such character of inspection is viewed with suspicion if not resentment by the ordinary mechanic."¹²⁸

Despite such critics and worker antipathy, scientific management continued to remain a vital theory within the Federal Government. The

¹²⁴ *New York Times*, 21 January 1912, p. 8. & for Taylorism see Hugh G.J. Aitken, *Scientific Management in Action Taylorism at the Watertown Arsenal, 1908-1915*

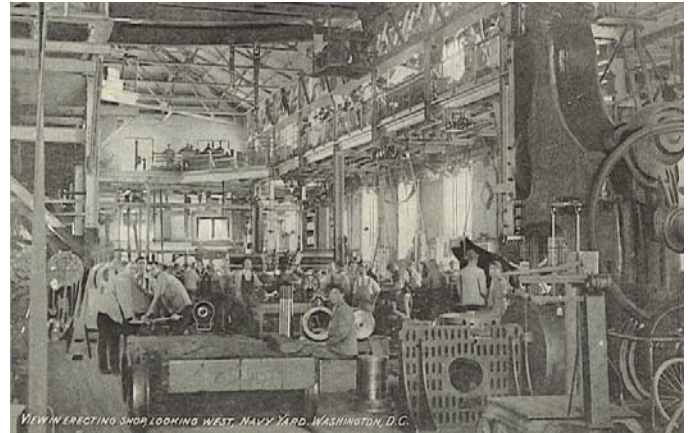
¹²⁵ *Washington Post*, 11 September 1911, p. 1.

¹²⁶ *Washington Post*, January 4, 1912, p. 1.

¹²⁷ *General Conditions of the Navy Yards and Naval Stations of the Atlantic Gulf Coasts*, p. 270.

¹²⁸ *Ibid*, p. 68, and Peck, op. cit., p. 205.

Classification Act of 1949 and 1990's enthusiasm for "Reengineering" all flow directly from the ideas of Frederick Taylor.



Some idea of the work environment that confronted reformers such as Frederick Taylor can be seen in these four post card views of the Naval Gun Factory circa 1912. Clockwise from bottom left: The Gun Shop, Miscellaneous Shop , Erecting Shop and Secondary Mount Shop.

World War I through the Closing of the Naval Gun Factory, 1914 – 1962

World War I

When the United States entered World War I, the Naval Gun Factory was already producing 14-inch guns for Battle Cruisers and the newly designed 16-inch guns were intended for the latest Battleships like the *Arizona* and *Nevada*. Thanks to the Naval Act of 1916, the Gun Factory was enlarged to build the newest super guns prior to the outbreak of hostilities. The new appropriation also gave the Navy Yard the ability to expand its land area both to the east and west sides of the facility. By 1917, the Gun Factory was employing 6,000 workers in three shifts to prepare the Nation for the war in Europe.



During the war the Yard workers had joined their fellow countrymen in patriotic demonstrations and war bond rallies. Such demonstrations and war rallies were a regular feature of life on the home front during WW I.

One of the largest patriotic demonstrations ever occurred on Monday evening, 21 January 1918.

That evening nine thousand NGF employees attend a giant patriotic rally in support of the United States and its allies. Secretary of the Navy, Josephus Daniels was in attendance as was the Reverend Billy Sunday, a famous evangelist, (and former Chicago Cubs player). The rally was held at the Reverend Sunday's Washington DC Tabernacle where Sunday gave the invocation praying:

Oh Lord we beseech Thee to
render to render service to our
life. Thou hast poured out of
heaven all thy blessings upon us
and let us now do service
whether we work in the mine or
are the owner of the mine or in
the government or anywhere
else against the vilest most
infamous government which
has forced war upon us....And
Lord, we're going to win this
fight if it takes everything
we've got!

The *Washington Post* reporter wrote when the popular evangelist concluded his prayer he received deafening applause. Captain A. L. Willard superintendent of the Navy Yard then addressed the workers and praised them for their faithfulness telling them they were a vital part of winning the conflict.

After hearing Mrs. Newton D. Baker, wife of the Secretary of War, sing the *Battle Hymn of the Republic*, the mechanics presented Secretary of the Navy Daniels with signed resolutions containing over 9000 NGF employee signatures. Each employee had pledged their loyalty to the government. After receiving the resolutions Secretary Daniels read a message from

President Wilson congratulating the workers for their devotion to the war effort and promised to present them to the President.¹²⁹

War Bonds were central to funding the great conflict. To help raise money for the war, Captain Willard let Yard employees stop work early to attend bond rallies.¹³⁰ NGF employees held dances and benefits, and spare pennies were put into shell casings placed around the workplaces. Yard workers also contributed funds for the Red Cross and formed their own Red Cross Auxiliary. Through fund raising efforts, they were able to purchase an ambulance for the Yard and everywhere production and capacity increased.¹³¹

War patriotism also raised issues of loyalty. During the war the United States Civil Service Commission began for the first time to do systematic background checks to confirm the loyalty of applicants. Those like John George Sauer, a native of Germany who was deemed of questionable loyalty, were denied NGF employment.¹³²

The war also put a premium on securing skilled labor. As early as 1915 private sector arms companies such Remington Arms Manufacturing were competing for munitions contracts with the belligerent nations. To compete successfully they made

tempting offers to NGF workers. Secretary of the Navy Daniels was so concerned enough to push for higher wages for skilled mechanics.¹³³

Despite the efforts of the Daniels and the Congress the private sector remained a constant competitor for labor as wages rose all during the war. When the guns fell silent in November of 1918, the Yard labor force had increased to over 10,000 workers.

Women Enter the Workforce

During World War I (1917-1918), NGF expanded in size and ran twenty-four hours each day, seven days a week. Because of the acute wartime shortage of civilian workers, the Navy looked to women and created the Yeoman "F" (Female) rating. This new rating allowed for the first time thousands of women to volunteer for the wartime service. Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels, who created the Yeoman (F) rating, did so because it allowed the Navy to call up women specifically to relieve officers and men for sea duty, rather than as a substitute for male civilian employees who were serving in the armed forces. This wartime experiment proved so successful that many women were kept on after the armistice as civilian employees. Some like Nellie M. Stein and Ann Tapscott served as Yeoman (F) in the Naval Gun Factory for the duration of the war then immediately went to work as a civilian employee under the civil service as clerks in the same division. Tapscott later became a

¹²⁹ *Washington Post* 22 January 1918 p.4

¹³⁰ *Ibid.* 13 June 1917 p.4

¹³¹ Marolda, op. cit., pp. 53-58.

¹³² John George Sauer, Letter from Civil Service Commission to Superintendent, dated 12 November 1917, NARA RG 45.

¹³³ *Washington Post* 11 July 1915 p. 11

supervisor in the Accounting Department.¹³⁴



African-American women too began to enter the yard labor force during the war. Most of these new workers, such Mrs. Mabel Brown who began her 36 year career as a

“Charwomen” (a title later changed to laborer), worked cleaning offices, laboratories and industrial spaces. Their work was often hard and physically demanding, but the work was also steady and better compensated than most positions available to them in the private sector.¹³⁵



Nellie Stein began her long federal career in 1912 as a Printers Assistant with the Government Printing Office. When war broke out, Stein

volunteered for active duty as a Yeoman F and was stationed at the Naval Gun Factory. After the Armistice, she was hired as “typewriter” at NGF. In 1932 Stein moved into the new Industrial Relations Division where she “constantly studied laws, directives, comptroller general decisions and

books on personnel administration for 14 years.” Stein and others like her often had to overcome a great deal of skepticism from her male supervisors and coworkers. Here is one example of the challenges that Stein and other women faced in establishing a place for themselves in the Yard’s work force. “Ordinarily the Personnel Officer would not recommend a Civil Service female employee to an administrative position. He would not so recommend women to be in complete charge of a division for he does not believe that women are emotionally equipped to meet the demands of such a position.” Despite his considerable reservations, NGF’s Personnel Officer CDR. Davis did recommend Stein for the job and by the time of her retirement in 1948 Nellie Stein was NGF’s Assistant Personnel Officer (CAF-11), one of the highest graded positions at the factory.¹³⁶

By the 1920s, some factory organizations, such as the Accounting and Supply Departments, not only had large numbers of women but they in fact outnumbered men.

The Case of the German Master Mechanics

Toward the end of World War I, the factory had built a new optical shop. This new shop supplied high quality lenses and optical devices for the fleet and range finders for submarines and airplanes. The new optical plant, which opened in 1919, was billed as the most modern and comprehensive in the nation. The plant had one problem

¹³⁴ *The Log*, July 1944 & Ann Tapscott OPF, NARA.

¹³⁵ Mabel Brown OPF, NARA.

¹³⁶ Nelli M. Stein OPF, memo dated 1 September 1937, NARA.

however, finding sufficient and capable staff to run and direct the shop. Facing a shortage of qualified labor at home, Naval Intelligence had encouraged German optical workers of the giant Karl Zeiss optical works in now defeated Germany to immigrate to the United States and bring their superb knowledge and skills to the new optical plant. There was one significant problem with this plan; namely, no one had explained it to NGF employees. Many of the factory employees were returning servicemen who felt these former enemies should not be allowed to take positions in the factory, especially as Master Mechanics. The fact that these recent émigrés were not citizens infuriated the workforce. Their protest eventually carried the day with then Assistant Secretary of the Navy Franklin D. Roosevelt, who stated “I am unalterably opposed to the introduction of enemy aliens into such important posts as those at the optical shop of this or other yards.” In the end the Germans optical workers were allowed to remain as employees, but they were not granted the classification of Master Mechanic.¹³⁷

The Yard Transforms: The Retirement Act of 1920 and the Classification Act of 1923

Workers Push for Retirement Act

At the turn of the century Naval Gun Factory employees formed the Joint Retirement Committee to promote a uniform and coordinated request for

¹³⁷ *Washington Post*, 23 January 1919, p. 1.

retirement legislation. The movement was funded by voluntary collections of 5 cents from apprentices and 10 cents from journeymen workers. The Committee repeatedly sent delegations to lobby the Congress in an attempt to convince members that a retirement system for Navy Civilians was a humane and just method for ensuring older employees adequate compensation in their senior years. Several sessions of Congress appeared ready to pass the legislation, but it remained for the 66th Congress to finally give it the adopting vote.¹³⁸ After years of lobbying and petitioning, in 1920 Federal workers finally caught the attention of the Congress. That year the “Sterling Lehlbach Bill” instituted a retirement system for employees of the U.S. Civil Service. Now Yard employees who reached 70 years of age with at least 15 years of service could rest from their labors. The new law based annuities on an average of the last 10 years of service. The law also mandated a pay range where no retiree could receive more than \$ 720.00 per year nor less than \$ 180.00 as a pension.

What the Retirement Act Meant to Yard Employees

Prior to 1920, retirement was not an option for most Yard workers. Elderly employees like seamstress Mrs. Almira V. Brown, mechanics Joseph Padgett and Benjamin McCathran and custodian Jared Mundell illustrate what the new Retirement Act meant for NGF personnel.

¹³⁸ *The Log*, 1 September 1951, p. 3.

Almira V. Brown, Seamstress

In 1861 Almira Brown's husband Francis Brown was killed in a tragic explosion in the Yard's Ordnance Laboratory. As a civilian, no pension was available for his widow. Despite efforts by then Commandant



Dahlgren that she be granted a pension, her claim was denied.¹³⁹ To sustain Brown and her two children, she was apparently allowed employment at the Yard. According to the available records, she was one of the first women to work at the Washington Navy Yard. In 1920, Brown was 81 years of age. She had worked continuously at the Yard since in March 1864. For over 50 years she had sewed canvass powder bags and awnings for surface ships. In 1907 in a move to promote greater efficiency, the Navy Department tried unsuccessfully to release Brown and about fifty other women by moving the work to another government arsenal. The women directly petitioned then President Theodore Roosevelt who got the decision reversed. Brown managed to stay on. She apparently loved her job even in her eighth decade despite poor health and wanted to stay on. However, due to the new mandatory retirement age, her request was denied.

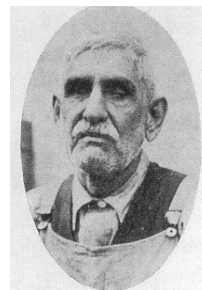
¹³⁹ Civil War Pension Index, R 2540, NARA, Hibben, op. cit., p. 105, and *Washington Post*, 11 January 1907, p. 4.

Joseph Padgett, Machinist

Joseph Padgett came from a long line of mechanics and was 77 in 1920. He first came to work at the Yard in 1855. He spent over half a century in the NGF's Breech Mechanism Shop. He was a long-standing enthusiast of the factory baseball team and was still playing the game in his late sixties.¹⁴⁰

Jared Mundell, Laborer

In 1920 Jared Mundell, Sr. was the Yard's oldest male employee. He claimed to have sailed with Commodore Perry on his second voyage to Japan in the 1850s. During the Civil War he had served with two Union Regiments as a Principal Musician. After the war he had gone to work with the Washington Navy Yard and had served over fifty years as caretaker for the Navy Museum.¹⁴¹



Benjamin McCathran Machinist

Born 1 February
1855 McCathran
went to work for the
Naval Gun Factory as

a Machinist in 1880. He was promoted over time to Machinist 1st class. While working in the Gun Carriage Shop in 1893 McCathran was struck in the left eye by a piece of steel flying off the hammer of a fellow worker. His wound was serious, especially so for McCathran, who already was blind in right eye from a previous accident.

¹⁴⁰ Joseph Padgett OPF, NARA.

¹⁴¹ Jared Mundell OPF, NARA, and Civil War File, 1st Dist. Of Columbia Infantry Co F and 15 N.Y. Eng. Co A, NARA.

Over time, McCathran's sight in the left eye gradually failed leaving him almost legally blind. At the time, the normal procedure for the federal government was to discharge a disabled worker as the law provided no real method of compensation or disability retirement for injury sustained during employment.

NGF management kept McCathran on as a machinist doing various small jobs as his handicap would permit. In 1909, however, McCathran was reduced in grade to Machinist 4th Class and stayed at that grade until his retirement in 1920.

What these older workers had in common was their real need to continue working or face the remainder of their lives dependent on savings or the charity of their families. (For more on retirement see Appendix F.) In 1920 Brown, McCathran, Mundell, Padgett and, 150 other coworkers were able finally to retire with some steady income.¹⁴² Ironically, three of these yard old timers requested to be retained beyond the statutory retirement age. In each case their requests were denied.

The New Classification System

Three years later the government passed yet another piece of landmark legislation. This new law changed the Yard's old job classification and compensation system. The new system applied not only to the Navy Department but to other agencies as well. While it would later be

amended, with increases and a few extra top grades to reach the levels of the entire workforce, its most distinctive feature remained the classification of the civilian employees into four distinct groups or "services". These were according to the difficulty and responsibility of the duties to be performed, and to some extent, to the degree of training required. These four "services" were:

- Professional and Scientific (P)
- Sub professional (SP)
- Clerical, Administrative, and Fiscal (CAF)
- Custodial (later Crafts, Protective, and Custodial) (CPC).

Within each group, there were to be several grades, again based on the relative importance, difficulty, responsibility, and value of the work.

The most important and practical benefit of the 1923 classification bill for employees, was standardization of the job grading system. Until that year, job grading had been left mostly to custom and usage among the various Yards. For workers, the other clear benefit was that the new standards had some written definition and they were governed by the principle of "substantially equal pay for substantially equal work."

Efficiency / Performance ratings

The Navy Department issued instructions to the Navy Yard in January 1913 detailing a system to rank employees for promotion. This efficiency system was the prototype of all subsequent Navy performance management and evaluation systems. The system was designed with the

¹⁴² Almira V. Brown, Benjamin McCathran, Jared Mundall, and Joseph Padgett OPFs, NARA.

assistance of the U. S. Civil Service Commission. Employees were to be rated on various duties and character attributes. The ratings were intended to be objective and were based exclusively on the supervisor's knowledge and appreciation of the work assigned. There were six elements for employees and seven for supervisors. In 1913 supervisors, like Master Mechanic Charles Smithson, were rated on such items as: Quality of Work, Accuracy, Interpreting and Executing Orders, General Efficiency, Physical Condition, Habits and Conduct, Punctuality, and Number of Absences (over and above leave with pay legally due).¹⁴³ In the 1920s, responding to criticism that the new system was too subjective, the Navy Department sought to quantify its evaluation system by rating employees on a scale of 100 to 59: namely, Excellent 90 to 100, Very Good 80 to 89, Good 70-79, Fair 60-69, and Poor 59 and below. Up to 3 additional Points could be awarded for longevity. For the year 1921, Smithson, for example, was accorded 99.5 points with 3 additional for longevity bringing his total score to 102.5.¹⁴⁴ In this new rating system each NGF mechanic was graded relative to other workers in the same trade. For example, Curtin R. Bell, a first class mechanic, received a final cumulative rating of 94.53. In relation to the NGF's 2248 other Mechanics, Bell stood number 61, and he was number 31 in relationships to his peers in his immediate shop. Relative standing

was key to successful placement or discharge in a reduction-in-force. From its introduction, this system was very unpopular, but lasted into World War II, when teamwork rather than



individual performance came to be emphasized.

Women Ask for the Equal Pay

In 1919, the National Women's Trade Union League asked Secretary of the Navy, Josephus Daniels, for the same pay as men working in the Yards. The committee protested to the Secretary against rating women as seamstresses and flag makers in the Navy Yards at the pay of common laborers. Sewing, the committee contended, was a skilled trade and none of the ratings for male skilled trades were as low. They also complained that seamstress and flag maker inspectors did not receive the same pay as men.¹⁴⁵ Despite this and other appeals, comparable pay did not become a reality for another four decades.

“Roaring Twenties:” Health, Safety and Working Conditions

By 1921, working conditions at the Washington Navy Yard and Naval

¹⁴³ Charles Smithson OPF, Semi Annual Report of Fitness, dated 30 June 1913, NARA.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, dated 16 December 1921. & Schinagel, Mary S. *History of efficiency ratings in the Federal Government*

¹⁴⁵ *Washington Post*, 10 November 1919.

Gun Factory were becoming standardized and somewhat less arduous. The employee manual for that year notes the Yard labor board was “under civil-service rules” while white collar clerical employees “are employed through the Civil Service Commission.” Employees who were injured on the job while in the performance of their duty and required prolonged treatment of a nature not provided at the Yard’s dispensary were referred or conveyed to the public health dispensary or to the Providence Hospital, where the United States Public Health Service took charge of the case and furnished all necessary medical, surgical, and hospital services.

By 1920, the Navy Yard had its own ambulance service, which was available seven days a week 24 hours a day. The Yard Medical Officer could proudly boast a fully equipped medical facility and that all injured employees could be picked up by the Yard Ambulance and brought to the dispensary in three to four minutes from anywhere on the Yard.¹⁴⁶ Injured and disabled employees were eligible now for the first time to receive workers’ compensation while away from their job due to occupational injury. The lot of Yard employee spouses had also improved. Spouses of yard employees who died as a result of a job injury were now eligible for 35% of the deceased employee’s wages with additional allowances for their children. These

¹⁴⁶ *Annual Report of the Department of the Navy 1920*, p. 929.

survivor payments were paid monthly until death or remarriage.¹⁴⁷

Despite renewed emphasis on workplace safety, work at the Yard still remained dangerous. Everywhere in the Gun Factory there was constant noise and industrial activity. At the forges workmen were pouring molten superheated metal into large molds for ship cannons. Enormous cranes now replaced oxen and draft horses in moving finished munitions to rail and ship. Despite safety efforts some Yard workers died each year. In 1920, for example, the Gun Factory had five work-related fatalities. These tragedies included: three fatal falls, an electrocution and an employee crushed by a crane.

During the 1920s, the Yard was growing more conscious of smoking as a safety issue. In 1921, smoking regulations allowed smoking between 1200 and 1230 and in most of the shops during night shifts but not on the streets unless it was during the lunch break.

The 1921 *Manual for Employees of the United States Navy Yard and Station* reflects the pervasive industrial character of work and the new concern for workers’ safety:

When working around molten metal, wear congress shoes. Use a brush not your hand, to clean away chips from your machine. Never fool or play while you work. Don’t flood the bottom of a furnace with

¹⁴⁷ *Manual for Employees of the United States Navy Yard and Station Washington D.C. 1921*, U.S. Government Printing Office, pp. 3 and 20.

oil when lighting the furnace. Don't attempt to jump off or on a moving elevator. Always ring your crane bell before and when carrying a load.¹⁴⁸

After World War I, ordnance production remained strong until the mid-nineteen twenties. Gun Factory employees still worked three shifts, as they had during the war. All employees worked fixed schedules, forty-four hours a week, eight hours per day with a half day on Saturday. The normal day shift was 0800 to 1200 and 1230 to 1630. Employees had a designated lunch period of 1200 to 1230. The only approved variation was for Gun Factory machine operators who were allowed to work straight through from 0800 to 1600 and eat their lunch at their press or forge.¹⁴⁹

Employees performing industrial or dirty work in the factory foundry or its forge shop were now allowed five minutes time for washing up before quitting time. "These special privileges are allowed in the foundry and forge shops on account of the peculiar character of the work performed in these shops."¹⁵⁰

The Gun Factory and the Navy Yard both developed a factory-like work ethic.

The various shops have in addition local gongs and whistles, which are sounded for special warnings, such as arrival of the pay wagon, opening of muster boards, etc.¹⁵¹

New Yard Security the Introduction of Photographic ID's and Fingerprints

Throughout the Yard, bells, gongs and whistles regulated employees' days.



The war and the modern era had brought greater concern for installation security. Photographic identity cards were now the norm and were issued to all employees.

Employees though were required to procure photographs for the new cards at their own expense. Three photos were required for shop employees and two for office workers. At the same time the Navy Department began to fingerprint all new

employees.¹⁵² Attendance was enforced and regulated, each shift's ID cards were color coded: Yellow for 2400 to 0800, Green for 0800 to 1630 and Red for 1600 to 2400. Musters were required on all shifts and a muster clerk carefully recorded attendance.¹⁵³ At the Gun Factory, musters were solemn and elaborate affairs.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, pp. 19-20.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 4.

¹⁵⁰ *Annual Report of the Navy Department for the Fiscal Year 1919*, U.S. Government Printing Office, p. 2370.

¹⁵¹ Ibid, p. 9.

¹⁵² Ibid, p. 8.

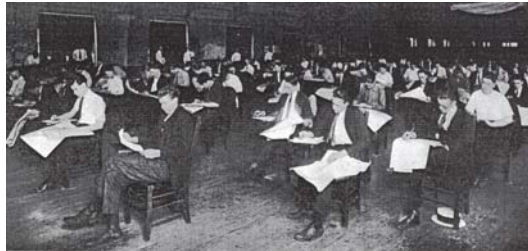
¹⁵³ Ibid, p. 9.

Mustering For Work

Mustering at NGF was a daily ritual. Michael Lynch recollected that

All the men employed in the Ordnance Department at that time had to muster by roll call. The men would all assemble in this old Ordnance Machine Shop and the Time Clerk would call the roll and when it was completed, he would call off the tardy ones, giving them a second chance. The time consumed at each muster answering to names and getting back to work, was about one-half hour. The men had to go to the pay office to draw their pay and this continued until several years ago, when we had the pay wagon go into the shops for pay offa year or so later as the force increased, they established a regular time card system, the men making out the cards themselves we then mustered by tagging in.¹⁵⁴

The NGF manual for supervisors reminded foremen: "An employee failing to muster at the regular muster period but reporting for work after the board is closed will lose one hour, and shall be reported as tardy on a green slip except if an employee has permission to report late..." Much discretion was left to factory management. For example the manual states, "A man appearing for work but failing to muster will not be permitted to leave the yard and report sick, but will be put to work at the next hour. However, if the Master Mechanic is convinced that



the man is sick, he will be released or the Yard Medical Officer will verify his condition."¹⁵⁵

The Navy Yard Apprentice School

On 15 December 1918 the Navy Yard Apprentice School opened for its first students. The new school represented the first serious attempt to standardize the training of Navy civilian apprentices. The school rapidly became critical because it allowed a continuous flow of well-qualified apprentices to fill mechanical and trade vacancies at both the Naval Gun Factory and the Washington Navy Yard. For over one hundred years young employees had learned their skills in an often-haphazard manner working on the job under the tutelage of a senior mechanic. Now with the establishment of the new school, shop apprentice training became a focused and structured three and four-year curriculum. As before, apprentices continued to receive on the job training with designated senior mechanics, but

the important, new element was the classroom instruction each apprentice received eight hours per week. Of course, the apprentice curriculum varied by occupation, but all Yard

apprentices were taught mathematics, chiefly shop algebra and trigonometry, mechanical drawing, basic electrical, basic chemistry and business English. In addition they received classes in safety, personal cleanliness and "moral habits." The new apprentice school

¹⁵⁴ Michael Lynch OPF.

¹⁵⁵ *Manual of Instructions for Department and Shop Supervisors*, US Government Printing Office, 1922, p. 49.

was so successful that within a few years other activities and private industry sought its guidance and attempted to emulate its curriculum. By 1919 the school had over 750 apprentices enrolled.¹⁵⁶

The Great Influenza Pandemic of 1918

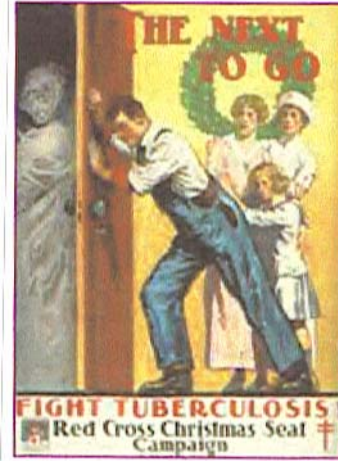
Health and sanitation were frequent concerns for both workers and management at the Yard. Outbreaks of disease could be devastating to employee health, productivity and morale. One of the worst episodes was the great influenza epidemic of 1918. This pandemic struck the United States hard. Ultimately the death total for the nation was close to a million people. Because this virulent flu strain peaked initially among naval personnel on shore duty in the last weeks of 1918, one scholar has called this “largely a naval affair.”¹⁵⁷ The disease moved down the eastern seaboard rapidly moving through the Philadelphia Naval Shipyard and then within days to other naval installations including the Washington Navy Yard and Naval Gun Factory. At the Yard, the *Navy Annual Report* for that year stated: “Out of a complement of 10,000 employees 2831 were stricken during the influenza attack.”¹⁵⁸ The report’s author goes on to state, “an effort was made to determine fatalities, but no

¹⁵⁶ *United States Naval Administration in World War II, US. Naval Gun Factory*, unpublished manuscript, Historical Section Naval Gun Factory Navy Library, Vol. 129, pp. 251–55.

¹⁵⁷ Alfred W. Crosby, *America’s Forgotten Pandemic: The Influenza of 1918*, p. 57.

¹⁵⁸ *Annual Report of the Navy Department for the Fiscal Year 1919*, U.S. Government Printing Office, pp. 23 and 70.

reliable data can be found.” The Navy Department, however, estimated the fatality rate for its uniformed personnel at 6 per 1000 sailors. Fear of contagion was so great that many feared to drive ambulances or go near the sick. WNY employees responded by volunteering to drive for DC Health Department.¹⁵⁹



Disease Prevention and Worker Health

Because of its large population of employees close to major urban environment, the threat of disease and contagion was always present. Yard regulations continually specified the importance of hygiene and preventive measure. By 1930 malaria was now a thing of the past but the *Regulations of the United States Navy Yard and Station* reminded employees:

Any civilian employee of this yard having a contagious or communicable disease shall immediately report this fact to his immediate superior.

¹⁵⁹ *Washington Post* 15 October 1918 p.9

The communicable diseases common around Washington, especially during the winter are chicken pox, diphtheria, influenza, measles, mumps, scarlet fever, whooping cough, and occasional cerebrospinal meningitis.¹⁶⁰

Some less serious, unsanitary health matters were still the subjects of repeated concern. Spitting was one loathsome custom that lingered on. "The practice of spitting on floors, walls of buildings, bases of columns, into cutting oils used on machines and other improper places is an unsanitary and filthy one that reflects discredit on shop management."¹⁶¹ Employees were reminded to use the cuspidors and spittoons strategically placed through out the Factory.

Work, Automobiles and Social Life

Socially, the Naval Gun Factory in 1920 was still in some ways the small world yard workers experienced in the 1800s. Most employees still lived in the District's 5th and 6th wards. They shopped, sent their children to school and worshipped nearby. But something new was happening; a few employees were now driving to work!



¹⁶⁰ *Regulations of the United States Navy Yard and Station, 1930*, U.S. Government Printing Office, p. 61.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

NGF issued its first parking regulations in 1914. An early history of the NGF states that a large number of employees were of "age to own and drive their own machines and they find it practical to live a considerable distance where they would find satisfactory housing."¹⁶² Perhaps 1914 is the year we can use for dating the commuter phenomenon at the Yard and beginning of the long transitional move to the Washington suburbs. Until the advent of the motorcar employees typically lived at most only a streetcar ride or so from the Latrobe Gate.

In 1909, the factory purchased its first truck, a 10,000-pound Studebaker Electric to haul heavy material around the arsenal.¹⁶³ A report for that year states, "The wisdom of providing this equipment is beyond question as a great saving is made in time and money." A 1910 report noted the factory now had four of these trucks and that they had proved particularly helpful in making the payments to the men in the shops by the pay department. The author noted this resulted in great savings financially.¹⁶⁴ "Truck Driver" and "Auto Mechanic" were now recognized as occupations.

Most NGF employees continued to take a lively interest in sports and recreation. Employees had by 1920, formed their own very active Recreation League. The Naval Gun Factory sponsored both baseball and

¹⁶² *History of the Navy-Yard 1799-1921*, Unpublished Manuscript Navy Library, p. 85.

¹⁶³ *Washington Post*, 7 February and 21 March 1909.

¹⁶⁴ *Annual Reports of the Secretary of the Navy, 1909 and 1910*, pp. 412 and 350 respectively.

football teams. NGF had a long tradition of winning baseball teams. In 1915 a team composed of apprentices and machinists had taken the Potomac League Championship Title. The Gun Factory had the Championship Baseball team for 1920 defeating the Marine Corps team to become



“undisputed champions in the government league.”¹⁶⁵ During the 1920s athletics were broadened to include basketball, bowling and tennis. The civilians that year fielded both a women’s and men’s teams for basketball. By 1920, budding thespians could also join the cast of Yard players for an employee production of the Gilbert and Sullivan’s comic operetta *HMS Pinafore*. The *Washington Times* reported the company’s first opera production a success: “It was a happy thought that made the Navy Yard players choose that comic idyll of the navy...picture, lyrics, comedy were all ably sustained.”¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁵ *Recreator Year Book*, Washington Navy Yard 1920, Navy Library, p. 22.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid*, p. 38.

For those employees who liked modern entertainment, there was the “moving pictures.” Films were shown each Thursday evening on the green at Leutze Park. Each silent picture was accompanied by music from the Navy Band. *The Recreator* notes:

“Nowadays every community has its movies and in this respect Washington, even down Southeast, here is well provided with excellent houses. However, on a hot summer’s evening it is a rare treat to see a good movie in the open air under the stars. Especially this is so when the conditions are such as those attending the Recreation League show given in Leutze Park Thursday evenings.”

The 1920 *Recreator* is replete with illustrations of the great silent film star Charlie Chaplin, who appears to have been a crowd favorite.

Some pleasures were even simpler such as the “Straw Ride” to Silver



Spring on a hay wagon, then considered a far distant location from the Yard. Employees also went to weekly dances organized by the Recreation League that often featured a “kissing booth” and a fortuneteller.¹⁶⁷

Despite overall improvements in working and social conditions, the Yard of the 1920s, like much of America, was still very to a great

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid*, p. 42.

extent a segregated society. While African-Americans and whites sometimes worked together, they did not do so as equals. Recreational activities remained segregated. The NGF Recreation League beginning in 1903, held annual summer camp for Yard workers' children and the poorer kids from the local community. Camp Good Will was for white children and Camp Pleasant for African-American children.¹⁶⁸ The camps were held in local parks giving city children some fresh air, water and experience outdoors. The children were taught to grow small gardens and basic hygiene. The Naval Gun Factory Band entertained playing favorite tunes of the day and NGF workers entertained as Mutt and Jeff.¹⁶⁹

Employee Discipline and Performance Cases referred to the Commandant

A review of early twentieth century official personnel folders reflects most disciplinary matters were dealt with on the spot by the supervisors. The most common offenses were absence without leave. In 1909, Jared Mundell, Jr., was absent without leave (AWOL) and missed 6 consecutive musters. Mundell, a machinist 4th class, was removed from the rolls on two separate occasions for such offenses. Each time he was reinstated after a year due to the acute shortage of skilled labor. More typical of infractions warranting disciplinary action was "tardy for muster." Navy Department regulations required that any employee who failed

to report to muster on time be reported as tardy to the Muster Clerk. On the third occasion, the worker was subjected to disciplinary action. Charles Diggs, a new blacksmith helper, was warned following his third infraction, and taking the message to heart became a top performer retiring in 1952.

In April 1918, two patternmakers on the night shift, Charles Stromberg and Robert Burns, were both caught by the night watchman, "Pitching Pennies," i.e., minor gambling. After an inquiry by their Foremen, Burns was removed and Stromberg was suspended for three days. Burns' supervisor justified his removal because Burns had previously been suspended for three days for sleeping on the job. The action proposed as Burns' removal "will work a moral benefit on the entire shop." Stromberg, the supervisor noted, was a first offender.

Burns appealed to then Commandant A.L. Willard.

In reply to the charge, I denied that I was guilty of gambling in the shop, on the technicality that it was not done in a sense of gain or thru continual offense, but simply in an innocent way. I did match a few nickels on that evening. In that way I am guilty. But in as much as I didn't make a practice of doing it, or was a continual offender, I believe the punishment is too severe.¹⁷⁰

Admiral Willard eventually decided to rescind the action and reinstate Burns. In lieu of discharge Burns was suspended for six days without pay.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁸ Ibid, p. 51.

¹⁶⁹ *Washington Post* 13 July 1913 p. 2

¹⁷⁰ Lynch, op. cit., n.p.

¹⁷¹ Ibid, n.p.

Gambling at WNY: Pikers and Plungers

In the early years of the 20th century NGF had significant problems with gambling. On 21 August 1913, on Thursday afternoon at 15:30 the Washington DC police force arrested six WNY employees. The employees were accused of illegal gambling or “making book on horses.” The men were taken to the Fifth police precinct and each was later released on \$1,000.00 bail. The police were apparently acting on tips from the disgruntled spouses and parents of Navy Yard employees. According to the Washington Post the police rapidly found that gambling at the Yard and NGF was a well organized, extensive and profitable operation. Secretary of the Navy, Josephus Daniels confirmed he was:

glad these men were arrested and that they will be adequately punished. Hundreds of young apprentices of the yard have been brought under the baneful influence of betting on horse races through the opportunity offered by the handbooks made the navy yard.¹⁷²

Commandant Hillary P. Jones stated his belief that thousands of dollars have been paid to the gamblers each week and that that apprentices had been large contributors. He complained that widespread gambling was leading to the impoverishment of families. DC police officials estimated fifty percent of the employees in the navy yard were gambling. The Post drew reader’s attention to the police belief that it was women, especially

female clerks, who were laying wagers:

These feminine gamblers, it is said once they begin to play the races do not prove “pikers” by any means but frequently become “plungers”.¹⁷³

Commandant Jones alerted to this pattern of wide spread gambling showed concern and irritation especially at the entire NGF supervisory cadre. The whole supervisory force of the East Gun Carriage Shop was reprimanded for allowing bookmakers on the premises. The Commandant admonished each of them regarding the:

deplorable conditions in the shop over which they are entrusted with control as disclosed by the recent raid on race horse hand book makers. It is inconceivable that any one of the supervisors could have had knowledge of such conditions and allowed them to continue but the fact is they did exist, even without such knowledge, argues a state of discipline that reflects grave discredit on the shop as well as the whole Gun Factory.

The Commandant went on to point out that the bookmakers’ headquarters were situated in the East Gun Carriage Shop. His letter concluded with a stern warning to the force informing them that this reprimand would be placed in all their official personnel files.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷² *Washington Post* 21 August 1913 p. 1

¹⁷³ Ibid 24 August 1913 p. 6

¹⁷⁴ OPF Charles M. Smithson

Provide Extraordinary Service at a Local Disaster: The Knickerbocker Theater Collapse



Late on a cold and snowy January evening in 1922, the Yard Officer of the Watch, CDR Hubbard Kimmel, received frantic calls for help from the DC Fire Department. The Fire Department explained that the roof of the Knickerbocker Theater had collapsed under the recent heavy snowfall. One hundred and seven people were dead and many more trapped. Among those Hubbard directed to respond were civilian employees from the Boiler Shop at the Naval Gun Factory. These employees worked for over 48 hours in subfreezing temperatures using acetylene torches, hacksaws and sledgehammers to help free survivors and locate and recover the dead. Nearly two hundred people were rescued, and President Harding telegraphed his personal thanks to the rescuers.

Armistice Wage and Salary Cuts

Following the end of WWI Department of the Navy rapidly cut the size of its workforce in addition orders for munitions at the Gun Factory declined. Yard mechanics were

particularly vulnerable since their wages were based on comparable pay in the private sector. Wage cuts now became the order of the day. WNY workers asked the Navy to cut administrative overhead. A young yard messenger who had his pay cut to \$5.20 weekly felt inspired to resign his position in verse. The young poet stated his case thus:

The Navy has reduced my pay to just one dollar four a day. It will be seen that the proposed rate of pay for messenger boy is insufficient to cover ordinary living expenses, namely proposed pay \$5.20; deduction for pension \$0.13; carfare for five days \$ 1.00 room per week \$2.00; balance \$2.07.

The sum of \$2.07 is less then 30 cents a day for three meals, leaving absolutely nothing for clothes, laundry, and other sundries. Advice, advice, I humbly seek how to live on five per week¹⁷⁵

Despite the young poets plea wages were in fact reduced and stay that way till the mid 1920's, when the economic prosperity finally return to the nation.

¹⁷⁵ *Washington Post* 16 September 1921 p. 2

The 1930s, the Great Depression and the Navy Yard.



While the recession of the 1930's was world wide and affected the entire United States in one respect, Washington D.C. was fortunate. While millions of American workers were unemployed, with its many government agencies, the District of Columbia remained a magnet for job seekers. The Navy's need for ordnance, munitions and supplies continued. In 1933, when the NGF put out a notice for 500 new workers, the *Washington Evening Star* reported:

... lines of men started forming as early as 10 o'clock last night, although the blanks (applications) were not distributed until 9 this morning. By midnight several hundred men were assembled outside the gate at 9th and M Streets southeast. Many brought blankets, cushions and automobile seats as they dozed through the chilly hours.

The throng continued to swell as the hour for distributing the blanks drew near. The police guard had been increased throughout the night and by 9 o'clock 50 officers were forming applicants in line.

There were double lines at least four blocks long and about 1000 additional job seekers had collected

by mistake before a gate on the 11th Street side of the Navy yard.

The blanks were handed out in a comparatively short time, once distribution began. Five hundred were given. The names of those fortunate enough to obtain the slips will form a new eligibility list for common laborers under the Civil Service.¹⁷⁶

The report continued:

...successful applicants must be able to shoulder a sack and contents weighing 125 pounds and their rating will be based on their ability to do hard manual labor.¹⁷⁷

The Navy Yard pay for common labor in the year 1933 ranged from .43 to .53 cents an hour, less a 15 % economy deduction and another deduction for retirement.

The Economic Crisis of the 1930's and its Impact on NGF Workers

The economic crisis of the 1930s that was part of a great worldwide depression prompted the U. S. Congress and President Franklin D. Roosevelt to seek ways to reduce defense costs and promote greater efficiencies. NGF Workers, like the rest of their federal counterparts, often bore the brunt of these efforts. The following is a brief chronology of the major events:

At the beginning of the depression, the Hoover administration responded to

¹⁷⁶ *The Evening Star*, 4 October 1933.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

the worsening economic situation by passing The Economy Act on 1 July 1932. This act covered all federal employees. The Act reduced the workweek to 5 days/40 hours from 44 hours, a 9% reduction in salary costs. This act also canceled all vacation time (then 30 days per year) for one year; another *de facto* cut in pay. It prohibited all promotions and new hires. (When restored, vacation was limited to two weeks.) Section 213 of the Act further specified that in administering reductions in force (RIFs) any married person living with his or her spouse, who was in a class to be reduced, was to be dismissed before any other persons in that class, if the spouse was also in the service of the Federal government or the District of Columbia. For the Hoover Administration the issue was insuring employment to the maximum number of families. At NGF however thirty seven men were given notice to quit and 18 of their spouses agreed to a voluntary marital separation in order to save their jobs. In order to do this they had to officially attest to separate residences.¹⁷⁸ The Navy Department, later reclassified all navy yard employees as "temporary," to exempt them from the hiring prohibition.

In October 1932, after petitioning by workers, the Navy Department authorized navy yards to rotate work among trade workers in navy yards as a way of avoiding outright layoffs.¹⁷⁹ When the new Roosevelt administration took office in March 1933, it moved in one of their first acts (April 1933) to return the work week to 5½ days/44 hours, but at 40 hours

pay, making the total cut in pay for NGF workers 15%.

In August 1933, yet another cut-back was announced, this time to a 5-day/40-hour week, at 32 hours pay, making the total cut now 33%.

After much protest, the Navy restored its previous pay cuts and Navy yards returned to a rotating schedule that alternated a 5½-day week with a 4½-day week. The yards closed every other Monday.

Later in April 1934, under intense labor union lobbying, Congress passed over FDR's veto a new appropriation act that in the "Thomas" amendment set the work week for NGF and all Federal employees covered by wage boards [the blue-collar workers] at 5 days/40 hours at 48 hours of pay, in effect creating the 40-hour work week for Federal trade workers several years before the Fair Labor Standards Act was passed. Congress further rescinded 5% of the pay cut and legislated two further annual 5% rescissions. This act also stated that if the Navy Department convened any Wage Boards, it could not recommend wages lower than the levels established in 1929.

NGF Social Life in the 1930's

Despite pay reductions and the generally gloomy economic situation for NGF workers, employees who retained their jobs were still able to make payments and to purchase the basic necessities. Carl Brown remembered that he lived as a young apprentice machinist on wages of \$15.00 per week. On this, by car

¹⁷⁸ *Washington Post* 6 September 1932 p.14

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid* 23 November 1932 p.5

pooling with his friends, Brown could afford enough gas for his old Model A Ford, pay room and board and still see an occasional movie.¹⁸⁰

For those who had some savings Fairlawn Village at 1811 T. Street S.E. DC advertised that for \$4,990 on an FHA loan or just \$490 down and \$33.00 per month Yard workers could own a new home. Fairlawn proudly proclaimed 400 all brick semi-detached homes in planned community just minutes away from the Gun Factory. The builders noted that over 75 Yard employees had already purchased their residences at Fairlawn.

Baseball continued to remain the most popular sport in the 1930s. Employees went to see the Washington Senators at Griffith Stadium. Closer to home the apprentices had their own team and games were played on two diamonds, one where building 200 now stands and the other near the old receiving center parking lot.

Civilian Personnel Comes of Age

On 15 April 1932 then Commandant Rear Admiral Henry V. Butler established the Washington Navy Yard's first Civilian Personnel Office. Direction of the newly established office was given to a Lieutenant Commander and staffed with seven employees. The Commandant's decision to establish a Civilian Personnel Division was simply a reflection of the growing complexity of civilian personnel administration and the need to centralize the employment process. Prior to Admiral

Butler's order, civilian employment matters received only the limited amount of time a busy department head could afford. On a day-to-day level for over 100 years for the most part personnel and employment decisions were left to individual Shop Foremen. At the Naval Gun Factory departments had a long tradition of keeping their own civilian personnel records and sometimes issued their own civilian personnel practices and procedures.



The new Civilian Personnel Division was tasked with molding the personnel structure into a coherent whole. The Personnel Officer became adviser to the Commandant on all matters pertaining to civilian personnel administration, especially the legality and uniformity of actions recommended by the various department heads. By far the most important task of the new division was to assume centralized responsibility for all civilian employee personnel records, disciplinary actions and efficiency ratings.¹⁸¹

¹⁸⁰ Interview with Carl Brown, 2003.

¹⁸¹ Unpublished Manuscript of the Historical Section, Naval Gun Factory, Navy Library, op. cit., pp. 240-250.

“Navy Day” at the Yard

During the 1930s one day each October the Washington Navy Yard and Naval Gun Factory celebrated “Navy Day.” Navy Day was the one day each year that the normally secured Yard would be opened to the general public. Each Navy Day proud employees were excited and ready to show off their workplace. In 1936, *The Washington Post* reported, “over 200,000 visitors were expected.” The report went on to state “the huge plant on the Anacostia River now in the midst of the busiest year in peace time history will place itself at the disposal of thousands of men, women and children eager to see one of the great cannon cradles in operation.” The reporter went on to say that thousands upon thousands of visitors will seize the opportunity offered by Navy Day. They will look upon the origins of ship cannons, a rare treat indeed since most people who have met the guns only in newsreels and movie thrillers are in for an experience “they will never forget.”¹⁸²

World War II the Yard Goes to War

While the 7 December 1941 Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor caught the United States off guard, the shocked nation quickly went to work for victory. Machinists like Carl Brown and Curtis R. Bell returned to their workbenches with new resolve. Brown memorialized the attack by inscribing his pay envelop for that

week with “Japan Declared War 12-7-41 First Pay for Sunday Work.” The latter notation was in reference to the urgent need to increase production that resulted in the first authorizations for Sunday work in over a decade.¹⁸³

The attack on Pearl Harbor resulted in America’s declaration of war against the Empire of Japan and also the Third Reich. With a two-front war the Navy



Yard and the Naval Gun Factory suddenly took on critical

importance to the war effort. The war affected everyone in some way. The draft and military mobilization resulted in the call up of thousands of skilled NGF employees. Over fifty Yard

retirees *voluntarily* came back to their old jobs to work for the duration of the war. Thirty-eight former Yeoman F’s from the World War I era came back to help. Many were now grandmothers, as they did a generation earlier

they took over many important civilian administrative and clerical jobs that they performed for the duration of the war.



¹⁸² *Washington Post*, 23 October 1936.

¹⁸³ Interview with Carl Brown, 2003, & Papers of Curtis R Bell (1938-1961), Operational Archives, Naval Historical Center, Washington DC

“Driving with Hitler” and War Bond Rallies.



Yard employees also responded by buying war bonds. Hollywood stars like Marine Lt. Tyronne Power came to the Yard to rally employee support. In 1944 Yard employees bought over \$100,000 worth of war bonds. Gas rationing brought about the rapid growth of Share-a-Ride clubs. Employees were warned, “When you ride ALONE you ride with Hitler! Join a Car-Sharing Club Today!”¹⁸⁴ Employees gave thousands of pints through blood drives. World War II expanded employment opportunities for everyone, particularly for women and minorities. The war economy brought yard employment to an all time high of over 20,000 employees by 1944. The draft and the shortage of skilled labor also made many social changes possible. The WNY Recreation Association organized regular outings for wounded sailors and marines from the Bethesda Naval Hospital. At these popular events in local parks entertainment included bands, singing groups, races, comic sketches and a beauty contest for Washington Navy Yard Beauty Queen. Connie Wildman of Shop 26 was the

¹⁸⁴ *The Yard Log*, 15 August 1944.

winner for 1944.



Connie Wildman of Shop 21 with Navy Veterans who voted her the Navy Yard Beauty Queen.

The First March on Washington

Activists like A. Philip Randolph saw that the time was right to redress the longstanding exclusions of African – Americans from Federal jobs. In January 1941, working with Bayard Rustin, he planned a march on Washington scheduled for July of that year. The march was to protest governmental hiring practices that excluded African-Americans from Federal employment and Federal contracts. Randolph and Rustin understood that this type of racial discrimination was the principal reason for the economic disparities between whites and African-Americans in this country. Randolph proposed that African-Americans march on Washington to demand jobs and freedom.

Racial Discrimination in Federal Employment Banned

To avoid an embarrassing confrontation, President Roosevelt signed Executive Order 8802 which banned discrimination in the federal

government and defense industries in June 1941. The Executive Order opened up the jobs in the burgeoning defense industry and began the process of ending segregation in Federal employment. Another Roosevelt order established a Fair Employment Practices Commission to monitor compliance. The new commission had limited powers but its existence gave voice and visibility to the grievances and concerns of African-American personnel. That same year the National Labor Board banned racial wage differentials, thereby clarifying the idea of equal pay for equal work for all Federal employees.¹⁸⁵

Responding to the Call

Nearly 100,000 African Americans came to Washington DC during the 1940's. Among these was Emma Butler who worked at NGF during WWII and grew up in a small rural Virginia hamlet. She remembered: "Particularly because Washington is the capital city, the war made a tremendous difference in peoples lives. Particularly as white men moved out of positions, black men and black women – really all women – were able to move into civil service kind of jobs in ways they had been unable to previously." As she recalled, not only was working for the government decent work, but she felt, "I was treated very well."¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁵ Eric Foner, *The Story of American Freedom*, p. 242.

¹⁸⁶ *Washington Post*, 24 May 1999, p. AA1.

The Gun Factory Fire Department and Guard Force Grow



The Fire Department was civilianized in 1942. The Fire Department had responded for over one hundred years to fires and emergencies with a force composed of military employees assigned for temporary duty and volunteer civilians. Now 19 civilian positions were hired to protect over 125 acres of land and the 1888 buildings that composed the Gun Factory. The new Fire Department had three 750 gallon per minute Seagrave Pumper Trucks to put out fires and deal with emergencies.¹⁸⁷ A fixture for many years at the Firehouse was "Smokey," a friendly Dalmatian who was adopted by the NGF Fire Department as their mascot. Smoky had a large following of admirers who photographed him wearing his small fire chief's hat, sitting behind the wheel of one of the fire trucks or as part of the Departments fire prevention campaign.

From its earliest years, the Yard and later the Naval Gun Factory had employed few civilians as watchmen. The bulk of its guard force and its visible symbol of security were Marines guards at the Latrobe Gate. This gate is the oldest continually manned Marine Corps post. However, as the Yard and Gun Factory grew in size, the need for guards at fixed post

¹⁸⁷ *The Log*, 16 October 1951 and 24 November 1958.

expanded. In the early twentieth century there were only three civilian guards at NGF. Pearl Harbor and subsequent demand to use all existing military manpower to deter the very real threat of sabotage necessitated Navy's decision to civilianize all guard post with the exception of Latrobe Gate. The guard force provided security around the clock in three shifts with 70 employees.



quit and are subject to command and discipline of court martial, however seldom its penalties may be invoked vary so greatly from the techniques of cajolery, provision of incentive and collective negotiation which are the unhappy tools of the civilian personnel director in time of labor

shortage, that military experience is often more of a detriment than an asset.¹⁸⁸ In 1944 LTJG Ashe, NGF Assistant Vocational Training Officer, wrote his boss:

War Time Recruitment and Civilian Personnel Challenges

A war economy made tremendous demands on the Washington Navy Yard's civilian personnel program. One of the most obvious challenges facing the Yard was in the area of recruitment and retention. During wartime, private sector and the military services competition for manpower was intense. By Navy's own figures for every ten employees hired in two years, seven would quit, one would enter military service and one would be discharged for poor performance or misconduct. This high attrition rate made the Department of the Navy look systematically at its civilian workforce for the first time. Reserve officers with business backgrounds were now placed in administrative posts ashore. In doing so initially, the Navy Department candidly acknowledged that the "techniques of directing, training, and controlling men in uniform who cannot

The experience in supervisory training this month [March 1944] tend to confirm the notion that difficulties are inherent in a scheme for conferences wherein civilian supervisors and naval officers are regular members of the group. Quite frequently one or two disturbing factors are observed: the officers dominate the conversation or the civilians confer about problems in which they are interested while the officers sit around with a bored expression and do not contribute to the topics being discussed.¹⁸⁹

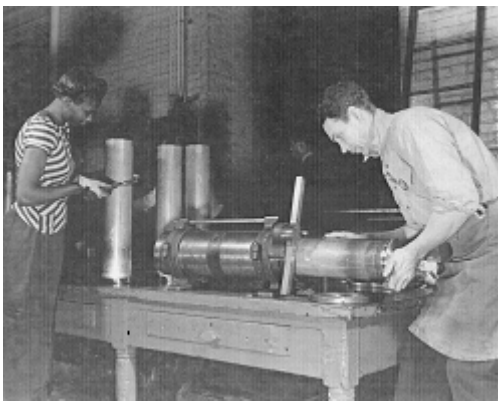
World War II increased the scope of the Navy Yard Civilian Personnel Officer (CPO) job. Now the CPO was

¹⁸⁸ *United States Naval Administration in World War II, US. Civilian Personnel*, unpublished manuscript, Historical Section Civilian Personnel Navy Library, Vols. 1-2, pp. 2-3 and chart 16.

¹⁸⁹ Memo to the NGF Vocational Training Officer, Office of the Secretary of the Navy, Division of Shore Establishment and Civilian Personnel General Correspondence, dated 29 April 1944, NARA RG 80.

given the added responsibilities for negotiating with all unions, for administering the new credit union, selling war bonds and addressing all civilian morale and welfare issues. The principal function of the CPO, however, remained the recruitment and retention of highly qualified employees, thus insuring Gun Factory's production quotas were met. Wartime production demands forced the Federal Government to use new authorities to hire. To meet this challenge the Civil Service Commission published regulations providing that all new hires after 12 March 1942 be temporary in nature and all appointments be for the duration of the war. The basis for this decision was to allow the government to hire large numbers of applicants without going through merit competition. It also made it easy to release personnel once the demands of war had passed

The Apprentice Program Expands



By 1942, faced with tough competition for qualified mechanics, the Yard dramatically expanded the apprentice program to an all-time high of 3116 apprentices.¹⁹⁰ The NGF apprentice program published its own monthly

¹⁹⁰ Ibid, p. 255.

newsletter, *The Apprentice-Alumni*. Each monthly issue contained articles with such titles such as: "Tomorrow's Man of War," "A Lecture on Helium," "How to find the diameter of arch," and an article detailing the new safety drill chuck. In each month's newsletter columnist "O Howie Gossips" regaled fellow apprentices with inside scoops and workplace happenings: "Don Webber is reading Bocaccacio's *Decameron*. Ace Mc Osker's 'Friday Flashes' had achieved early dominance in the newly organized six man touch football league by beating the 'Wednesday Wonders.'" Gossips also inquired cryptically, "who owned that cruising green De Soto we've seen slip into the capes and make for the brook?" Reminders were also provided in each issue of up coming tests and social events.¹⁹¹

Women go to War at the Navy Yard and Gun Factory

WW II greatly expanded employment opportunities for women. While hundreds of thousands of men were being drafted into

military service, if vital war production was to continue, women were needed in the factories and offices. In January 1943, Yard Commandant, Rear Admiral, Ferdinand L. Reichmuth invited the Washington press corps to tour the Yard. Here reporters from the



¹⁹¹ Carl Brown Collection, n.p.

two major papers could view first hand the work that women were accomplishing at the Gun Factory and other locations. This tour was the first time that the Yard had been opened to the press in over a year due to wartime security. Reporters were told there were now 1,400 female workers employed in ordnance manufacture. These new entrants ranged in age from 18 to 50. They came from all walks of life having worked as housewives, dry-cleaners and laundry workers, beauticians, office workers, maids and one, Mrs. Arbutus Howlett, who was previously employed as a farmer. As demand for labor grew NGF and other munitions producers advertised widely for Woman Ordnance Worker (WOW).

The women working in ordnance production were classified into three grades: ordnance worker, ordnance operative and precision operative. Entry-level pay was 57 cents per hour rising to a high of 108 cents per hour.

The world of the female employee was not free of stereotyping and bias. Most of these women worked long hours and also frequently worked Saturday and Sunday.



Captain J. R. Palmer, Production Officer, reflected some of the views of

the time, when he described the ideal female employee:

She is between 25 and 35 years of age, single and without local family connections. She is a person who has to earn a living and is endowed with a natural mechanical bent and a high degree of adaptability. In her work-a-day world relationships with men in the shops she does not expect the small gallantries a man shows a woman in a social relationship.¹⁹²



Captain Palmer went on to relate to the reporters: "Women are doing the work usually done by apprentices and some had sufficient skill to work as machinist."

One top ranking officer summed up the contribution that female employees were making to the workforce as:

These women are doing a grand job to win the war and win it as quickly as possible. They step into

men's places at the machines and keep them turning without a stop as the men go off to the fighting fronts. Today's women workers at the Washington Navy Yard produce an ever growing flow of ordnance material.¹⁹³

The Star reported the biggest problem for the

¹⁹² *Washington Star*, 10 January 1943.

¹⁹³ *Ibid*, and *Washington Post*, 10 January 1943.

new female workers was finding childcare. One female reporter who actually worked in Gun Factory ordnance production took a more jaundiced view.

Equal pay and promotions for women are one of the government standards of employment supported in writing by the Navy DepartmentThe Navy Yards themselves seem to be unaware of the fact; Navy Yard women start at \$4.65 a day which with time and a half for the sixth day is \$ 29.64 a week. Deduct the 20-percent withholding tax, and you find we luxuriate on \$23 a week. The highest pay women on production in our shop receive \$6.95 a day, a peak she attained after two years of service at the yard. Men get as high as \$22 a day.¹⁹⁴

Many of the women working at the factory may have agreed with Mrs. Robert T. Withers, a milling machine operator in the Breech Mechanism Shop with over two years on the production line's 4-12 shift: "I feel I am helping my husband and my country and keeping busy so that when this war is over I can be a housewife again."¹⁹⁵

The End of the War, Triumph and Readjustment

On 8 May 1945 the defeat of Nazi Germany was announced by

¹⁹⁴ Susan B Anthony, "Working at the Navy Yard 1944," *Reporting WWII*, Vol. 2, 1999, p. 92.

¹⁹⁵ *The Log*, 15 September 1945.

loudspeaker to Yard and Gun Factory employees. To employees assembled in the Sail Loft and all over the Yard, President Harry S. Truman's voice declared Victory in Europe (VE Day).¹⁹⁶ Everywhere there was great rejoicing. Later in the year the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki led within days to the end of the War in the Pacific. Almost immediately the Yard began to put in place the complex, but necessary, adjustments for a peacetime economy. On 7 September 1945, the last woman ordnance worker on the Navy Yard left her bench, her service at the Yard having come to an end. Over two thousand women had been employed since 1942, but now that the troops were coming home and the Yard operations were to be scaled back, the women were let go en masse. As the *Yard Log* related,

Every shop where these women were employed had only praise for these women who came do a job – a man's job for the duration. And they did it well despite the fact that fellow workers pooh-poohed the ideas and master mechanics shook with fear. And so let us pay tribute to these women ordnance workers, the first in the Navy Yard who responded to the call to do their part in winning the war. Hats off to all of them!¹⁹⁷

Victory at a Price

When peace finally came after four long years of war, all Americans felt a

¹⁹⁶ *The Log*, 15 May 1945.

¹⁹⁷ *The Log*, 15 September 1945.

sense of euphoria, but throughout the Yard there was also a profound sense of great and terrible loss. Victory had come at a high price. Everywhere, Yard employees mourned friends, colleagues and family members who would never return to their shop or office. There is still no one single list of Yard employees killed in WWII but below are just a few of the names recorded in *The Yard Log* for 1944-45.

- Nathan Rubinton, a woodworker in Pattern and Joiner Shop 26, received word that his son Meyer Rubinton was killed in France. Prior to his induction Meyer had worked in the Sight Shop for five years.
- Dorothy Osborn, an electroplater in Plating and Polishing Shop 22, found out that her son Carl had also died fighting in France.
- Edward J. Galotta of the Personnel Relations Division would never come home. He died of wounds suffered while engaged in aerial combat over Germany on 8 March 1945.
- Lieutenant Robert Bolick, a former Erecting Shop 5 employee, was killed during an air raid over Schweinfurt, Germany.
- PFC Robert R. Landis, a heavily decorated soldier and a former apprentice machinist in Shop 13, was killed in the last months of the war in ground combat in Germany. His father and brother both worked at the Yard.
- Pvt. Harry Barlow was killed while fighting a German Panzer unit near Pittershausen, Germany. Prior to his induction, he had worked as

apprentice machinist in Breech Mechanism Shop 18.

Post War NGF

As America's victorious soldiers and sailors were demobilized many returned to their former employers. At NGF all the factory shops welcomed back or mourned the loss of colleagues who had volunteered or had been drafted for the duration of the war. Although there was retrenchment some career fields expanded, particularly the NGF apprentice program, which resumed in a renovated building 172 and quickly hired new employees like Jack Webb.¹⁹⁸ Webb, who entered NGF as an apprentice electrician had served in the wartime navy. Webb remembered he enjoyed his new job at NGF, quickly made friends and joined his shop's apprentice baseball team.¹⁹⁹

Directly after the war to celebrate America's hard won victories NGF mechanics prepared two victory trains to generate interest in the factory and the sale of Victory Loan Bonds. The trains carried specially created displays and exhibits of planes, guns, munitions and military equipment that helped win the war.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁸ *The Log*, 15 April 1949.

¹⁹⁹ Interview with Jack Webb, 2003.

²⁰⁰ *The Log*, 15 November 1945.

The new classification system reflected the NGF multiplicity of occupations and titles. New Occupations such as electronics technicians entered the job lexicon.

Veterans Preference

Since the Civil War, the DON and NGF had afforded all honorably discharged veterans a preference in employment. All former sailors, soldiers, airmen and marines with wartime service had reemployment rights to jobs held prior to induction. In addition, they were granted a five point preference for civil service examinations while disabled veterans were granted 10 points. The same law granted servicemen with a service-connected disability and who held a wartime temporary appointment the right to have their appointment converted to permanent. Rear Admiral Reichmuth, Commandant of the Washington Navy Yard, in a 2 July 1945 order to his Department Heads anticipated problems for returning veterans. Some animosity from supervisors who felt their discretion challenged reminded all supervisors and managers, "Personal non-agreement with the law or policy must not influence any official administration action." Reichmuth went on to state, "Irrespective of the official personal opinion the fact remains that although the veteran is at present a minority group in the federal service he has certain rights and privileges and those rights must be

accorded. In due time, the veterans group will become a majority group due to the operation of veterans preference.^{201,,}

The Classification Act of 1949

The passage of the Classification Act of 1949 set up a General Schedule (GS) 18-grade level and 15 level Wage Grade (WG) classification schema.

The new system mandated the reclassification of all blue and white-collar federal jobs. The system with its greater emphasis on the accuracy of position descriptions was part of a larger federal effort to make pay and compensation more centralized and to increase the accuracy and consistency of the overall Federal compensation system. The new classification system reflected the NGF multiplicity of occupations and titles. New Occupations such as electronics technicians entered the job lexicon. Many of these newer trades were an integral part of NGF's effort to make modern armaments such as guided missile launchers; however, some of the older yard trades lingered on.

As late as 1959 there were six sail makers and six blacksmiths working at NGF. The sail makers no longer cut and sewed sails for frigates. Now they pieced together heavy canvass for protective sandblast suits used by NGF foundry workers. They also made canvass awnings for the remaining battleships and the Presidential yacht. NGF blacksmiths in the 1950's were now confined to making ornamental ironwork for ship and shore installations.²⁰²

²⁰¹ N. Stein OPF, NARA.

²⁰² *The Log*, 15 July 1959.

Employee Associations and Unions Gain Recognition

In 1946 the Department of the Navy began to give formal recognition to organized groups of employees. New regulations allowed NGF employees with the consent of the Commandant to organize any association among employees for such purposes as operating cafeterias or recreation, welfare, credit unions, hospital funds, etc. As implemented, this regulation permitted unions, veterans associations, and professional and fraternal organizations to enter the Yard or NGF for the purposes of recruitment or to distribute or post literature. Recognition by the DON and NGF did not mean that unions had won the right to strike or bargain over wages. In 1955, the Congress explicitly prohibited Federal employees from striking or asserting the right to strike. Prior to the 1946 formal recognition, unions had no *official* standing on Navy installation nor were unions allowed to represent the civilian workforce in civilian personnel matters. As a practical matter Department of the Navy and NGF had tolerated some union activity especially during the war years. In World War II the unions had supplied a national representative to the U.S. Wage Review Board. At NGF a tradition of mutual respect and cooperation had developed since the founding of Machinist Lodge 174 in 1898. This Union was composed almost exclusively of NGF mechanics.²⁰³

²⁰³ Furer, op. cit., p., 909, and *The Log*, 1 March 1950.

With recognition and as the decade of the 1950s progressed, articles on union matters and union leaders figure prominently in the NGF newspaper, *The Log*. These articles reflected the generally cooperative NGF labor/management environment.



The Korean War

The Korean War caught the nation off guard. The North Korean attack across the 38th Parallel on 25 June 1950 was a surprise and resulted in many initial casualties. As part of the American response to the North Korean aggression, DoD ordered a massive call up of reservists, which in turn resulted in the call up of many NGF personnel. NGF had 375 reservists on its rolls, of these 18 were called up in the first few months of the war. To some, like Jack Casselberry, a naval warrant officer, wartime service was a tradition. In fact for Casselberry, a Leadingman Machinist in Shop M-13, Korea was his third war. As a young man he had enlisted in the Navy and served for 14 months overseas. Then in WWII he volunteered and served in Europe and North Africa for 27 months followed by seven more in the Pacific. Casselberry remembered being a little homesick in WWII when he read the name plates on the guns

each inscribed “Naval Gun Factory Washington DC.” For some, like Virginia Kagel of NGF’s Planning Department and a corporal in the Marine Corps Reserve, the Korean War was her first call up. She made headlines in the local papers since she was one of the first reservists called to duty.²⁰⁴

Women Ordnance Workers Once Again

The Korean War meant a heightened demand for NGF to increase munitions production. This combined with the loss of skilled workers to the reserve call-up motivated NGF to begin a serious effort to hire female ordnance workers. Starting in late 1950 NGF hired hundreds of women. All of the new workers were given a two-week indoctrination course. Each new employee was provided practical shop training and instruction in how to operate the various machines and tools, how to read blue prints, and the use of measuring instruments.²⁰⁵

Some like Mary L. Johnson had previous experience at NGF during WWII and were keen to return. “I worked here once before during the last war and I know something about the work. I honestly feel the work I am doing is important.” Irene Hunter also had worked three years for NGF in World War II. She welcomed a chance to return, saying, “when I was notified that the NGF was hiring women to work on machines again, I quit my job with the picture company and came here. The work that I do is very exciting and takes steady nerves.

²⁰⁴ *The Log*, 1 September 1950.

²⁰⁵ *The Log*, 1 February 1951.

I believe had I the opportunity, I would like to work here permanently.”

Kathleen Siggman, who previously had been a model, an assistant buyer of women’s apparel and worked in a private sector machine shop, was enthusiastic: “this is the best job I ever had!” Daphene Dyer, a war bride from England, related; “I was born in England and spent the last war driving ambulances. That is why I could not go back to office work. I feel that the work I am doing here is essential for my new country and naturally I am anxious to do a job.”²⁰⁶

Air Raid Drills and Atomic Bombs



After the VE and VJ day the Gun Factory became increasingly concerned with the threat of nuclear war. The Soviet Union had already tested atomic devices and consequently the Department of the Navy began to take active measures to insure the survivability of the NGF from a Soviet Air Raid or missile strike. Air Raid drills, which had been discontinued soon after World War II, were now resumed in earnest. At 11 a.m. on 12 March 1952 NGF employees heard the Yard air raid siren wail. Employees left their work places and proceeded to find shelter. Once employees arrived they were issued helmets, medical kits and

²⁰⁶ *The Log*, 1 March 1951.

Geiger counters. Posters throughout the factory advised employees: “You can live through an atomic bomb raid and you won’t need a Geiger counter, protective clothes or special equipment.” Employees were reminded the “first rule is to keep calm.” Some of the early drills were not a great success; workers often found shelters amid cigarette smoke fouling the limited shelter space. Another problem for the civil defense planners was overcoming the shear noise of the factory which prevented whole sections of NGF from hearing the alarm system.²⁰⁷

Loyalty Oaths and Reviews

On 22 August 1947, President Harry S. Truman established a Loyalty Review Board to review the loyalty of all Federal employees. As a consequence of the directive all employees were required to fill out the affidavits attesting their loyalty or be denied employment.²⁰⁸

In the late 1940’s and the early 1950s the rapid expansion of the Soviet Union and the rise of Communist China alarmed the American public. In response to some startling successes of Soviet espionage and some dramatic security breaches at “the Manhattan Project,” Congress passed new legislation which mandated for the first

time extensive “loyalty reviews” of all current Federal employees.²⁰⁹

The McCarthy Era, HUAC & WNY

Senator Joseph McCarthy and the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) then proceeded to hold public inquiry into alleged disloyal individuals and associations. In July of 1951 Mary Stalcup Markward , a 29 year-old former beauty shop worker, appeared before HUAC. Mrs.Marward testified that she had worked for seven years as an under cover operative for the Federal Bureau of Investigation. She claimed while working undercover to have successfully infiltrated the Communist Party in the District of Columbia and Maryland. She claimed that Communist underground groups operated in the Federal Government and that a secret Communist Cell know as W-37 composed of Yard workers was set up in the Washington Navy Yard but had been dissolved in 1945.²¹⁰



Other witnesses identified by Mrs. Markward included two former wartime employees of the Navy

Yard. One of these Victor Fleisher a

²⁰⁷ *The Log*, 18 April 1951.

²⁰⁸ Navy Civilian Personnel Instruction, dated 30 September 1948, NARA RG 45.

²⁰⁹ Civil Service Commission Standard Form 84, Request for Report on Loyalty, dated 4 August 1947, NARA RG 45.

²¹⁰ *Washington Post* 17 July 1951 p. 1

Russian-born naturalized citizen admitted he worked at the Government Printing Office in 1939 and at the Navy Yard from August 1940 to late 1945. Under questioning from the Committee, Fleischer declared “I know of no activity adverse to the interest to the United States.”²¹¹

Mrs. Markward was not the first to charge Communist influence at WNY, a previous HUAC investigation in the 1930’s had made similar charges against WNY employees. As early as 1935 Commander S. A. Clements stated that there were as many as thirty-six known Communists at WNY. Clements revealed that some Navy officials believed:

That in the civilian organization of navy yard the Communist party has cells (chapters) in practically every yard. In a very vital spot, we will say the Washington Navy Yard, if an emergency comes along and we know the Communists have a policy of sabotage—they say so and so it must be – not unreasonable to assume that they are put there for that purpose.²¹²

The Committee called six WNY workers to testify regarding alleged Communist influence.²¹³ When asked to respond to an allegation that thirty of his employees had been dismissed because of Communist affiliation, WNY Commandant, Rear Admiral George Pettengill stated:

There isn’t any truth in the report. Anyway, we couldn’t discharge an employee for being a communist any more than for being a Republican. Of course subversive activities would be grounds for dismissal but we haven’t seen any evidence of that.²¹⁴

Despite a prolonged HUAC inquiry during the 1930s into alleged un-American activities no substantial evidence was ever uncovered of Communist influence or subversion at WNY. The post WWII political atmosphere however was very different from the 1930’s, actual instances of Soviet espionage convinced many elected officials to carefully scrutinize the federal workforce,

On 27 April 1953 President Dwight Eisenhower issued Executive Order 10450. This order gave agency heads the complete responsibility for the security of their own organizations. Employees being investigated for disloyalty were to be informed of the charges against them and given the opportunity of requesting a hearing. Loyalty hearings were held before boards consisting of employees of agencies other than the one which the employee belonged. The board could make an advisory decision but the agency head had the final word with no right of appeal.²¹⁵

Something of the tenor of the times can be glimpsed in the August 1954; *The Log* editorial page which was titled *Unfavorable or Suspicious*

²¹¹ Ibid 22 February, 1952 p. 14

²¹² Ibid 9 March 1935 p.1

²¹³ Ibid 11 October 1939 p.1

²¹⁴ Ibid 19 October 1939 p. 2

²¹⁵ Spero op cit p.500-501

Appraisal. Here NGF Superintendent, Rear Admiral, T. B. Hill reminded his employees:

A number of our citizens unwittingly expose themselves to unfavorable or suspicious appraisal which they can and should avoid. This may take the form of an indiscreet remark; an unwise selection of friends or associates; membership in an organization whose true objectives are concealed behind a popular and innocuous title; attendance at and participation in the meetings and functions of such organizations even though not as an official member; or any of the numerous other clever means designed to attract support under false colors or serving to impress an individual with his own importance.

It is advisable to study and seek wise and mature counsel prior to association with persons or organization of any poetical or civic nature, no matter what their apparent motives may be in order to determine the true motives and purposes of the organization in question.²¹⁶

African Americans in the 1950's



Electrician, William Counsel

The 1950s were a decade of advancement for African-American personnel. Throughout this era articles in *The Log* began to reflect the trend in American society toward equitable treatment for all races. At NGF new occupations were opened to African Americans. For the first time, the NGF apprenticeship programs saw significant numbers of African American enter. One example occurred in 1954 when William Counsel successfully completed the demanding four year electrical apprentice program.²¹⁷

²¹⁶ *The Log* , 16 August 1954 p2

²¹⁷ Ibid 21 June 1955.



Louis E. Lowman MD

In 1955 Louis E. Lowman made history when he was hired as the first African-American Medical Officer in the NGF Dispensary. Dr. Lowman, a graduate of Howard University, concentrated his practice in the field of Industrial Medicine. A native of Baltimore, Dr. Lowman had worked his way through Medical School, including working as a Porter on the old Baltimore and Ohio Railway.

The First NGF Computer

The employees in the Engineering Department came to work in November 1954 to find a new electronic analog computer for use in solving differential equations. *The Log* reporter reminded NGF employees that the computer was a tool like any other.

This computer should not be thought of as an “Electronic Brain,” *The Log* reports, “It cannot think any more than a slide rule or desk calculator...it’s a useful

tool for electronic calculation but like all tools it must be told what to do.”²¹⁸



Saul Cohen, Fire Control Design Engineer, uses the Gun Factory's newly-acquired electronic analog computer as an aid in solving a problem.

In 1958 NGF procured two IBM model 604 electronic computers which were used by the new Data Processing Division. *The Log* reporter noted:

Three letters EDF are going to play an increasingly important part in the lives of everyone who works for a large organization. These letters stand for Electronic Data Processing. The Gun Factory can be justly proud that at this time it is the only field establishment under the management control of the Bureau of Ordnance with an authorized and approved EDP Program for business type applications.²¹⁹

One of the first new EDP applications installed was the “Shop Recorder”. This system was designed to record and transmit data regarding NGF workers hours and charge them to the correct accounts. NGF Production Specialist and resident cartoonist Robert E. Bear captured some of the 1950’s workers puzzlement and concern with the quick pace of change

²¹⁸Ibid , 20 November 1954.

²¹⁹*The Log*, November 5, 1958, p.1

as he gently spoofed the latest technological innovations (see Appendix D).

Rumors, Cost Cutting and Anxiety

By the late 1950s the Gun Factory was under review by various Congressional committees looking for ways to streamline the nation's defense infrastructure and cut costs. NGF employees were increasingly aware that the plant was under threat of imminent closure.

Employees like Fredrick W. Shaeffer were ready to publicly discussed their worries. Shaeffer, an Industrial Engineer in the NGF Production Control shop, was concerned that the change over from big guns to missiles

would result in a wholesale shift to private sector weapons production. William Fitts, an engineer who had worked for NGF since 1942, thought, "missile launching systems is right down our alley." These workers were typical of the of the thousands whose hopes, dreams and livelihoods were so bound up in NGF that they could not imagine the historic plant ever closing.²²⁰ Articles in *The Log* sought to help NGF workers cope with the accelerated pace of life and the

uncertainty surrounding possible factory closure. For example, *Stress In Our Time* recommended that

"employees get plenty of rest, avoid caffeine and eat a well balanced "Stress Diet" composed of the seven food groups with emphasis on more proteins mineral, and vitamins."

Readers were warned to stay away from animal fats, salt stimulants and irritants such as tobacco.²²¹

If actual sick leave usage rate of an organization is an indicator of work

force fatigue, then NGF stress levels were very high indeed. Sick leave remained a real concern to NGF throughout the 1950s. Articles frequently appeared in *The Log* citing the deleterious



effects of high average sick leave rate. In fact NGF by the mid-1950s had the highest rate of all Department of the Navy shipyards and industrial concerns. In 1955 the rate was 4.8% per annum of each man-year as opposed to the DON wide average of 3.3%. The next highest yard was New York, which had 3.5%. Supervisors were sent to classes on leave management and formed tiger teams to try and get a handle on the problem.

²²⁰ *Washington Post*, 17 November 1958, p. B 11.

²²¹ *The Log*, June 1961. n.p.

Sadly the sick leave rate remained an unsolvable predicament.²²²

In March 1954 NGF announced a major Reduction in Force (RIF). The RIF affected over 1000 employees. This reduction reflected the beginning of a trend that would accelerate over the next decade as the mission of the Gun Factory diminished in size and scope.²²³

A New Director for NGF Civilian Personnel

In January 1952, NGF recognized the growing need for professional expertise in civilian personnel administration Dr. Dawson Hales became the first NGF Civilian Personnel Director. Dr. Hales had served in the naval reserve during WWII at the New York Naval Shipyard after earning his Ph.D. at Columbia University. Hales moved to quickly establish the NGF program as a model within Department of the Navy.

NGF Social and Work Life in the 1950's

As in prior decades, baseball and basketball were the two dominant off-duty sports for Factory employees. Both men and women had strong teams and NGF did well in the all government sports leagues. Bowling enjoyed wide popularity especially

with the many workers who were able to use the new suburban lanes that opened in Montgomery and Fairfax Counties. After the war, housing starts in the DC metro area boomed. Continuing a trend started in the 1940's and thanks largely to the new GI loans, NGF veterans were able to buy houses through the VA with little money down. Low priced automobiles and relatively cheap gas meant that employees could commute ever-longer distances. The new South Capitol Bridge promised workers a shorter commute from the east side of the Anacostia River. NGF issues of *The Log* for the 1950s are replete with articles highlighting the doings and activities of civic and fraternal organizations like the NGF Quartermans and Leadingmans Association and the VFW and Masons lodges were also very popular. All of these organizations held dances and social events open to NGF employees.

"Stag Parties." were a regular feature of the 1950's NGF social scene for some employees. Stags or male only parties were sponsored by NGF and used to bring management and labor together in a more relax atmosphere. Heurich Brewery was a favorite party location. NGF Stag programs (according to *The Log*) were pretty tame affairs consisting of:

Entertainment provided by a hillbilly band with plenty of sweet songs and some fine parlor jokes. After the band retired (for refreshments) the piano was taken over by the stags for some old fashion group singing. The sound of their voices floated across a large portion of the Northwest

²²² *The Log*, 21 January 1955 and 11 February 1955.

²²³ Ibid 1 March 1954.p.1

Washington for a long time after the bar at Heurich's closed.²²⁴

The employees of NGF were civic minded. Many still lived near the Factory and they continued to sponsor efforts to help their community. One of the largest in scale and duration was the NGF annual "Orphans Christmas Party." Beginning in 1944, the employees held large toy drives and then contacted local orphanages and homes for underprivileged children. Each year's party was bigger than the last as thousands of toys were bought, packaged and distributed to poor children. Shops and offices competed with each other to see who could bring in the most presents or offer the most extravagant entertainment.²²⁵



Mixing business with humor, Robert E. Bear, a production specialist with the NGF Management Department, produced his "Yard Bird" cartoons for *The Log*. This feature ran from 1947 to 1953 and amused and informed Yard personnel and their families of the "happenings" that were often

missed in the haste of daily production. Appendix (D) contains examples of Bear's work.

Transformation: Closure of the Naval Gun Factory and the Beginning of the Modern Navy Yard

Toward the end of the 1950s the Bureau of Ordnance made efforts to find another mission for NGF. "Its shops investigated the use of plastics in weapons, tested equipment for a satellite navigation system, and produced launchers for the Navy's Tarter surface-to-air missile."²²⁶ All of this effort however was to no avail. Despite heroic pains NGF production facilities and its workforce were in reality geared to the age of steel ships and big guns. The factory, which had

been so central to naval ordnance and munitions, was simply unable to convert its production economically to the new highly sophisticated electronic weapons. The physical plant was now nearly a century old and the dedicated NGF workforce, while highly skilled, did not possess the requisite new knowledge demanded by the new era.

²²⁴ *The Log* 1 June 1951 p. 5

²²⁵ *The Log*, 1 December 1949.

²²⁶ Marolda, op. cit., p. 82.

In 1961, the last production runs were completed, shops were dismantled and cleaned, and forges and boilers banked. Over \$ 200 million dollars of equipment such as machine tools, industrial cranes and barges were disposed of primarily to other government agencies.²²⁷

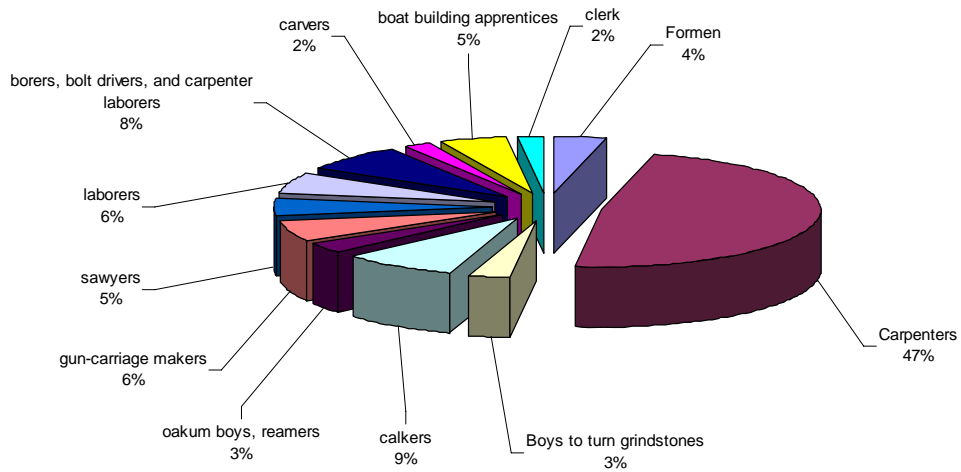
By the beginning of 1962, NGF workers, who epitomized the rich heritage of the nation's trade and craft traditions and who had served their country well in the all the major wars of the 20th century, said quiet goodbyes to their friends and shop mates. Now through reduction-in-force procedures they were to be separated or placed in jobs with new commands. The NGF doors may have been closed, but its workers' proud legacy of hard work, dedication and caring for their community lives on in the Yard they built.

²²⁷ *The Log* July 1961 p.5

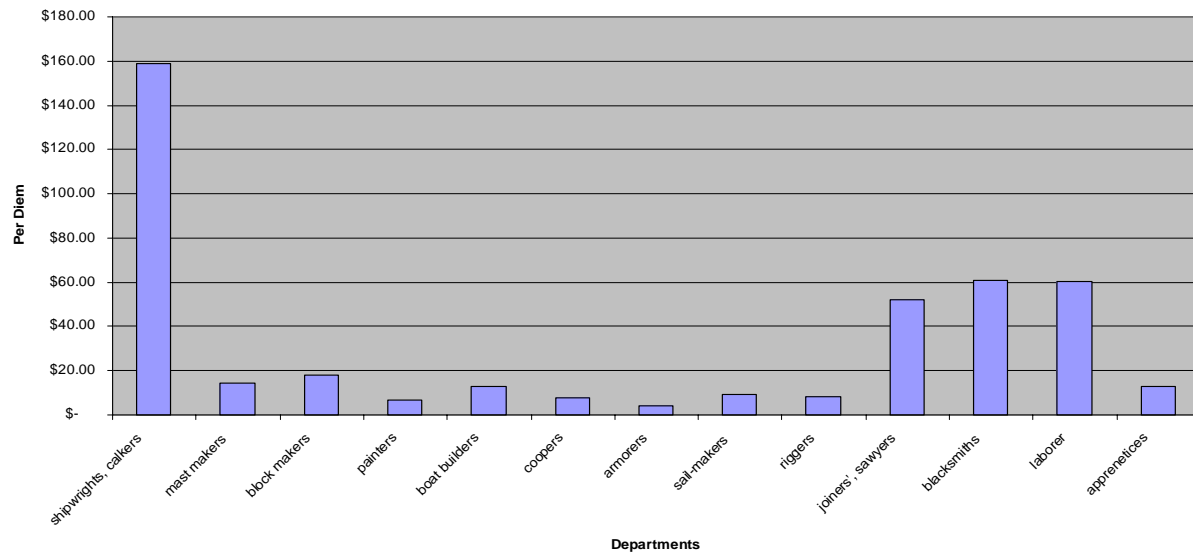
APPENDIX A

Comparative WNY Demographics

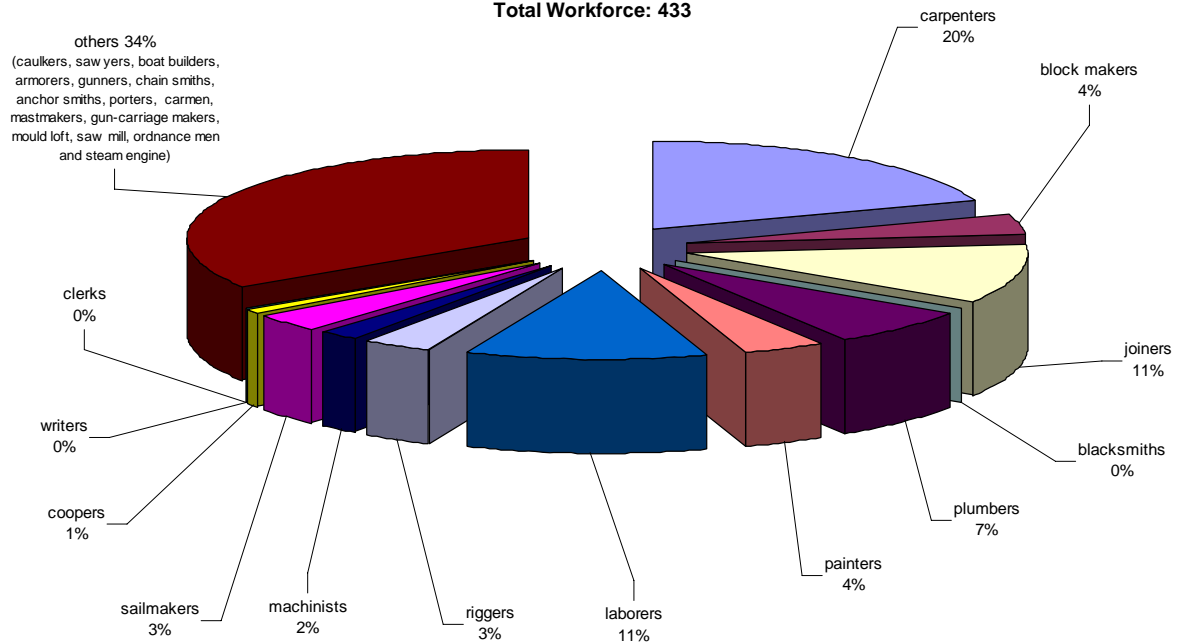
Washington Navy Yard Employees in 1808
Total Workforce: 175



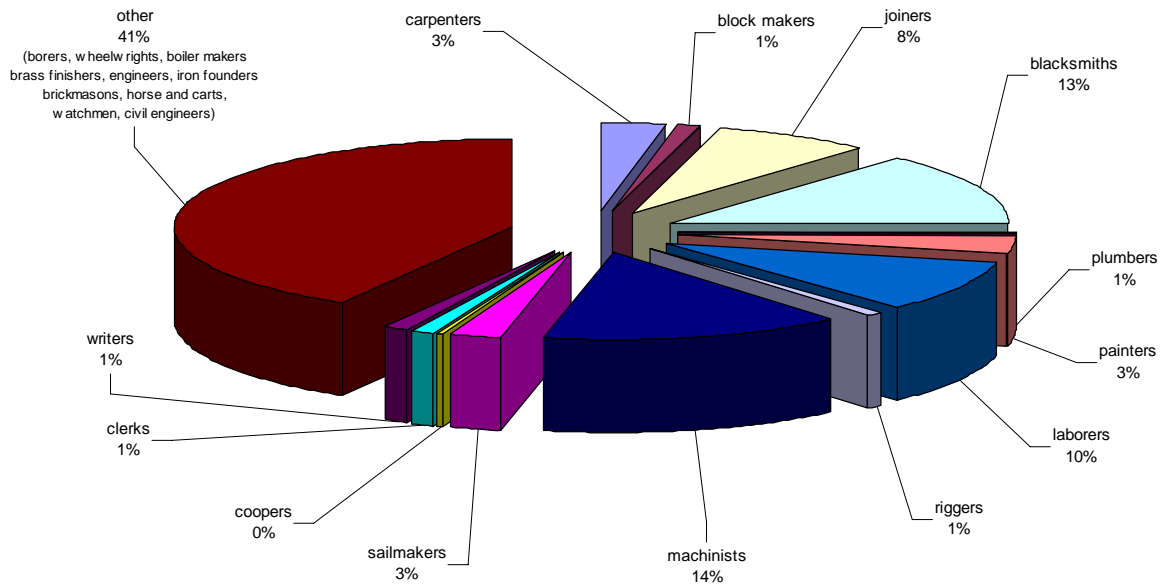
Washington Navy Yard Pay in 1808
Total Workforce: 1367
Total pay per diem: \$427.50



Washington Navy Yard Employees in 1820
Total Workforce: 433



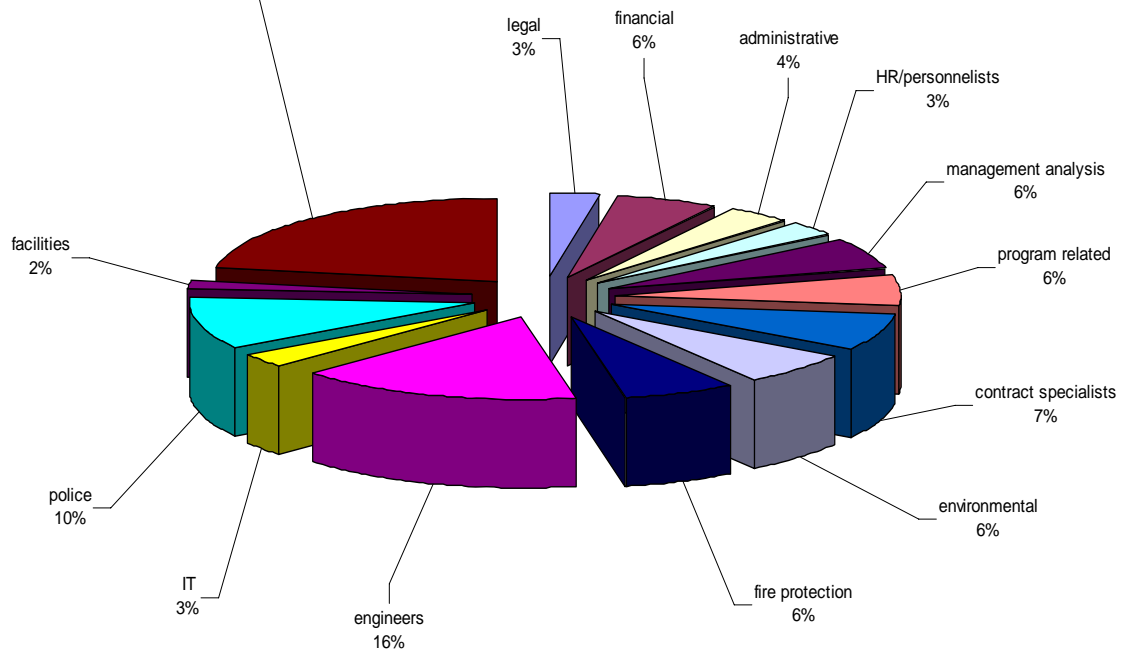
Washington Navy Yard Employees in 1865
Total Workforce: 1367



Washington Navy Yard Grade Scale Employees in 2003

GS Workforce: 1316 (78%)

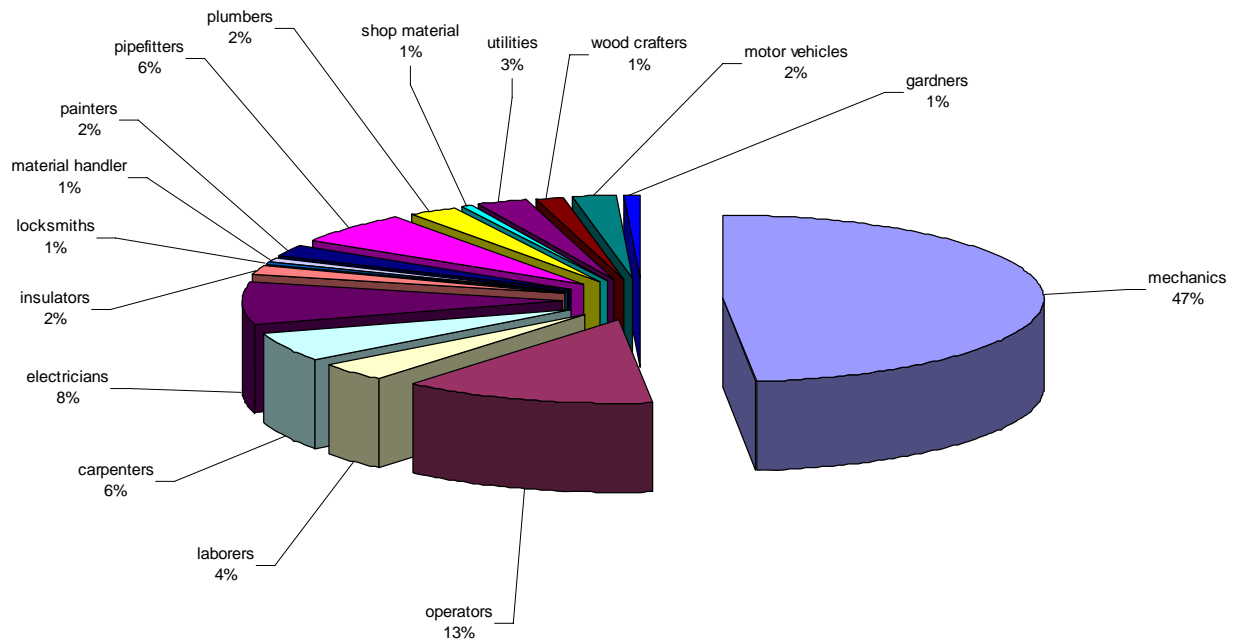
Total Workforce: 1688



Washington Navy Yard WG Employees in 2003

WG Workforce: 372 (22%)

Total WNY Workforce: 1688



APPENDIX B

More about Michael Shiner

In researching the history of the Washington Navy Yard civilian workforce, wherever possible, I have relied on primary source documents to establish facts, dates and the sequence of narrative events. Michael Shiner's diary is a unique primary source and is both a window on the life of 19th century workers in general and African-Americans in particular. Shiner is not only an important source for the history of slavery in the District of Columbia but also for what he tells us regarding the life of mechanics and laborers at the Washington Navy Yard. Reconstructing Michael Shiner's personal and family life presents many problems and challenges. His diary omits considerable information that the modern reader would deem essential. Shiner was not writing for the general public. His primary purpose in writing his diary appears to be his desire to record the public events of his time. Recording events for himself, he has no need to say anything about his life prior to his first entries in 1814, and with one crucial exception, he says nothing about his immediate family, marriage, children or other family members.

The Shiner manuscript also contains no information regarding his parentage nor does he ever state how he became literate. Many of these omissions may be his deliberate desire as an antebellum slave and freeman to guard his safety, privacy and maintain distance from painful memories. The District of Columbia slave codes of his era made teaching a slave to read and write illegal and punishable by law. Perhaps Michael Shiner like his great contemporary Frederick Douglass (who also worked as a slave at a shipyard (Baltimore) learned by quietly observing others and teaching himself as the occasion presented.

The following are some examples of how I went about establishing a basic chronology for Michael Shiner's birth, slavery status, manumission, and death and how I attempted to resolve apparent inconsistencies:

- **Birth:** Based on his declaration to the census enumerator Michael Shiner was probably born a slave in Maryland about 1805. We base Shiner's birth year on the 1860 entry for Michael Shiner, in the District of Columbia Census. In that year, Shiner is listed as 55 years of age. In his diary, which begins in 1814, he does not state his age. Perhaps like many slaves he may not have known his exact birth date.
- **Slavery Status:** From his diary as a slave Shiner worked in the paint shop assigned to various projects painting ships and yard buildings. Day to day he was probably a helper for a crew of painters where he mixed and carried paint and

utensils about the Yard. His relationship with the Howard family is difficult to fully grasp. From the diary it appears he was given considerable latitude. As a slave valued for his work, he was afforded the occasional weekends and holiday off to be with his family. He records Mrs. Howard beating him on his returning late from a night of liberty. After Thomas Howard died, Shiner states that he was a good man and that he knew he was in heaven. The Yard Officers apparently were asked to keep an eye on slaves moving in and out of the Yard. From the WNY Daily Station Log we found two entries relating to Shiner. For Saturday 27 December 1828 “Michael Shiner who has liberty out from Wednesday till Friday Morning has not come to the yard” Again on Sunday 28 December 1828 we read, “This day pleasant airs form the SW and fair weather. Michael Shiner got home this evening.” From the 1845 Washington Navy Yard Book Michael Shiner is listed second line from the top.

NO.	NAMES	OCCUPATION	WHICH NUMBER OF DAYS' WORK	DATE OF PAY PER DAY	AGGREGATE AMOUNT OF PAY		CHECKED FOR INCOME TAX		AMOUNT DUE AND PAID		WE acknowledge to have the several sums appended to and in full for work done at the month of		
					Dolls.	Cents.	Dollers.	Cents.	Dollers.	Cents.			
	<u>Painters</u>				28	50	52	12	55	58	76	94	04
44	H. Ramsey	Helper	24	25	54	00		50		53	70		
	Mich. Shiner		24		54	00		50		53	70		
	Jno Barker		12		28	12		16		27	96		
	H. B. Jones		24		54	00		50		53	70		
	Chas Stockwell	Apprentice	33	65	15	27				15	27		
45	Geo Gates	Minor	24		15	60				15	60		
	<u>Provisions Dept</u>												
1	Edw. Cadell	Helper	24	25	54	00		50		53	70		
2	Herman Davis		23		51	75		59		51	46		
	<u>Riggers &c</u>												
	Jno Adams	Quartermaster	24	58	84	00		1.50		82	50		
	H. Tenable	Rigger	23	58	70	50		1.18		69	32		
	Jno Church		23		70	50		1.18		69	32		

- **Manumission:** Here again I am extrapolated from surviving documents. Shiner states he worked at the Navy Yard from 1814 and he was a slave of the Yard's Chief Clerk, Thomas Howard. From the District of Columbia Probate Records, we find Howard died November 4, 1832 and his will declares: “having purchased Negro man, Michael Shiner for the term of 15 yrs., to manumit him at the expiration of 8 years if he conducts himself worthy of such a privilege. “ (Will of Thomas Howard, of Washington Co., D.C.: O.S. 1621; Box 11). No documentation for the exact date of Michael Shiner's manumission is known but a date after 1840 and prior to 1850 is probable. Our review of the *Pay Roll of*

Mechanics and Laborers Employed in the United States Navy Yard 1845-1867 shows Shiner is first listed on the 1845 roll. There is no indication that Shiner is still a slave. The record indicates he is making comparable wages to his fellow painters. Many of the earlier rolls are missing but at least as early as 1845 he appears to be a freeman. The 1850 census enumerator for the District of Columbia lists Shiner as a freeman when he was queried.

- **Marriage and Family:** What documentary evidence I have reviewed indicates Shiner was married twice. The date of his first marriage is not known. In a diary entry for 1833, Shiner gives his wife's name as Phillis (also spelled Phyillis) and their children as: Ann, Harriet and Mary Ann. This is corroborated in the District of Columbia Manumission Book, for 13 June 1833. The District of Columbia Marriage Register for 1826-1850 states Michael Shiner married Jane Jackson on 9 August 1849. The 1850 Census for the District of Columbia lists Jane Jackson as 19 yrs. and their children as: Sarah E. 12, Isaac M. 5 and Braxton 6 months. The 1860 census for the District of Columbia lists Shiner's family for that year as: Wife, Jane Jackson age 29yrs, and children as Sarah E. age 21, Isaac M. 15, Rose Ann 8, and Jane M. 3yrs. Given Jane Jackson's age in 1850 (19 years old), clearly she is not the birth mother of Sarah and Isaac Shiner. Most likely they are children of Michael and Phillis but we cannot be certain. What happened to Phillis and her children? From other sources, we know Mary Ann, Phillis' daughter lived until 1904 (see below). Shiner's diary is simply silent on most personal matters, and we learn nothing more of the fate of Phillis and her children from it. Perhaps Shiner simply did not choose to record anything more of his family. By 1850, Ann Harriet and Mary Ann would have reached the age of marriage or employment and no longer resided with Michael, moved out of the District of Columbia or changed their last names.
- **Financial Affairs:** Shiner records very little regarding his financial affairs. How did Michael Shiner acquire enough money to gain his freedom? Shiner does not say but from other documents and the practices of the antebellum era, one may infer that he was allowed to "work his own time" or earn his freedom. During the 18th and 19th centuries, large areas of Virginia and Maryland were covered with plantations each requiring considerable slave labor. The District of Columbia from its beginning was an exception. In the District, there were no tobacco, cotton or wheat crops to gather so without intensive agriculture many owners found it profitable to allow their slaves to "work their own time".

"Working out" arrangements allowed the master to earn a regular return with little or no outlay. On the other hand the slaves gave their master a fixed percentage of their wages. Typically the slaves paid for their own food, clothing and shelter. After paying the master and buying their own essentials any money left over

could be put aside toward the purchase of freedom. The provisions of Thomas Howard's will allude to a variation on working out known as "term slavery". Term slavery was a common practice in the District, allowing the master to set a fixed number of years for his slave to work for him. The slave was allowed to purchase freedom at the end of the agreed period. While Shiner does not specify how much he was paid, he appears to have been able to accumulate sufficient funds to purchase not only his own freedom but also to assist his wife and children in gaining theirs. Despite naval regulations limiting slavery at the Washington Navy Yard slavery remained an established institution for many years. The following is from a 8 April 1830 report from Commandant Isaac Hull to the Board of Naval Commissioners which lists some of the slaves at Washington Navy Yard and their owners. Michael Shiner's name is not listed.

No.	Names	Stations	Remarks
1	James Tucker	Anchor smith	
2	John Goff	"	
3	John Tucker	"	
4	Fredrick Poff	"	
5	Lewis Freeman	"	
6	Abial Cannon	"	
7	Richard Brooks	"	
8	William Bond	"	
9	Washington Shaw	"	
10	Electus Davis	"	Slave to John D.
11	Joseph Thompson	"	Free - Black
12	Charles Washington	"	Slave to W. D. Mas.
13	James Dyson	"	Slave to Carey &
14	Leonard Taylor	"	Slave to W. D. Ma
15	Wm. Taylor	"	Slave to S. L. T.
16	William Brown	"	Slave to S. L. T.
17	Francis Talby	"	Slave to W. D. Mas.
18	Robert Gibson	"	Slave to S. L. T.
19	Walter Somerville	"	Free Black
20	John Farrar	Appr. "	Appr. to S. L. T.
21	Thomas Goff	"	"

Because of such customs as working out and term slavery, in the District of Columbia, free African-Americans rapidly came to outnumber slaves. Indeed, by 1830 free African-Americans outnumbered slaves by three to two; by 1860 it was more than five to one. (*City of Magnificent Intentions, A History of Washington, District of Columbia*, p., 58). Despite these figures Shiner's diary confirms that many slaves, such as Phillis Shiner, remained at the mercy of their masters' whims, subject to sale or harsh treatment..

- **Entrepreneur and Politician:** The 1860 census gives us some indication of his social standing. The census reflects Shiner was able to not only free his family from slavery but was able to buy a modest house for them in the District at 474

9th Street, S.E.. His dwelling is listed in the 1860 census as valued at \$800.00. Shiner is listed at the 9th Street address as early as 1858. In the DC Directory for that year he is listed as “colored painter.” An article in *The Washington Post* on 14 June 1905 reports Shiner’s estate increased substantially by the time of his death. In 1867, he had purchased a large property from W.B. Todd consisting of 9000 square feet of ground with frontage on D Street and Tenth Street, S.E. and on South Carolina Ave. *The Washington Post* relates that he developed the property by filling in a former skating pond and constructed a house on it in October 1868. This article goes on to recount a resolution “adopted in county council to inquire of Superintendent of Sewers into feasibility of draining what is known as Shiner’s Lake so as to relieve also the Wallach School House and 7th Street East of the great flow of water. After the Civil War Shiner became active in politics and he and his son Isaac were both delegates to the Republican Nominating Convention in 1870. There he spoke “of what happened 1000 years ago and who were friends of the colored race” (Source *National Intelligencer*, October 6, 1868).

- **Death:** Records from the DC Superior Court, involving Shiner’s daughter, Mary Shiner Almarolia’s estate, establish Michael Shiner’s death date as January 19th, 1880 and the cause of death smallpox. *The Washington Post*, for September 1904, reported a court battle over her estate (Almarolia vs. Holtzman et al. In Equity No. 23.908).
- **Michael Shiner In Memory**

After his death, the diary apparently came into the possession of his daughter Mary Almarolia and upon her date of death to the Library of Congress. In 1941, the Library recorded parts of Shiner’s diary, which it aired as part of the Library of Congress’ *Hidden History* program (*Christian Science Monitor*, 29 May 1941). The 10 August 1941 edition of *The Sunday Star* carried under “Those Were the Happy Days,” the question: “Where was Mike Shiner’s Pond?” Answer: “Ninth and S. Carolina Ave. S.E.”. Shiner’s diary manuscript was featured in the March 2002 Library of Congress exhibit, *An African-American Odyssey*. The Library exhibit focused on Shiner’s successful attempt to purchase his family from slave dealers.

APPENDIX C

Three Examples of Patronage in Practice

Political patronage became a fixture in the national political life during the administration of Andrew Jackson (1829-1837) and continued until the passage of the 1883 Pendleton Act. The highpoint for patronage was probably the administration of President Grant (1869-1877).

All national and many local parties, indeed many individual politicians, acted as patrons securing jobs for their constituents. In return for employment assistance, job seekers were often required to pay an assessment fee of 1% or 2 % of their monthly wages or work for the party's use during elections, etc. Patronage assessments were often overt as in the following 1880 request to Foremen and Clerks at WNY for "voluntary contributions:

East Washington Garfield and Arthur
Club 624 Pennsylvania Avenue South
East Washington D.C.
September 21, 1880

Dear Sir: A contribution is respectfully solicited to assist in defraying the expenses that may be incurred in the election of James A. Garfield for President and Chester a. Arthur for Vice President of the United States, and for the Republican Party at large.

A duly authorized person will call upon you for you contribution and a receipt as follows will be given, which you are at liberty to retain.

By order of the Club
Frank A. Davis, secretary¹

Many WNY employees who desired key jobs or career advancement looked for powerful benefactors. Political patronage was often the key to securing sought after employment in a pre-merit era. Typically, the political party in power used its influence to provide government jobs for loyal supporters. Not all shipyard jobs were attained by patronage. Some, positions especially highly skilled mechanics, were filled as the result of merit due to scarcity of applicants. The following are some examples of endorsed applications for employment, which are typical of the thousands in NARA holdings of WNY employment documents.

Note: Spelling and usage is that of the originals

The Case of John D. Boyd

John D. Boyd's application secured all of the necessary (indeed multiple) political endorsements. In this case the applicant was a veteran and a loyal Republican both requisites for employment with the new administration of President Grant.

¹ *Washington Post* 8 September 1880

Washington with my Command I found him in the ranks of the Republican Party where he has stood ever true up to this time.

I hope that the services rendered by Mr. Boyd will not be overlooked by the party as I know that Mr. Boyd valuable service to the Republican Party of this City.

J.B. Adams

Washington D.C.
May 24, 1869

Honorable A. E. Bovie
Secretary of the Navy

I would most respectfully make application for the position of Master Ship Carpenter at the Washington Navy Yard. I would respectfully state that I was the only man endorsed by the Republican party of the city. My appointment has been requested of the Admiral by the Asst. Naval Constructor.

I am sir very respectfully
etc.

John D. Boyd

Endorsed

Josiah L. Venoble President 5th & 6th
ward Grant and Colfax Club

William Beron Secretary ex. Com
G&CC

Charles Champion, President Sixth
Ward Republican Club

John Bull Adams, President Grant
and Colfax Club Georgetown D.C.

Georgetown DC
May 24th 1869

It gives me great pleasure to state what I know of my old friend whose acquaintance I formed in May 1861 in this city. The bearer Mr. John Boyd I found him a true and loyal man and in 1865 when I returned to

Washington
May 24th 1869

To whom it may concern,

This is to certify that John D. Boyd has been endorsed by the Executive Committee of the Grant and Colfax Club of the 5th & 6th Wards, for the position of Foreman of the Ship Carpenter Department of the Washington Navy Yard.

William Beson
Chairman, Ex Comm

After reading such powerful political endorsement, the Navy Yard leadership had few alternatives but to appoint the applicant. So the following reply was sent:

Washington
April 17th 1857

Hon. J. Toucey
Secretary of the Navy

Sir,

The undersigned members of the Democratic Association of the 6th Ward of Washington, respectfully represent that the present Master Ship Carpenter of the Washington Navy Yard, Mr. E. Foster, is a Know Nothing and an enemy of the Democratic Party- hostile to the late and present Administration and believing that his removal and that of others of the same Know Nothing Party is necessary to the interest of the Democracy, and would be simply an act of justice to the men who through danger and difficulty been faithful to their principles and political creed.

Therefore they respectfully ask that Edward Foster be removed from his place of Master Ship Carpenter of the Washington Navy Yard, and recommend to your favorable consideration, Mr. John W. Richardson, of Baltimore, but now resident here, as a man in every manner qualified to

perform the duties of Master Ship Carpenter, and an old well-tried Democrat.

With great respect they have

The honor to be your obedient servants

The Executive Committee of Jackson
Democratic Club

Washington, April. 17th 1857.
Hon J. Toucey
Secretary of the Navy.

Sir
The undersigned members of the Democratic Association of the 6th Ward of Washington, respectfully represent, that—
The present Master Ship Carpenter of the Washington Navy Yard, Mr. E. Foster, is a Know-Nothing and an enemy of the Democratic Party, — hostile to the late and to the present Administration; and believing that his removal and that of others of the same Know-Nothing party is necessary to the interest of the Democracy, and would be simply an act of justice to the men who have through danger and difficulty been faithful to their principles and political creed. —
Therefore they respectfully ask that the said Edward Foster be removed from his place of Master Ship Carpenter of the Washington Navy Yard, and recommend to your favorable consideration, Mr. John W. Richardson, of Baltimore, but now a resident here, as a man in every manner qualified to perform the duties of Master Ship Carpenter, and as an old and well-tried Democrat.

Yours very truly
Wm. Whistler
Jno. W. Richardson
V. L. Ligon

Note: The "Know Nothings" or The American Party enjoyed some popularity in 1850s. The party derived its informal name from its members replying, when asked about their role, "I know nothing." The party was anti-Catholic and anti-immigrant. In 1854 and 1855, its supporters won several offices, including mayor of Philadelphia and control of the Massachusetts legislature.

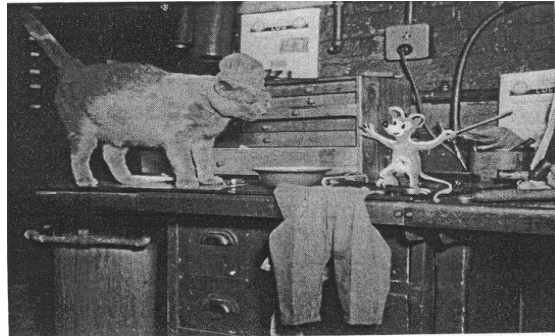
APPENDIX D

THE YARD BIRD THE COMIC GENIUS OF ROBERT E. BEAR



Every two weeks Naval Gun Factory readers of *The Log* looked forward to viewing and laughing at the latest cartoons of Robert E. Bear. From 1947 to 1953, Bear cast his satiric eye on the life and work at the Factory. As a production specialist with the NGF Management Department, Bear had wide access and opportunity to capture the foibles and quirks of the NGF community. Most Bear cartoons are annotated with his signature creation

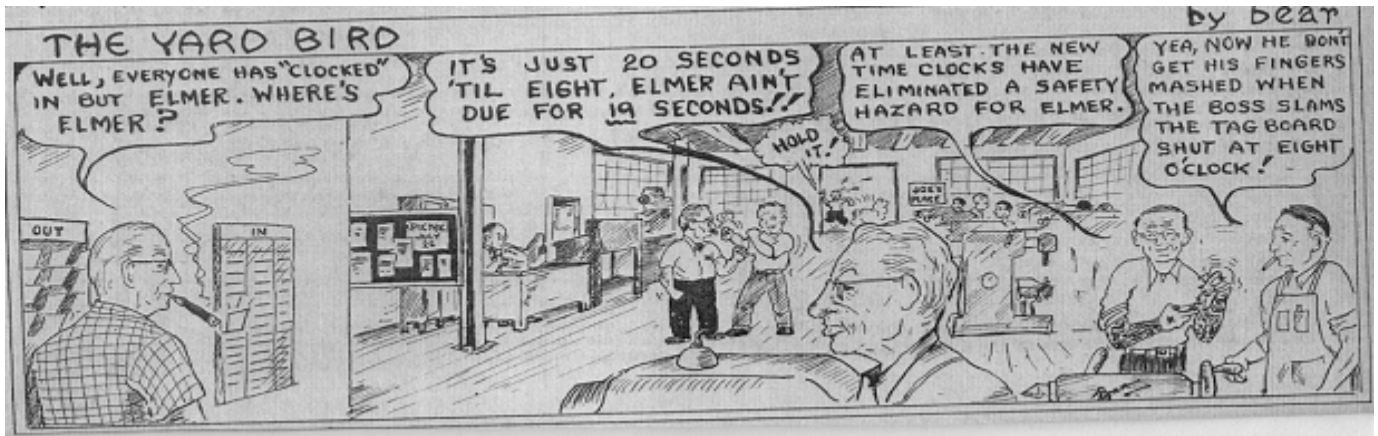
“Mabel Mouse.” Mabel became so popular with readers that the mechanics in Shop R-1 invited her to meet Minnie, the shop cat and mascot. The above photograph captures their first encounter with Mabel introducing Minnie to her new shop overalls. Mabel always provides Bear’s running gentle commentary on the passing parade of events. In each strip, Bear with Mabel’s assistance depicted the plight of bosses and workers and why they perceive their world so differently. Below are just a few of Bear’s creations many of which are as fresh and topical as the day they were published.



December 1949



July 2nd 1950



July 23rd 1952



July 23rd 1952



August 20th 1952



March 23rd 1953



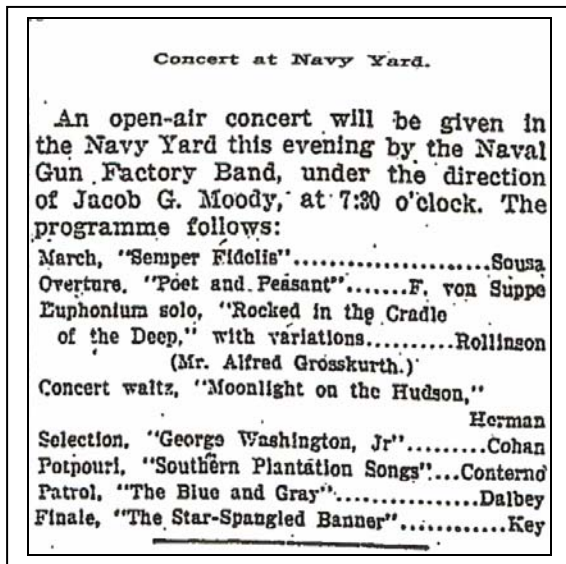
April 3rd 1953



APPENDIX E

THE NAVAL GUN FACTORY BAND

“We Thought We were Through With Them” the Naval Gun Factory Band marches into politics and other controversy.



The late 19th and early 20th centuries were the age of the marching bands. Almost every self respecting town and hamlet in America had at least one group of amateur musicians who were ready to serenade their fellow citizens from a park bandstand or lead the parade down Main Street for any festive or civic occasion. Washington DC had dozens of such organizations and a long tradition



of bands getting together to provide entertainment and free concert music throughout the city. For the most part, these parades and concerts were cordial and fun



Prof. J. G. Moody.

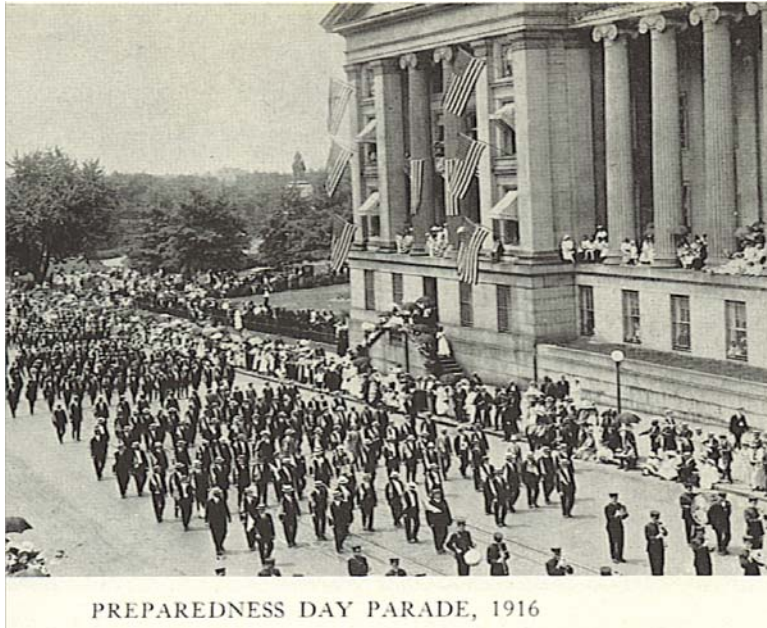
occasions. While most such bands were amateur some of the more popular bands accepted payments or honorariums for their participation. These payments helped defray the cost of uniforms, instruments and travel. Unfortunately these activities often led to confusion and bad feeling with the professional musicians unions.¹

On June 18th 1906 a unique Washington DC labor dispute erupted. The two contenting parties were the Musicians Union and the Naval Gun Factory Band. The dispute was of long standing; the Musicians Union accused the members of the Naval Gun Factory Band of refusing to join the Musicians Union even though the Union had offered them a substantially reduced membership dues rate of \$ 10.00 per annum. NGF Band leader “Professor” Jacob G. Moody

¹ The NGF Band played frequent concerts. The above program and concert announcement appeared in the *Washington Post* for August 1, 1907

indignantly wrote the Washington Post that the union's offer was no real reduction in dues nor were his band members desirous of joining the professional musicians union.

Since its inception in 1904 the NGF Band had been made up exclusively of civilians, most of which were NGF employees. The majority of these employees, including Jacob Moody, worked as machinists or skilled ordnance workers and as such paid dues to the Columbia Lodge Number 174 of the International Association of Machinists. The band members apparently felt that since they already paid their dues directly connected to their NGF employment they should not have to pay yet another deduction for their after hours amateur musical activities.



The professional musicians were not persuaded and the argument over membership festered to such an extent that by 1907 the American Federation of Labor actually considered a resolution brought forward by the DC Musicians Union to expel all members of Columbia Lodge no. 174 from the AF of L unless they compelled the errant amateur NGF musicians to professionally affiliate with the American Federation of Musicians and become dues paying members in good standing.

In rebuttal NGF's Columbia Lodge strongly denied that their organization sponsored the NGF Band. They stressed that the NGF Band was an "amateur organization for its own amusement". The musicians union motion to expel the Columbia Lodge was tabled but the issue did not go away.²

In 1910, the National Sunday School Parade which included over 5000 marchers and bands from all over the United States for the giant parade down Pennsylvania Avenue, was disrupted by this unresolved labor issue. Five Bands scheduled to parade abruptly threaten to withdraw if the nonunion NGF Band marched in the parade. The Sunday school delegates and marching bands had formed into line when five bands from the Washington DC area declared that the Sunday school convention had broken faith with them when they engaged the nonunion NGF Band. Leaders of the Sunday school group then ordered the NGF Band from the ranks. According to the Washington Post, the NGF Band then withdrew from the line of parading bands and appeared to pass out of the ranks and around a corner but the band marched on! One Sunday School leader recalled for the Post reporter "we thought we were through with them, it was the greatest kind of surprise to me to learn that the officers of the parade while ordering NGF departure were unable to prevent the Gun Factory's band from turning a corner and resuming their place in line."³

² Washington Post May 23, 1907 p.1

³ Washington Post May 21 1910 p.1&2

In the pre Hatch Act era, the Band often played to political and social gatherings such as election night festivities at the Washington Navy Yard. During the administration of President Wilson, politics and patriotism often overlapped as in the giant preparedness parades of 1916. The parades were ostensibly to prepare the nation for a war in Europe. The NGF Band and thousands of other government employees (including three thousand from the Gun Factory) marched down Pennsylvania Avenue to show support for the President Wilson and country, in a giant homecoming demonstration for the newly elected Wilson.

Later in 1916 the NGF Band provided musical accompaniment for suffragettes and their political supporters who gathered at Union Station to bid farewell to Alice Paul, a prominent leader in the struggle for the voting rights amendment. Paul and other suffragette leaders were to leave for the National Suffrage Amendment Convention in Chicago. The day of her departure 5000 supporters turned out to see and hear her. The NGF Band played “Marseillaise” and “Onward Christian Soldiers”.⁴



Photo of Alice Paul toasting the new 19th Constitutional Amendment giving American women the right to vote.

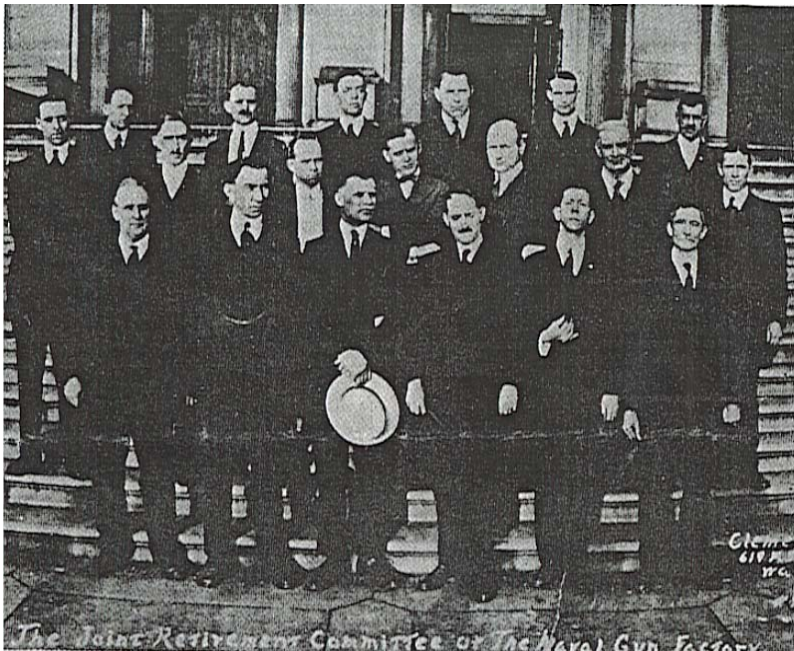
In 1922, NGF quietly chose to replace their mechanics band with an all military organization, later to become the Navy Band. The reason for NGF’s decision to disband the civilian band was never officially given. After examining the documentation, the following four factors may have led to the band’s demise. First, was the nebulous public/private nature of the civilian Band. Second, they were a government employees’ organization performing in a quasi official role which may have given the appearance of Department of Navy endorsement for political and social causes. Third, was the Commandants possible decision for a stronger military representation (similar to that provided by the United States Marine Corps Band) when there was a need to represent the factory at official functions. Fourth, this resolved any of the Band’s outstanding labor issues.

⁴ Washington Post April 10, 1916 p.2

APPENDIX F

Robert H. Alcorn and the Creation of the first Civil Service Retirement System

Robert H. Alcorn was born in Roanoke County, Virginia in 1872. Although his family made their living as farmers, young Robert took an early interest in mechanics and first went to work for the Virginia Railway. There he labored in the railway shops repairing and maintaining trains. In 1910 he moved to Washington DC and went to work for the Naval Gun Factory as a molder.¹ That same year he became the leader of a group of NGF employees interested in the retirement problem. The Committee was composed of like-minded individuals representing all of the NGF shops. The reason NGF employees became prominent in the struggle for a federal employees retirement system was in part due to their proximity to Capital Hill and their experience in lobbying on other issues such as pay reform. Alcorn's genius was to convince the NGF committee to make strategic alliance with employee committees in other large non DOD Federal agencies such as the Government Printing Office.² In the next decade his career at the factory also advanced as he became a Quartermaster or section supervisor in the Molding Shop.



The problem of retirement and pensions as one scholar noted was two fold; "would Congress permit pensions at all and if so who would pay for them?"³ Alcorn made an in-depth study of the problem and become in the process, a recognized expert on retirement systems. In 1916 Alcorn became chairman of the Joint Conference Committee on Civil Service Retirement. The Committee was composed of area trade unions and federal employees who worked at the various naval shipyards. As Chairman he began to take on a national role as an advocate and spokesperson for the creation of

a federal employee's retirement system. He was often called to testify before Senate and Congressional committees that had cognizance on Civil Service issues. The idea of a law providing for a system of retirement for all government employees was revolutionary and controversial.

¹ *Washington Post* 27 September 1957

² William Gaebner, *A History of Retirement the Meaning and Function of an American Institution 1885-1978* p.67

³ Paul P. Van Riper, *History of the U.S. Civil Service* p.246



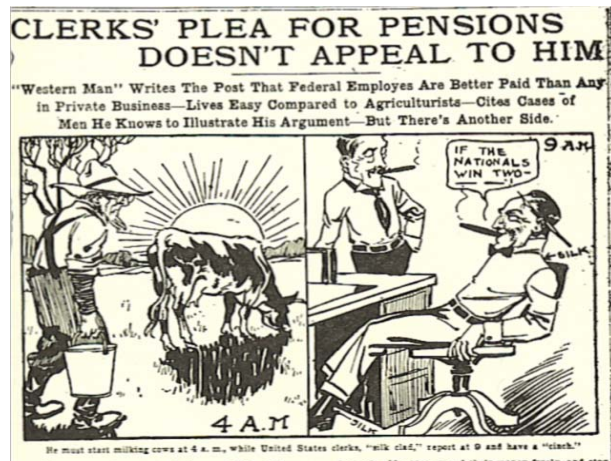
William H. Moody

At the turn of the century workers in the United States had few protections and retirement pension plans were almost unknown. Alcorn had to address the deep and abiding skepticism that argued the provisions for retirement in the American business and industrial tradition, solely the individual responsibility of the worker. From 1886 to 1914 more than seventy pension bills were introduced into Congress.⁴ In 1904, then Secretary of the Navy William H. Moody, appearing before the Congressional Civil Service Reform Committee, was asked his opinion regarding the feasibility of a pension plan for federal workers. In his reply Moody declared himself unalterably opposed to any scheme of civil pensions at government expense:

“I can not find language too strong to express my opposition to such a project” Moody further stated his belief that he considered it his duty to discharge superannuated employees. “It seems a hard and ungracious thing to discharge a person who has grown old in government employ, but I do not believe department heads have the right to consult their own feelings in the matter. It might be a creditable thing were I to go down in my own pocket and produce the money wherewith to pay a superannuated clerk, but it would not be creditable to pay an inefficient person out of the public treasury.”⁵

Moody’s attitude was not unusual for his era. Many government workers had deep and abiding skepticism of the introduction of a federal pension plan. Part of this doubt was that early federal pension efforts called for a strictly voluntary withholding with no funds from the public sector. In addition some plans called for the introduction of a mandatory retirement age for all federal workers.⁶

Some members of Congress were ready to endorse a voluntary withholding scheme providing that federal workers exclusively funded their own retirement by payroll deduction. Alcorn and other proponents of government funded retirement legislation effectively argued such a plan would make it nearly impossible for employees ever to



Washington Post cartoon September 8, 1912

⁴ *The Log* 1 September 1951 p.3 and 9. Photograph of the Joint Retirement Committee of the Naval Gun Factory circa 1920. Front Row L.to R. Charles Love Frank Goodman, C.V. Lewis, **Robert H. Alcorn**, C. E. Reed & H.K. Griffin. Second Row L. to R. James P. Mc Ardle, R.W. Mathaney, George Cooke, Frank Lee, Wm. J. Ruckert, Thomas Finnern & Bernard Ladd. Back Row L. to R. Virgil Pitman, E.A. Kline, William Keeler, Henry J. LeClair, Edward Scott & John J. Trumbo and Van Riper Ibid p. 246

⁵ *Washington Post* 6 March 1904 p. E1

⁶ Ibid 1 February 1892 p. 7

retire since few if any would be able to set aside the necessary funds. Alcorn and other committee speakers also testified that the high cost of living and comparatively low pay of most federal workers made retirement a voluntary withholding scheme impossible. By 1910 supporters were now able to point to major European nations such as Britain and Germany as successful Civil Service pension plan models.

Alcorn and the committee pressured Congress by circulating petitions (gathering over 16,000 signatures from District of Columbia workers alone) and bringing NGF workers into the Congressional chambers in their work clothes and with their trade tools, to explain the need for financial security in their old age. While many in the Congress were skeptical, they did share a concern with the workers that absent a real retirement law the U.S. Civil Service could become geriatric as an aged workforce stayed on year after year for fear of losing all sustenance should they leave their position with no pension. While management often wanted to decrease the number of superannuated employees, politically it found such actions impossible absent some sort of viable retirement scheme.⁷ Part of this difficulty was the long continuance in Civil Service of Civil War veterans such as Jared Mundell who worked as a laborer for over fifty five years at WNY.⁸ Appointing officers were especially reluctant to remove such veterans.

In 1920 after many years and despite stiff resistance from members of Congress, business groups, and innumerable hearings, Alcorn and his committee were finally able to gather sufficient support to insure passage of the Retirement Act. The new law called all covered federal employees to pay in 2 ½ percent of their salaries and wages for its maintenance with the Federal share allotted at \$ 18,000,000.00 per annum. To insure the Act's passage the mandatory retirement age for federal workers was set at age 70. This mandatory retirement provision was partly a concession to the many vocal critics of the high number of older workers and their supposed inefficiency. When the Legislation was finally signed into law, over 5000 aged workers retired; some over 90 years of age.



Robert Alcorn
in later life.

Over the next three decades Alcorn worked successfully to expand the 1920 Retirement Act's provisions for survivors and to lower the minimum retirement age. Ironically Robert Alcorn left federal service early making him ineligible for an annuity. For many years he worked with others on retirement issues including the National Association of Retired Civilian Employees (NARCE). NARCE is presently known as the National Association of Retired Federal Employees. In 1945 he became president of NARCE making him the only president of that organization who was not an annuitant. As president, he demonstrated leadership on retirement issues and advocated for better provisions for all federal retirees. During his presidency he began publication of *Retirement News* in which he answered many questions about changes to retirement legislation and how employees and annuitants could better utilize the program. He had to give up the NARCE Presidency in 1946 due to ill health but continued to remain active and involved in retirement issues.⁹

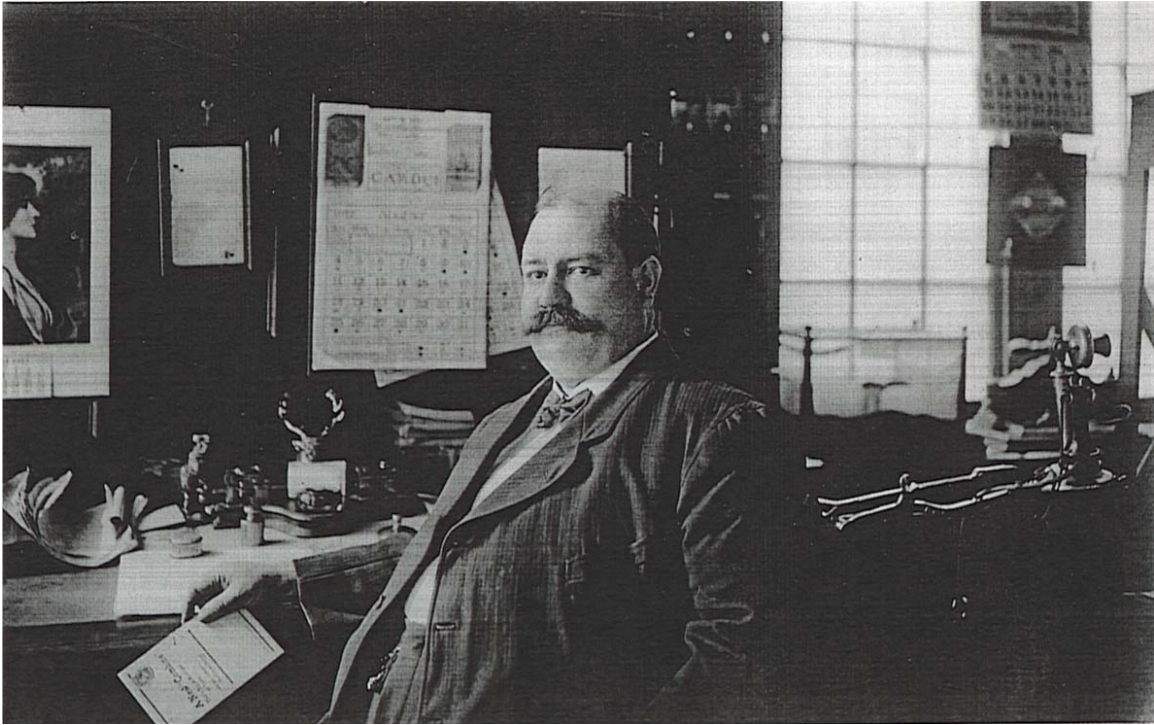
⁷ Van Riper op. cit p. 163

⁸ For Jared Mundell see page 56

⁹ E-mail narfe.org to author dtd. 3 January 2005 subj. Robert H. Alcorn

Robert Alcorn died age 85 at Yeadon, PA on September 18 1957. He is buried in the Congressional Cemetery (range 92 Site 162N) not far from the Washington Navy Yard and the Factory that he loved and served so well.¹⁰ When his death was announced, Frank J. Wilson, President of the National Association of Retired Civil Employees stated Alcorn was: “Just about 95 percent responsible for the passage of the Civil Service Retirement Act of 1920. Every civil service retiree owes him a debt of eternal gratitude.”

¹⁰ E-mail from Bill Flecke Congressional Cemetery Manager to author dtd. 15 Janaury 2005



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NGF Breech Mechanism Shop circa 1910 (authors collection)



VIEW IN MISCELLANEOUS SHOP, LOOKING WEST, NAVY YARD, WASHINGTON, D. C.

Naval District Washington
Washington Navy Yard