



The Friends of the PNSM  
The Wheelhouse

Volume 2, No 3  
July 1, 2023

Welcome to the  
*The Wheelhouse*,  
a Newsletter

published quarterly  
by **The Friends of the  
Portsmouth Naval  
Shipyards Museum**

Please visit the  
Museum and see our  
website for additional  
information.

<https://www.friendsofportsmouthnsm.org/>

In this issue we bring  
you messages from our  
**President, Gary  
Bahena**, a History  
Column from our 1<sup>st</sup>  
**Vice President, Steve  
Milner**, a Report from  
our **Treasurer, Robert  
Fogel**, and a PNSM  
Exhibit reviews by  
**Renée M. Russell**

**Editor and  
Newsletter Design:  
Renée M. Russell**

**The Friends of the  
Portsmouth Naval  
Shipyards Museum**

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## President's Message

Greetings, Friends.

In this issue of The Wheelhouse, we bring you updates about the reopening of *The Lightship Portsmouth Museum*. We also highlight our Annual Meeting, tell you about our upcoming Speakers Series presentations by Allie Marie (July 26) and James Shoemaker (September 13), and share news about the Portsmouth Paddle Battle.

## Treasurer's Report

As of June 1, The Friends have \$104,828.76 on hand. During this fiscal year we are funding the continuation of the Oral History Project with the IC Norcom TV Production students, and have set aside \$8,000 for projects, not yet defined by the Museums.

# THE FRIENDS OF THE PORTSMOUTH NAVAL SHIPYARD MUSEUM

## Norfolk Naval Shipyards (NNSY) History

By: Steve Milner, First Vice President

### NNSY has hosted United States Presidents over the years

During the course of Norfolk Naval Shipyards' storied history, it has hosted royalty, members of Congress, other VIP's, noted military leaders and several U.S. presidents. Our Shipyards and some historians have documented that seven U.S. presidents have been here--but through my research--I'd like to add an eighth, **President Theodore "Teddy" Roosevelt**, also known as TR.



*President Theodore Roosevelt waves to crowds in Downtown Portsmouth, where he delivered a Memorial Day speech on May 30, 1906, after his Presidential Yacht arrived at NNSY.*

It depends how you define a visitor, versus someone who also toured our Shipyards. It's possible our 26th president did tour our facility when he was Assistant Secretary of the Navy. But it's documented that he visited our Shipyards when he and his family disembarked on May 30, 1906, from the presidential yacht, *Mayflower*, at one of our wet slips,

*(Presidents Continued, Page 3)*

## Calendar Items:

**Wednesday, July 26, 6-7 PM, Churchland Branch Library, Allie Marie** will speak about her research on the German Village at the NNSY

**Saturday, September 9, 9:30 – 4:30 High Street Landing, Annual Paddle Battle,**

**Wednesday, September 13, 6-7 PM, Churchland Branch Library, James Shoemaker** will speak about his book on the History of Norfolk Naval Shipyards



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**PNSM Event – Lightship  
(LV101) Grand Re-Opening  
Saturday, April 8th at 10 am  
Portsmouth Lightship  
Museum** By: Renée M. Russell,  
Editor

Friends gathered for **The Lightship  
Portsmouth Museum** reopening  
on Saturday, April 8th at 10 am,  
and our event was locally  
reported, on WAVY TV-10.



It was amazing to see all of its new  
exhibits and added information  
aboard. The crew from the  
Shipyards Museum planned all  
sorts of family friendly activities,  
including some giveaways.



*Ross Paterson was on hand to provide a  
brief overview of the changes to be seen  
aboard.*



“What an honor it was to meet,  
greet, and hear some really salty  
sea stories from Peter Brunk,  
retired USCG CWO04, and former  
Commanding Officer of the  
Lightship Nantucket (LV-112,” said  
one attendee.



*Peter Brunk (USCG CWO04 Ret), former  
Commanding Officer of the Lightship  
Nantucket, which is now a National  
Historic Landmark in Boston.*

Photographs, this page,  
by Renée M. Russell

**Annual Meeting of The  
Friends of the Naval  
Shipyards Museum** By: Gary  
Bahena

On Tuesday, May 9 at noon, The  
Friends’ **Annual Meeting** was held  
at the Portsmouth Children’s  
Museum.

The following were elected as  
Directors and Officers: Gary  
Bahena (President), Stephen  
Milner (1st-VP), Stephen Poole  
(2nd VP), Robert Fogel (Treasurer),  
Jeannie McCoy (Secretary), Lavern  
Harrell and Keith Abernathy.



*Meeting Attendees, from left to right,  
bottom row: Stephen B. Milner, 1<sup>st</sup> VP,  
Jeannie McCoy, Secretary, Barbara Pickett,  
Member; Top Row: Stephen Poole, 2<sup>nd</sup> VP,  
Keith Abernathy, Director at Large, Gary  
Bahena, President, and Mark Hugel,  
Member.*

Robert Fogel presented his  
Treasurer’s Report and Gary  
Bahena highlighted the major  
projects from 2020 and for the  
upcoming year, chief among which  
is to actually start developing the  
Oral History Project Exhibit for the  
Shipyards Museum. We hope to  
have agreement with the Shipyards  
Museum on the content of the  
Exhibit by Fall and an Exhibit,  
programmer/designer hired by  
year-end.



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# THE FRIENDS OF THE PORTSMOUTH NAVAL SHIPYARD MUSEUM

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*(Presidents Continued from Page 1)*

## **NNSY has hosted United States Presidents**

following its cruise down Chesapeake Bay from Washington, D.C., and **that he delivered a Memorial Day speech in downtown Portsmouth**, according to a story written by journalist Mark St. John Erickson in the Newport News Daily Press on May 30, 2014. **Roosevelt then went by carriage to the nearby Naval Hospital cemetery** as part of his Memorial Day observance. (At that time NNSY was known as Norfolk Navy Yard, Portsmouth, Virginia.)

**Roosevelt also visited Hampton Roads twice in 1907**, according to St. John Erickson. These visits included the President's attending the **Jamestown Exposition** on grounds that are now Norfolk Naval Station, and when he sent the Great White Fleet off on its nearly two-year world tour to show the nation's naval strength.

**Theodore Roosevelt's distant cousin, our 32nd President, Franklin D. Roosevelt, toured our Shipyard on July 29, 1940.** (It was renamed Norfolk Naval Shipyard on December 1, 1945.) He arrived aboard the presidential yacht, *Potomac*, that tied up at Berth 5 in Wetslip 1, just north of Building 31, according to NNSY's Command Historian and Archivist, Marcus Robbins. During this one-day visit, FDR saw **Battleship Alabama** under construction on NNSY Building Ways. A Virginian-Pilot newspaper story at that time noted that shipyard workers cheered the President at this ship's construction site.



*When President Franklin Roosevelt toured Norfolk Naval Shipyard on July 29, 1940, he saw ships under construction and heard about our facility's upgrades, in anticipation of World War II, a year-and-a-half before Pearl Harbor was attacked.*

Robbins also noted in his Service to the Fleet employee newspaper story, published last July, that **Shipyard Commander, RADM Manley Simons gave FDR an overview of our facility's improvements.** In part, these included the beginning of construction of **Dry Dock No. 8**, the erection of the 350-ton **Hammerhead Crane**, construction and extension to the Structural Shop, Building 163 and addition to the Machine Shop, Building 171, among others. RADM Simons also discussed the addition of **2,000 homes for shipyard workers** locally, including homes later dubbed by residents as the "**Simonsdale**" neighborhood.

Also, during his visit to Hampton Roads, a year-and-a-half before America was drawn into World War II, FDR wanted to see some of the nation's other prewar capabilities. In doing so he saw aircraft displayed at the **Naval Air Station** in Norfolk, stopped at the Army Air Corps' **Langley Field** in Hampton and toured **Newport News Shipbuilding** and Drydock Company in Newport News.

FDR also served as an assistant secretary of the Navy, from 1913 to 1920, and developed naval strategies during World War I.

Earlier U.S. presidents and the years they visited our shipyard were: James Madison, 1818; Andrew Jackson, 1829; Martin Van Buren, 1838; John Tyler, 1843; James K. Polk, 1846; Millard Fillmore, 1851 and James Buchanan, 1859.

**Marshall W. Butt** was the Shipyard's historian who **documented these visits** in his book, *Portsmouth Under Four Flags 1752-1970*. He also was one of the founders of the Portsmouth Historical Association and **helped establish the Naval Shipyard Museum in 1949 when it was located in Building 33.** When this Museum was transferred to the city of Portsmouth in 1963 and moved to its present location on High Street, Butt became its director.

Back to NNSY's early days: When Andrew Jackson visited our shipyard, **Dry Dock No. 1** was being built. Work started on it in December 1827 and was completed for its first use on June 17, 1833, when the warship *USS Delaware* was docked.



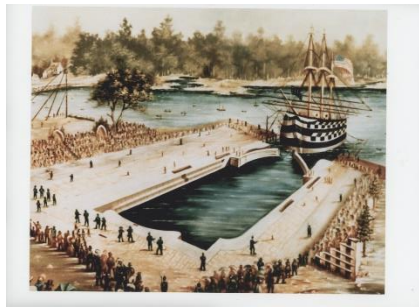
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# THE FRIENDS OF THE PORTSMOUTH NAVAL SHIPYARD MUSEUM

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Portsmouth folklore, repeated over the years, recalls that when **President Jackson visited our shipyard to see Dry Dock No. 1** under construction, he was separated from his official party and stopped for a drink of water,

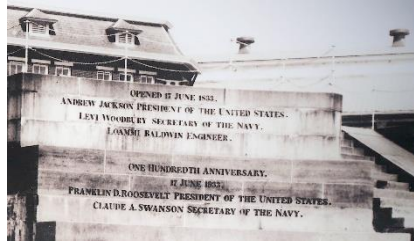


*In this artist's concept, USS Delaware prepares to enter NNSY's (Gosport Shipyard's) Dry Dock No. 1 in the first drydocking in North America. This historic treasure opened on June 17, 1833.*



*View of Dry Dock No. 1's headwall, circa 1933, showing names of some U.S. Presidents and others on the 100th anniversary of its opening. From NNSY Archives. See close-up, next column.*

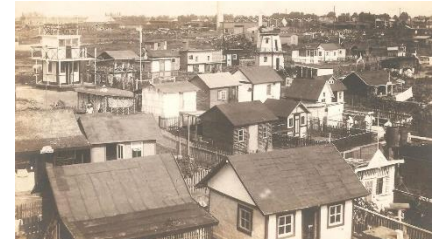
according to longtime Virginian-Pilot newspaper columnist and historian, George Tucker. However, the young boy tasked to ladle water from a bucket for the dock's construction workers refused to give him a drink



because, he said, this request didn't come from a worker. According to Tucker, the youngster, Ebenezer Thompson, said, "I haven't time sir. I'm hired by the government to wait on its employees."

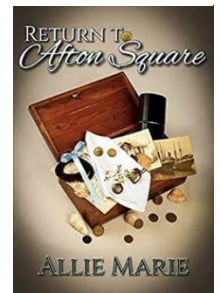
Supposedly, Jackson replied, "Then, my lad, I am entitled to a drink, for I, too, am an employee of the government as its President. Andrew Jackson at your service!"

No doubt Thompson happily repeated this personal story numerous times during his more than 90 years. ★



*Overview showing the extent of the German Village*

the village in her wonderful book *Return to Afton Square*. She will be available starting at 5:30 to meet and speak with you.



She will have some of her books available for purchase. Marie's fiction books focus on Portsmouth. For additional information, see this article from the Norfolk Historical Society's "Courier," from Fall 2007:

<https://norfolkhistoricalsociety.wildapricot.org/Resources/Documents/CourierFall07.pdf>

**Wednesday, September 13, 6-7 PM, Churchland Branch Library**

Come hear the third in our 2023 Speakers Series featuring noted local authors speaking on NNSY. James Shoemaker, who was part of our Pearl Harbor Day panel presentation in 2022, will speak more in depth about his book *History of Norfolk Naval Shipyard*. James will be available starting at 5:30 PM to meet with attendees and to sign book copies.

## Upcoming Speaker Events:

**Wednesday, July 26, 6-7 PM,  
Churchland Branch Library**

Come hear a noted and Friends member, **Allie Marie**. She will speak about her research on the German Village at the NNSY. As many of you are aware, during World War I, two German ships became stuck at NNSY. While there, their crews built a **real-life German village at NNSY**. It was complete with homes, shops a church, and even a windmill. Marie did an extensive profile of