



The Friends of the PNSM
The Wheelhouse

Volume 2, No 4

President's Message

Greetings, Friends.
In this issue of The Wheelhouse, we bring you updates about the recent 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 September 1, The Friends have \$109,946.31 on hand. During this fiscal year we are funding the continuation of the Oral History Project with the IC Norcom TV Production students. We have committed \$3500 for the purchase of video recording equipment to allow the Oral History Project to conduct additional interviews beyond the practical 3-interview-per-year limit using the IC Norcom studio. We have set \$5,500 for projects not yet defined by the Museums.

Volume 2, No 4
October 1, 2023

**Welcome to the
The Wheelhouse,**
a Newsletter
published quarterly
by **The Friends of the
Portsmouth Naval
Shipyard 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 **1st
Vice President, Steve
Milner,** a Report from
our **Treasurer, Robert
Fogel,** and a review of
Paddle Battle III by
Renée M. Russell

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Renée M. Russell**

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

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THE FRIENDS OF THE PORTSMOUTH NAVAL SHIPYARD MUSEUM

Norfolk Naval Shipyard (NNSY) History

By: Steve Milner, First Vice President

NNSY projects ranged from 'Old Ironsides,' to missile tests, to Space Shuttle

Already known for its quality workmanship in repairing U.S. Navy ships, Norfolk Naval Shipyard also has distinguished itself on specialized projects such as during NASA's now-completed Space Shuttle program. Add to that its projects on the Navy's oldest commissioned ship, a sailing vessel still in service, *USS Constitution*—more commonly known as "Old Ironsides."

Former longtime Code 1170 Photographic Supervisor, now retired, Roddy Hodges, reminded me recently at a Portsmouth Rotary Club meeting that NNSY had performed non-destructive testing on "Old Ironsides." Dating back to our nation's Revolutionary War, this historic sailing ship is moored at the Charlestown, Massachusetts, Navy Yard.

Jumping ahead a couple of centuries, Roddy said NNSY personnel gold-plated piping in a Space Shuttle's cargo bay and machined a specialized fuselage ring surrounding its rocket's three main engines. NASA asked our Shipyard to do this Space Shuttle work because we had one of the few milling machines in the U.S. capable of doing this task.

Polaris Continued, Page 2

BECOME A MEMBER of THE FRIENDS

Upcoming Events:

Wednesday, December 6, 6-7 PM, Churchland Branch Library, Acclaimed Historian, **Paul Ewell**, from The Eastern Shore, will speak on the history of the Eastern Shore fisherman and their boats. You do not want to miss this one.



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NNSY projects ranged from 'Old Ironsides' to missile tests to Space Shuttle

And a story in NNSY's *Service to the Fleet* employee newspaper, dated July 24 1970, caught my attention when I was reading back issues of this publication. It described how NNSY personnel supported the first launch of a dummy Polaris missile from inside a tube in *USS Observation Island* (EAG 154) on November 10, 1958, while it was moored at the Shipyard's Berth 42.



A dummy test Polaris missile is launched a short distance from a tube aboard *USS Observation Island* (EAG 154) at NNSY's Berth 42 in the late 1960s. The steam cannon-launched missile landed in the nearby Turning Basin. Credit Historic NNSY Archives

This, and later dummy missiles, tested a steam cannon ejection system that used pressurized gas to launch them from the ship's tube. It simulated the start of what would be a real launch when the two-stage missile's solid-fueled engine would then ignite on the way to its target.

These dummy missiles were recovered in NNSY's nearby Turning Basin.

Also, during a 10-month availability that was completed in May 1969, NNSY converted *USS Observation Island*, making it capable of firing the newer Poseidon missile. The Shipyard also upgraded the ship's periscope system at the time, installing one similar to those in Fleet Ballistic Missile submarines. A story on the aerospace website *Spaceline* also noted that NNSY converted the *USS Observation Island* to be the first Navy ship to incorporate a fully integrated FBM system. The Shipyard, according to *Spaceline*, also installed a complete prototype submarine-type missile firing control, navigation and launching system. NNSY also installed an instrumentation system for optical and electronic data. (A Polaris, minus its flight components, is displayed at NNSY's trophy Park.)

And after submarine-based Polaris and later Poseidon missile launches were operational, *USS Observation Island* provided at-sea support for these tests, according to *Spaceline*. The ship also served as a VIP viewing site for submarine launches, with the most notable guest being President John F. Kennedy, who attended an Atlantic-Ocean launch on November 16, 1963, six days before his assassination. At that time the submarine *USS Andrew Jackson* (SSBN 619) launched this Polaris missile 30 miles east of then Cape Kennedy (now Cape Canaveral).

When I was a media guest onboard the destroyer escort *USS Cone* (DD 866), in late 1969, I recall watching a live Polaris missile launch from a submerged submarine in the Atlantic Ocean, also about 30 miles east of Cape Kennedy. Cape Kennedy, originally known as Cape Canaveral, changed its name back when the late president's family gave its permission to do so. (Many geographical locations and landmarks around the nation had changed their names to honor President Kennedy following his assassination.)

And on a personal note, I was so excited when the Polaris missile streaked skyward from its submerged location that I followed its trajectory with my Super 8 home movie camera; that is, until my camera's



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PADDLE BATTLE III

On September 9, 2023, from 9:30-4:30, we held the 3rd Annual Portsmouth Paddle Battle on the Elizabeth River.

As in prior years, participants competed in Stand-Up-Paddleboards (SUP) and Kayak categories, separated based upon age/experience level.

New in 2023, by popular demand, the Paddle Battle added races for tandem kayaks and for canoes. Racer and Spectator comments agree, the 3rd Annual Portsmouth Paddle Battle was an awesome day out on the water and on land. Other festivities included **Dan Rosnato** and his acoustic guitar singing 70s and 80s classics, **DJ Eric** spinning popular tunes for all ages, games, good food and prizes!

Paddle Battle also had special events for children, including free face painting. In short, there seemed to be something for everyone.



Live Music, Food, Drink & Family Fun

September 9, 2023

PortsmouthPaddleBattle.com

In the works for 2024 – an afternoon Junior Paddle Battle to introduce Portsmouth children who are not usually exposed to the water to kayaking in the High Street Basin. The children will be in tandem kayaks and instructed by experienced kayakers.

Proceeds help The Friends support the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard Museum and the Lightship Portsmouth Museum including the ongoing work to develop the permanent interactive digital Oral History Project exhibit for the Shipyard Museum.

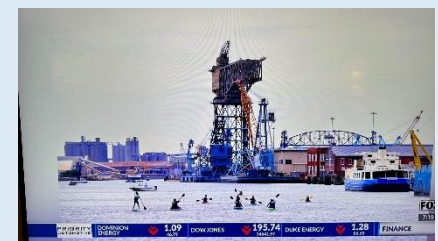
The Race Course once again ran from High Street Basin in Olde Towne to the Hammerhead Crane on the Shipyard and back. Racers loved this course as well as the ability to race against commercial ships.

The Friends are extremely grateful to **VB Surf Sessions** in Virginia Beach for lending 4 Kayaks for use by racers who wished to race but who did not own their own Kayak. Loaner Kayaks are always a very popular feature of the Paddle Battle and are usually provided by the **Hoffler Creek Wildlife Preserve**. This year, however, a terrible and saddening arson at Hoffler Creek wiped out their fleet of Kayaks. **The Friends' Board has approved a \$1,000 "Rebuild Hoffler" donation to Hoffler Creek.**

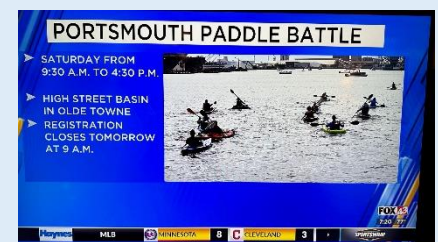
Gary Bahena (President) with walkie-talkie, announcing times and keeping score from Mile Marker 0.



Jeannie McCoy, looking pensively.



We were fortunate to have the event announced, throughout several days, on local Wavy-10 TV





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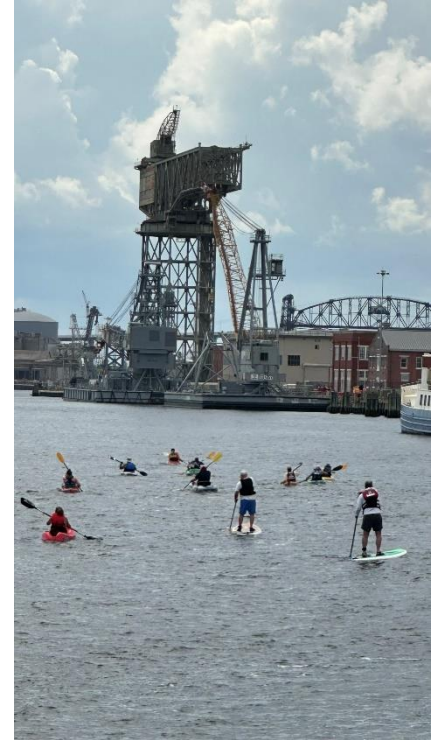


Portsmouth Mayor, Shannon Glover, competitor



Welcome to the Registration Table

Photographs by Renée M Russell



Long view of competitors in action. with the Hammerhead Crane in the background

Many observers came with canine friends



Re-enactors pause in the Museum for a sip of water.



Re-enactors outside the Museum



Keith Abernathy and Robert Fogel welcome competitors and spectators



At the start of their race, this group included 29 competitors.





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(Polaris Continued from Page 2)



Aboard USS Observation Island (EAG 154), President John Kennedy watches a Polaris missile test launch from the submarine USS Andrew Jackson (SSBN 619) in the Atlantic Ocean. Credit White House

automatic electric eye setting burned out as I pointed my camera toward the Sun. Missile launch or not, I should have known better. But before my camera's image faded to black I did capture some of this Polaris launch. Fortunately, a local photo shop repaired my camera.

President John Kennedy, at center, follows the test



launch of a Polaris missile from USS Andrew Jackson (SSBN 619). Credit White House

Looking at NNSY's storied history, it was once again at the forefront of national defense during these missile tests. This time, it was in the development of the Fleet Ballistic Missile System that is now a major component in today's submarine deterrent force.

The current Trident II D-5 missile program replaced Polaris and Poseidon missiles. The nation's other two Triad components are our nation's land-based Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles, and our aircraft capable of carrying nuclear weapons.



A two-stage Polaris missile streaks skyward as it's launched from a submerged "Boomer" submarine. Credit U.S. Naval Institute



Past
Speaker
Events:

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

Many came out to hear noted speaker and Friends member, **Allie Marie**. Marie's fiction books focus on Portsmouth.

She spoke about her research on



the German Village at the NNSY. This brought authenticity to her story. As many of you are aware, during World War I, the sailors from two German ships became detained



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 used the village as a backdrop for her delightful and informative book, *Return to Afton Square*.



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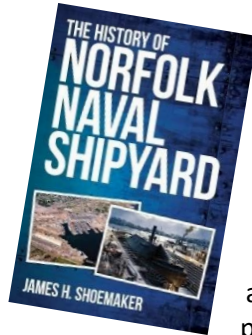
She was available before the event to meet and speak with attendees. She had some of her books available for purchase. For additional information, see this article from the Norfolk Historical Society's "Courier," from Fall 2007: <https://norfolkhistoricalsociety.wildapricot.org/Resources/Documents/CourierFall07.pdf>

**Wednesday, September 13,
6-7 PM,**

Churchland Branch Library

James H Shoemaker, who was part of our Pearl Harbor Day panel presentation in 2022, spoke more in depth about his book *History of Norfolk Naval Shipyard*.

The origins and history of the Shipyard trace back to 1767. It was ideally situated on a protected shore in the mid-Atlantic. The demand for shipbuilding follows the development of ship construction. From the materials used to build them, to the methods of powering



them. This evolved a labor force that has created legends.

James was available before and after the presentation to meet with attendees and to sign copies of his book.



Jim Shoemaker speaking about his path of history.



Admiral Hugel a valued Member of The Friends of Portsmouth Naval Shipyard Museum, introduced James.

Portsmouth Naval Shipyard Museum (PNSM) News

Assistant Curator of PNSM, **Ross Patterson**, left his current position, at the end of September, for a job that suits him well. He will be the Curator of the **World War II Museum** in New Orleans, LA. Ross's knowledge of WWII is encyclopedic and we wish him fair winds and following seas.



Ross Patterson, holding a Scrimshaw WWII Canteen, donated to PNSM by Renée M. Russell. It was scribed by her father, Robert I Russell, a 75th Co. B Seabee in the Pacific.