

Charlestown Navy Yard

Boston
National Historical Park

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

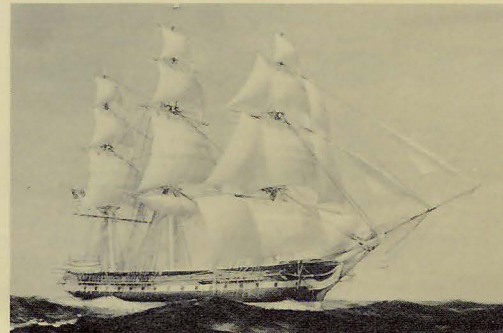


Constitution was at the low point of her career in 1900 when she was used as a floating barracks. To the left are the gunboat *Topeka* and cruiser *Olympia*.

Whether known as the Charlestown Navy Yard, Boston Navy Yard, or Boston Naval Shipyard, this facility served the Navy for 174 years. Although warships were built here, the yard was better known for its supply and repair functions and for its leadership in technical innovation. This leadership began with the construction of shiphouses that allowed vessels to be built or repaired in any weather, a

ropewalk that provided cordage to the Navy until after World War II, and the first naval dry dock in New England. In the 20th century, the yard continued its leadership with the development of die-lock chain, sonar, missilery, and sophisticated electronics. The evolution of naval technology and construction techniques is reflected in the fine products of this shipyard on the Charles River.

The Early Years



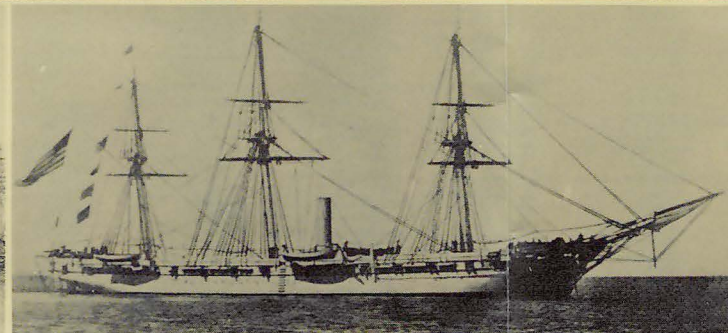
Independence, launched in 1814, was the first ship-of-the-line in the U.S. Navy. Built too late for the war of 1812, she fought Barbary pirates and in the Mexican War. In 1836 the upper deck

was removed, making her a "raze" frigate, as in the picture above. She remained in the Navy until 1914.



Artist Robert Salmon portrayed the shipyard in 1828. At the right is *Constitution*, next to her is *Columbus*. To the left are the shiphouses.

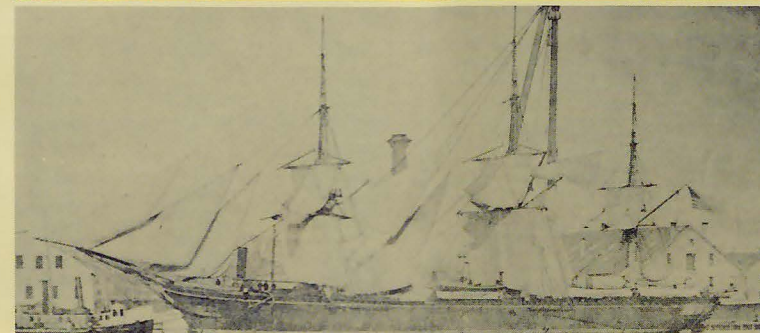
American Antiquarian Society



Hartford, a steam sloop-of-war, was launched at Boston in 1858 and sailed almost immediately for the Pacific as flagship of the Far East squadron. During the Civil War she was David

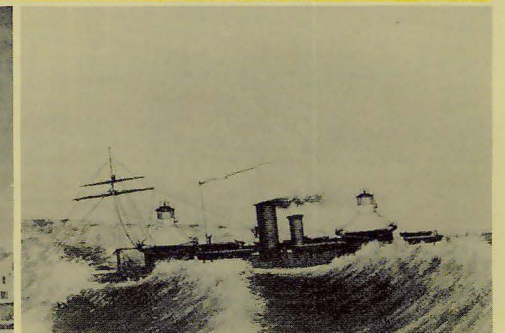
G. Farragut's flagship in the Union attacks on New Orleans, Vicksburg, and Mobile. She was in commission until 1938.

From Wood to Iron



The Confederacy had great commerce raiders like *Alabama*, *Florida*, and *Sumter*. To catch them the Union built swift cruisers like the steam sloop *Wachusett* (above), commissioned at Boston

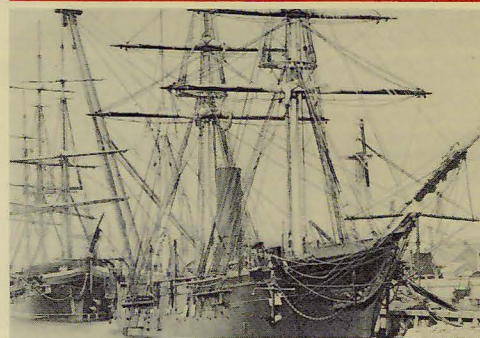
in 1862. Her great quest during the Civil War was the search for *Florida*, which she captured off Brazil in 1864.



Monadnock, a double-turreted monitor launched 23 March 1863, was the only monitor built at a government yard to see action in the Civil War. Assigned to the North Atlantic Blockad-

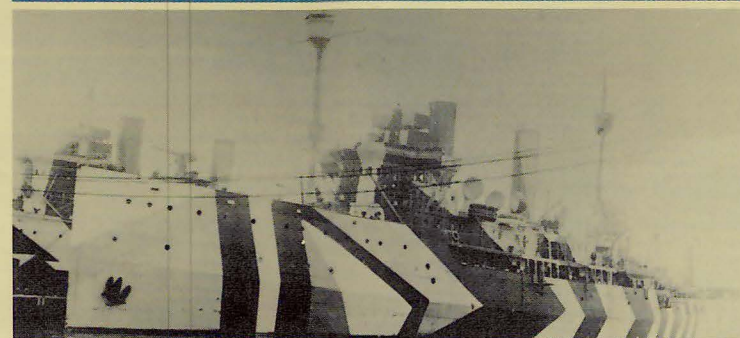
ing Squadron, she took part in the attacks on Fort Fisher, Charleston, and Richmond. In 1865 she became the first monitor to round Cape Horn.

Post-War Navy



Monitors did not spell the end of wood and sails. Launched in 1876, *Adams* (in the foreground) continued the tradition of wooden ships and iron men.

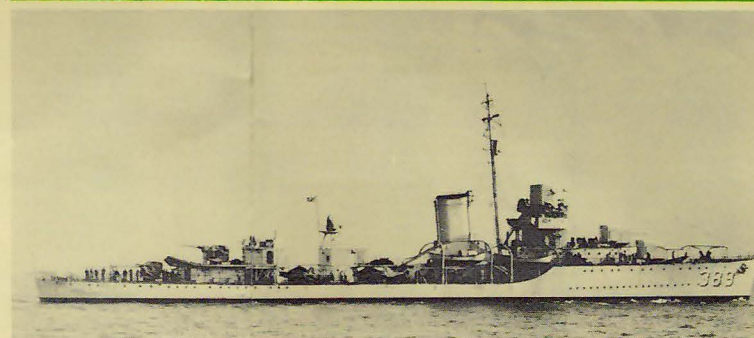
New Century—New Ships



World War I found many strange ships pressed into war service. Here a coastal steamer is converted into the minelayer *Aroostook* at Boston Navy Yard. Behind her is *Shawmut*, a sister ship

that, renamed *Oglala*, survived Pearl Harbor and World War II. The two vessels were among the first oil-fueled ships in the U.S. Navy.

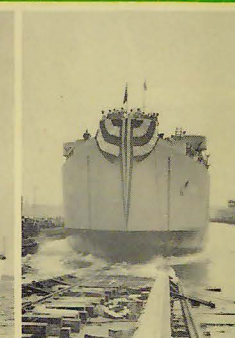
World War II—The Building Boom



Mugford, a destroyer, was launched 28 October 1935. One of her early commanders was Arleigh Burke, a famous destroyer-er of World War II. *Mugford* engaged in many of the battles of the

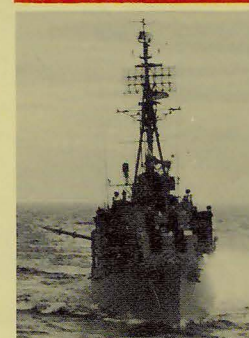
Pacific: Guadalcanal, Savo Island, Cape Gloucester, the Philippine Sea, and Leyte Gulf. She was hit at least three times by the enemy.

National Archives

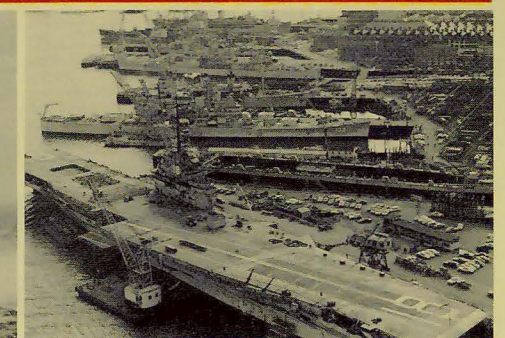


Island warfare in the Pacific called for ships able to land weapons and cargo directly on the beach. Tank Landing Ship (LST) 1035 was launched 4 August 1944 to help fill that need.

Age of Electronic Warfare



The 1950s saw many changes in old ships. At Boston, *Gyatt* became the first destroyer to mount a guided-missile battery. Here she is firing one of her Terrier missiles.



Advanced electronics and new weapons changed the shipyard. In the 1960s and '70s the yard specialized in the overhaul and modernization of old ships. In the busy scene above, the aircraft carrier *Wasp*, heavy cruiser *Macon*, guided missile cruiser *Springfield*, frigate *Mitscher*, and several auxiliary vessels are being worked on.

Except as noted, all photographs Official U.S. Navy

The Shipyard on the Charles

The early morning sun of 24 June 1833 sparkled on the gold epaulets and braid of blue naval uniforms. The officers and men of Charlestown Navy Yard, joined by a distinguished company that included Vice President Martin Van Buren, Secretary of War Lewis Cass, Secretary of the Navy Levi Woodbury, and many Massachusetts officials, were present to witness one of the great events of American naval history: the United States frigate *Constitution*, "Old Ironsides" to millions of Americans, was inaugurating the first naval drydock in New England. One hundred and forty-two years later water again swirled in the same drydock, slowly covering the wooden blocks and shores on which *Constitution* rested. On 14 March 1975 the historic ship floated out of the dock—the last commissioned vessel to use the famous facility.

Operations in the navy yard itself began some 40 years before the drydock was first put to use. In 1799 the United States was engaged in a naval war with France, and Congress called for the building of six ships-of-the-line, the battleships of the day, to protect American commerce from French attacks. Two years later Secretary of the Navy Benjamin Stoddert bought sites in six cities in which the ships could be built. The one in Charlestown became the Boston Navy Yard. It was primarily used as a storage facility until the War of 1812, but during that war the yard completed the Navy's first ship-of-the-line, the 74-gun *Independence*.

From the War of 1812 until the Civil War the yard enjoyed a slow but

steady growth as a repair facility and supplier of food and "stops" (clothing and personal articles). Few ships were built at Charlestown, but those few made important contributions to the fleet: *Merrimack*, which became the famous confederate ironclad *Virginia*; *Cumberland*, which met her end in battle with the CSS *Virginia*; and *Hartford*, Admiral Farragut's flagship at New Orleans.

During this period the drydock was built and many buildings constructed. The famed architect Alexander Parris, who worked for the navy yard from 1825 to the 1840s, designed many of the new structures. His best-known building is the Ropewalk which, from 1837 until the yard was closed more than a hundred years later, manufactured most of the cordage used by Navy ships ranging in size from destroyer escorts to aircraft carriers.

The Civil War forced rapid growth on Charlestown Navy Yard. As a repair and supply base it supported the squadrons blockading Southern ports and harbors. As a shipbuilding facility it converted a number of small vessels into warships and built *Monadnock*, one of the few monitors constructed at a government ship yard.

The United States emerged from the Civil War with the largest and most powerful navy in the world. But as happened after other wars, the Navy retrenched, and Charlestown Navy Yard was reduced in importance to an Equipment and Recruit Facility.

The 1890s saw a resurgence of interest in naval matters. Alfred T. Mahan published works that advocated a strong merchant marine, overseas markets, and new warships to protect them. The Navy began building steel vessels and new, powerful dreadnaughts. The yard, now called Boston Navy Yard, began to expand. During the first years of the 20th century a second drydock was added to handle the largest ships then afloat.

The yard's role in repairing and supplying vessels of the Navy continued to expand during the Spanish-American War and World War I. The large number of convoy escorts required by the allies to protect merchant shipping from German submarines and Boston's strategic location gave the yard an important repair responsibility.

After World War I and the Washington Naval Arms Limitation Treaty of 1922 activity at the yard slowed again. But in the 1930s, with the rise of totalitarian governments in Germany, Italy, and Japan, naval ships were again built at the yard. New destroyers, like *Mugford*, were built with WPA and PWA funds.

The United States became involved in the struggle with Nazi Germany even before the official declaration of war in December 1941. Congress created a two-ocean Navy in November 1939, and 10 months later the United States traded 50 overage destroyers for British bases in the Atlantic and Caribbean. Boston Navy Yard reconditioned many of those ships

and repaired British ships damaged by the Germans.

With the entry of the United States into the war, the navy yard turned full time to aid the war effort. Convoy escorts were repaired and supplied and numerous destroyer escorts (DEs) built. The yard employed nearly 50,000 persons who worked around the clock, seven days a week.

The end of World War II brought another cutback in the yard's work. Boston Navy Yard turned to modernizing older vessels. New electronics, radar and sonar equipment, and missile batteries were installed in vessels that had helped win the war. In the 1960s, as World War II vintage ships were reaching the end of their useful lives, the Boston facility began modernizing the Nation's warships through Fleet Rehabilitation and Modernization (FRAM). USS *Perry* was the first destroyer to be remodelled in this program that was intended to add 5 to 7 years to the life of aging ships.

The wars in Korea and Vietnam had little effect on the work at the navy yard; the wars were too far removed from the East Coast. After Vietnam, Boston Naval Shipyard was closed, ending 174 years of service.

In 1975, after *Constitution* was drydocked, one phase of the yard's activities came to an end. But a year earlier Congress set aside part of the navy yard as a unit of the Boston National Historical Park. The yard now has a new mission: to interpret the art and history of naval shipbuilding.

Charlestown Navy Yard

Visitor Information

The navy yard is in Charlestown, Massachusetts. It can be reached via US 93 or by public transportation from downtown Boston. During the summer months, visitors can also take a water shuttle to the yard. When conditions permit, the National Park Service offers specialized

tours of the yard. The U.S. Navy interprets the USS *Constitution*. The *Constitution* Museum has exhibits and special programs on the ship's construction, history, and life on board ship.

For your safety: Charlestown Navy Yard is being preserved as an industrial area. Please be alert to uneven surfaces, railroad tracks, and moving cranes. Avoid the edges of piers and drydocks.

Administration Charlestown Navy Yard is a unit of Boston National Historical Park, National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. Inquiries should be addressed to: Superintendent, Boston NHP, 15 State Street, Boston, MA 02109.

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Imagine a fortress afloat on the ocean, able to move under its own power, and armed with the most modern weapons of offense and defense. That is a ship of war, the largest and most complicated moveable object built by man. Two hundred years ago it was possible to build such a vessel, a small one at least, almost anywhere wood and water came together. But building a modern major warship is a long-term project, requiring the skills acquired from years of experience.

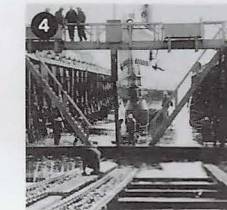


Ropewalk Designed by Alexander Parris, this building was constructed in 1834-37. Since that time most of the cordage used by the Navy has been made here. This building is the last complete ropewalk in the United States.

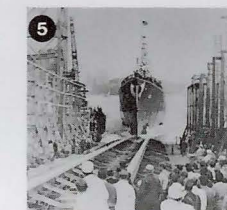
Building 105 Die-lock chain, made in two sections and heat-shrunk together, was invented in this building in 1926. For the next 48 years most of the anchor chain used by the Navy in ships was made here.



Building 42 The foundry that occupied part of this site produced many of the large metal castings needed by the Navy's ships. Here molten metal is poured into a mould of compacted sand.



Marine Railway This railway, built in 1918, was used to haul vessels out of the water so that workers could get at the hull. The railway was capable of handling tugs, patrol boats, and submarines.

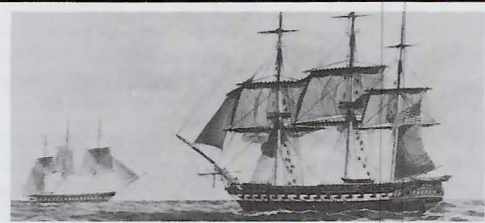


Shipways The traditional way to launch a ship is to build the hull on sloping ramps called shipways. When complete, the hull is slid into the water, as the destroyer *Cowie* did on 27 September 1941.



USS Constitution

The frigate *Constitution* was launched in 1797 from Hart's shipyard in Boston and soon saw action in the Quasi-War with France. But her fame and nickname "Old Ironsides" were gained in the War of 1812 when she sank the British frigate



Guerriere and *Java* and in a single battle captured the sloops-of-war *Cyane* and *Levant*.

After the war *Constitution* made several cruises to the Mediterranean. In 1830 the old ship was to be broken up, but an

inspirational poem by Oliver Wendell Holmes helped raise funds for her overhaul. In 1833 she became the first ship to use the new drydock at Boston Navy Yard. In the next 20 years the frigate made an around-the-world cruise, captured

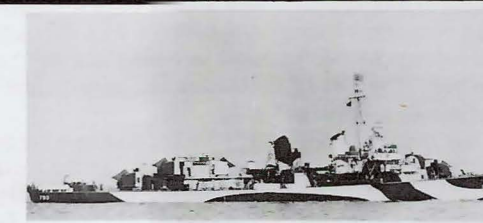
the slave ship *H. N. Gambrill* off the African coast, and served as a training ship for midshipmen at the U.S. Naval Academy.

Following the Civil War, the ship suffered a long period of neglect and deterioration. In 1925 ex-

tensive repairs were begun that culminated, in 1931, in a 90-port tour of the United States. She returned to the city of her birth, where she remains as a memorial to the Navy's age of fighting sail.

USS Cassin Young

Capt. Cassin Young, awarded the Medal of Honor at Pearl Harbor, was killed in action commanding the cruiser *San Francisco* at Guadalcanal. This ship, launched 12 September 1943, was named in his honor. The destroyer soon saw



action. She took part in the landings in the Philippines, rescued survivors of the bombed carrier *Princeton*, and screened the American force that sank four Japanese carriers in the battle of Cape Engano. At Okinawa she was twice damaged by

kamikazes and awarded the Navy Unit Commendation. *Cassin Young* served the Navy until 1960. Now she represents the many ships built at Boston Navy Yard during World War II that have served with distinction for over 30 years.

Illustration by Fred Freeman