

## *HUNTINGTON – NNS Hull #356*

*A History, a Heritage...and a Hope*

### *~ Introduction ~*

Generations of Newport News Shipbuilding craftsmen fondly remember when the HUNTINGTON, the shipyard's venerable flagship tug, was an integral part of the James River waterfront workaday scene. After 58 years of faithful service to her creators and owners, she was retired. But like other retirees, she soon found other pursuits.

After a few more years of active tugboat service, followed by some time as a floating museum in Hampton Roads, NNS Hull #356 'retired' a second time and moved to Florida! Today, she rests quietly at anchor in a Palm Beach waterway. Very soon she will be moved to a permanent berth at a nearby maritime museum where she will be suitably preserved and become an educational and historical exhibit.

Hers is a rich history and an important and proud part of the NNS heritage of "Always Good Ships". Hopefully, this vintage tugboat will long remain an invaluable source of maritime information and inspiration for future generations.

This is her story.

The years between World War I and II were particularly lean ones for American shipbuilders, due to a surplus of merchant and warships. Coupled with the Great Depression, this adversely affected operations at Newport News Shipbuilding. In 1933, a greatly reduced workforce went to a four-day week. Following the February 25, 1933 launching of RANGER (CV-4), the yard's first of many aircraft carriers, there were no vessels on the ways, or even on order at "Mr. Huntington's Shipbuilding Plant".



The management of NNS, led by shipyard President Homer L. Ferguson, made the best of this situation by regrouping its forces and work methods, modernizing yard facilities and embarking on a training program; all of which proved to be a huge benefit during World War II. As a part of this effort, NNS General Order No. 776 was issued on March 2, 1933, authorizing the construction of a tugboat for the Company's use. Hull #356 was assigned to this work.

A design that had been created by NNS in 1928 to construct a tugboat for the C&O Railway was adopted. Use of this design by the shipyard for its own purposes was no problem, for both the C&O and the shipyard were part of Collis Potter Huntington's empire. In the late nineteenth century, Newport News had become the eastern terminus for Huntington's coast-to-coast railroad system. In addition to developing the city's port area, Huntington also established the shipyard in 1886, which he originally intended to just provide repair services for ships visiting the port.

By 1933, the shipyard's board chairman was Henry E. Huntington; nephew of the yard's founder, who had passed away in 1900. In the 1930s, Huntington's heirs owned all of the company stock. While it is generally acknowledged that Hull #356 was named in honor of Collis Potter Huntington, the absence of other than a surname may have also been Homer L. Ferguson's way of paying homage to the stockholders, as well.



Apparently, as a practical way to train Apprentice School students, as well as to keep them gainfully employed in those lean years, Mr. Ferguson decreed or agreed that the tug HUNTINGTON was to be built as an apprentice project. Shop instructors, many of whom were also graduate apprentices, probably also participated along with other apprentice alumni whose skills were needed to augment those of the student workforce.

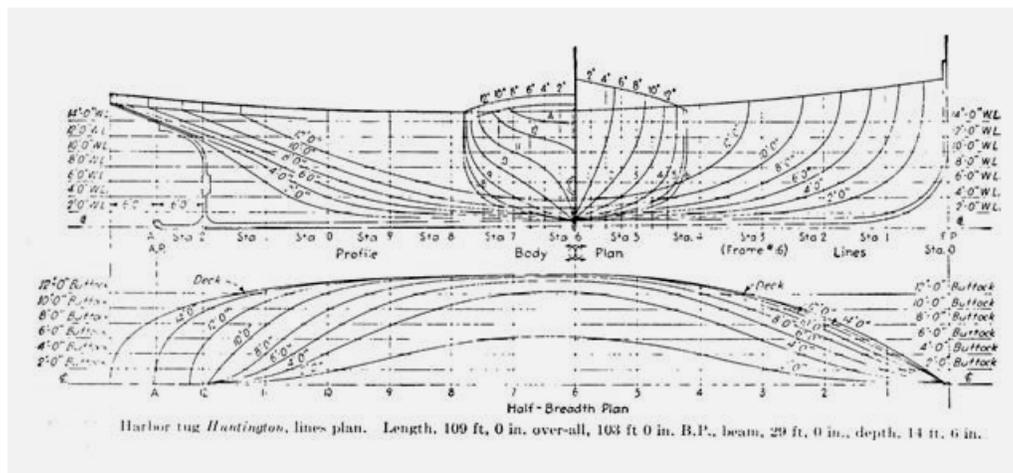
Homer L. Ferguson was a champion of the apprentice concept. It was his 1919 Executive Order Number 24 that transformed what had been an unstructured 'over-the-shoulder' system of training into a more formalized and beneficial program. Even when conditions at NNS were dire, Ferguson steadfastly insured the continuity of skilled craftsmanship at the shipyard by fully supporting the apprentice program.

Creation of the HUNTINGTON was not the only time in the mid-twentieth century when apprentices were given practical constructive responsibility by shipyard management. In 1929, apprentices and their instructors created the school's original athletic field and also built wooden spectator stands and a modest press box.

In 1932, the Company contracted for the original Apprentice Athletic Building that once stood on Washington Avenue, between 36<sup>th</sup> and 37<sup>th</sup> Streets. After that facility was ‘roughed in’, apprentices and their instructors laid tile, manufactured and put up electrical fixtures, and installed piping systems and lockers. They even utilized wood paneling left over from the construction of passenger ships in the 1920s to create the building’s lobby and offices.



When NNS committed to building a tug for its own use, a decision was made to increase that vessel’s beam by one foot over the 28-foot dimension previously utilized for the C&O tug. This increase resulted in HUNTINGTON’s gross tonnage (271 tons) and her displacement (489 tons) being slightly larger than those figures for her near-sister. All other principal parameters for Hull #356 remained the same.



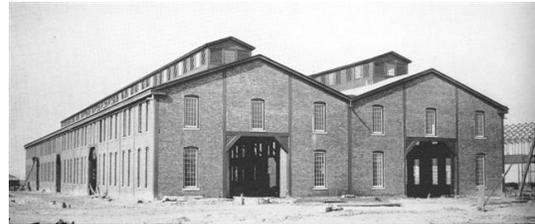
W.J. HARAHAAN, the C&O tug that served as the pattern for HUNTINGTON, was built in 1928 in the outboard end of the yard’s semi-submerged Shipways 8 & 9, well below the level of the James River. In the 1920’s, this was a common practice at NNS. Numerous small sea-going vessels, yachts and barges were also built there, and launched by flotation.

Defying both nautical and shipbuilding superstitions, the HARAHAAN was launched without formal ceremony or even a traditional christening by a sponsor. The same proved true, in later years, when four more ‘follow-on’ tugs were built for the C&O railroad system and launched under similar conditions. Nevertheless, they all enjoyed lengthy and productive careers, without serious mishap.

The keel for HUNTINGTON was laid on August 14, 1933 in the outboard end of semi-submerged Shipways 8 & 9. Construction progressed rapidly, and in less than two months, the riveted hull and superstructure of NNS Hull #356 was practically complete, and all of her major equipment had been installed.

In parallel, the shipyard built a steam-driven reciprocating engine, rated at 800 horsepower, and a coal-fired scotch boiler for the new tug. Even in 1933, scotch boilers (also called fire-tube boilers) were largely a thing of the past. Neil Woodall (Boilermaker – 1931), now 97 and the Apprentice Alumni Association’s oldest member recently provided the following recollections:

*“Apprentices and their instructors, and graduate apprentices did most of the work on the HUNTINGTON. I made the patterns for her boiler, stack and rudder. Amiel Schultz [Boilermaker – 1927] was the lead man on the fabrication effort for the HUNTINGTON’s boiler. After he left the yard, Assistant Foreman John Buchanan [Boilermaker – 1900] trained me to take Amiel’s place.*



*“Until the start of World War II, we worked in the old boiler shop, next to the machine shop and the blacksmith shop; down behind the main office building.*

*“In 1947, we built scotch boilers for two more C&O tugs. That was a real challenge, since all we had built since the mid-1930s were modern water tube boilers, and few of the North Side boiler shop workers had ever seen, much less built a scotch boiler.”*

Although the following photographs are not images of HUNTINGTON, they do depict one of the nearly identical NNS-built C&O tugs at various stages in their construction. The photo on the left shows the hull of one of the tugs completed up to her main deck. The right-hand image reflects how she looked when nearly complete and ready for launching...by flotation. It’s reasonable to assume Hull #356 would have appeared quite similar at those stages in her development, since all these tugs were built in the same location.



Unlike her near-sister ships, a gala launching ceremony was in store for HUNTINGTON. Wednesday, October 11, 1933 was selected as the day for the event; noon was chosen as the time for the tug’s christening. When that appointed hour approached, the HUNTINGTON was already afloat in the outboard end of Shipway #9.



A large American flag flew at her stern. Her jack staff sported a union jack that measured 4x6 feet. Additional flags were suspended from lines attached to the top of her funnel that stretched to the tug's bow and stern. Attached to both sides of her funnel were metal replicas of the shipyard's familiar gear-and-trident logo. A large red, white and blue decorative 'fan' enveloped her bow.

A small group of mostly shipyard executives and their wives, plus other prominent Newport News citizens were invited to attend. Familiar names in shipyard history, such as Ferguson, Woodward, Blewett, Sterling, Robeson, Cole and Skinner dominated the list of invitees.



But the star of the event, other than the HUNTINGTON, was the tug's diminutive sponsor, Anne Gordon Ferguson, seven-year old granddaughter of the shipyard president. Her two maids of honor were also very youthful little ladies. One was the sponsor's cousin, five year-old Louise Hammond Skinner. The other maid of honor was a childhood friend of them both; seven year-old Virginia Shackelford.



The proud mothers of the girls posed with them and the sponsor's equally proud paternal grandfather, shipyard president Homer L. Ferguson, on the bow of NNS Hull #356 just before the ceremony took place. Also present was the sponsor's father, Homer L. Ferguson, Jr., and her maternal grandmother, Mrs. T. C. Gordon.

Maid of Honor Virginia [She prefers Gina] Poindexter (nee Shackelford), although only seven years old at the time, has vivid memories of that day over 75 years ago:

*“The first thing I recall was how excited I was to get out of class! A shipyard car picked me up at Jackson Elementary, to the envy of all my classmates. Anne lived on Post Street in Hilton, so I suppose she also got out of school and rode to the launching scene with her parents. Louise was probably still in a neighborhood kindergarten, which most of us kids that lived in the 300 block of 57<sup>th</sup> Street attended at one time or the other.*

*“Anyway, the shipyard cars, about six or eight, parked near the tug, and I remember being surprised that the shipyard had so many cars! I don’t recall any speeches; just some picture taking. I am the tallest girl in those pictures, and wore what is called a beret. Anne successfully smashed the bottle against that mast at the very bow of the tug on her first try. All present cheered, and there was a collective sigh of relief from the adults. I guess they were worried that such a small girl might not be up to the task. The chauffeurs standing beside their cars all honked their horns when the bottle broke. Afterwards, we had ice cream and cake, right there on the tug. Then, it was back to school for me!”*

An article in the *Daily Press* the next day reported that light refreshments were served aboard the tug after the ceremony. But no mention was made of champagne. Prohibition was still the ‘law of the land’ that year. A vessel launched earlier in 1933 at NNS had been christened with a bottle of grape juice. An unpopular choice, to say the least.

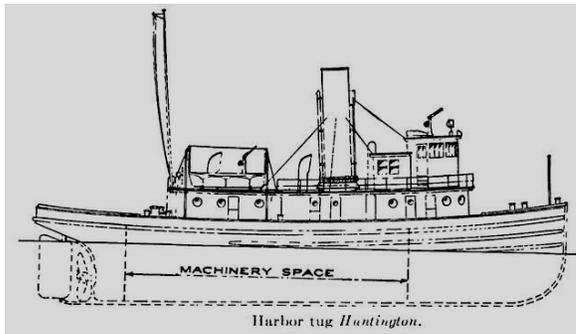
Gina commented on that, as well:

*“I don’t recall what was in that bottle, but you can see in the photos that it was certainly shaped like a champagne bottle, but hidden inside a mesh covering. Since it was a private ceremony, I have to believe that champagne was used. I just don’t believe Mr. Ferguson would have allowed a non-traditional substitute.”*

A guest list appended to the newspaper account included the names of several residents of the North End of Newport News, where most shipyard executives and other prominent citizens once lived. That list also included about twenty other children about the same age as the sponsor, including her younger brother.

A little over a month later, HUNTINGTON underwent ‘sea’ trials, which probably took place entirely in local waters near the shipyard. Her top speed was recorded as being 10 knots. She was delivered to the yard’s waterfront operations department four days later, on November 18, 1933.





This sketch shows the extent of her machinery space. In essence, she was a floating power plant. This drawing, plus her lines plan were utilized as illustrations in *Introduction to Steel Shipbuilding*. This textbook was used for many years in the Apprentice School to reveal the mysteries of water lines, buttock lines and frame lines to generations of aspiring shipbuilders.

An important part of her equipment was a fire fighting system capable of delivering 2,000 gallons of water per minute through two large fire monitors. She had accommodations for a crew of five, including a separate cabin for the tug's master. HUNTINGTON also had a well-equipped galley that soon became renowned on the Newport News waterfront for producing wonderful meals.

From a distance, she looked much like other work-a-day harbor tugs. Her foredeck and counter were dominated by the winches, bitts, chocks and thick manila lines that were her stock in trade. A huge rope fender gave her bow a very decided utilitarian look. These protective devices had to be replaced about every three years. They were huge; each consisting of over 5,000 feet of manila line that weighed 5,100 pounds. Later in her working career, more durable rubber fenders were introduced. Technological progress...albeit at the expense of another tug boat tradition.



But up close, rough rope fenders aside, she had more the appearance of a 'showboat'. True to a tug boat tradition that was already archaic in 1933, her pilothouse sported a large gilded eagle. Her smokestack, unusually tall by contemporary standards, but necessary because of her natural draft boiler; also supported a brass steam whistle.

Her hull was painted black above the waterline. Her superstructure featured a glistening coat of paint referred to as "Huntington Brown", which was created by adding varnish to the paint mixture.

Her numerous brass fixtures were diligently polished by her small crew every Friday morning; work load permitting. The entire craft was washed down with fresh water and her original, traditional teak decking was scrubbed daily. By the 1960s, the teak was badly worn and had to be removed. In its place a troweled-on material called Selby-Tuff was applied directly to her steel main deck.

In addition to traditional name boards, port and starboard, with lettering of gold leaf, she also had even larger boards abaft her stack on both sides that proclaimed her owners name in equally bright lettering:

## **NEWPORT NEWS SHIPBUILDING AND DRY DOCK CO.**

Her highest-mounted and largest symbols of pride were two of the shipyard's famed gear-and-trident logos, affixed to either side of her imposing smokestack. Her proud crew referred to HUNTINGTON as the "Queen of the Harbor" and she was generally considered, in her prime, as the finest tug boat in Hampton Roads.



HUNTINGTON's interiors featured vertical strips of finely-finished wood paneling in her crew living spaces and pilot house; another sign of a long-standing tugboat tradition. Even the few steps leading to her elevated pilot house were a sign of what is now a bygone craftsmanship, when wood was extensively utilized, and finely finished.

Nevertheless, in spite of her many decorative features, HUNTINGTON was first and foremost a workboat. For slightly over 58 years, she served Newport News Shipbuilding as the flag ship of the yard's modest working fleet. During that unusually long period of time, she assisted an estimated 30,000 vessels. These included some of the world's largest and most famous ships; many of which were also built at Newport News.

In the latter stages of her working career, she docked merchant vessels and warships that dwarfed her. For example, several of the aircraft carriers built at Newport News were ten times longer than she was, their displacement was almost 200 times bigger, and their shaft horse power 230 times more mighty! But when it came time for one of those giants to be warped alongside a pier or placed in dry dock, they were helpless without the assistance of HUNTINGTON and numerous other local tugs.

HUNTINGTON underwent one major conversion during her shipyard career. In 1950 her propulsion plant was replaced by a 1200 HP diesel engine. Her original four-bladed prop was replaced by one with three blades. She was also fitted with a diesel-driven fire pump. Her steam-driven auxiliary equipment was replaced by motor-driven components. Coal bunkers were replaced with fuel oil tanks and 96 tons of pig iron and concrete ballast was added to compensate for the removed boiler's weight. Most, if not all of this work took place while the tug was afloat at its normal berth alongside the yard's original Pier 3.

To facilitate these many changes, her boat deck had to be temporarily removed, and a number of internal rearrangements made to accommodate the larger engine. As a consequence, her crew's quarters were moved to a position forward of the engine, which, in turn, necessitated movement of her significantly-shortened smokestack aft about six feet.



The only other obvious external changes made in 1950 were the removal of her steam whistle and gilded eagle. Both of these artifacts were donated to the Mariners' Museum, where they were restored in 1986 to as-new condition. Along with a highly detailed model of the tug, they are now on display at the museum as a part of an NNS-sponsored shipbuilding exhibit. The eagle has an imposing wing span of over five feet, and the bright brass whistle stands 30 inches high.



This exquisite example of mid-twentieth century hand carving was created by veteran shipyard employee William W. Geggie. Mr. Geggie was a 53 year-old shipyard employee when HUNTINGTON was built. Born in Scotland, he served a wood carving apprenticeship there. At NNS, his unique talents were utilized to embellish the wooden interiors of liners and steamers. In 1929 he created a large figurehead for the steam yacht VIKING (NNS Hull #328).

Mr. Geggie's creation of the HUNTINGTON eagle was no doubt appreciated by his sons, Kelvin R. Geggie and William F. Geggie. Both of them were apprentices in the early 1930s. Kelvin completed his time in 1931 as a piping designer. His brother William graduated as a machinist two years later, and may well have produced some HUNTINGTON hardware in the shipyard's main machine shop.

Following replacement of her engine, the tug underwent dock and sea trials in mid-July of 1950. HUNTINGTON's speed and 'pulling power' were recorded as being slightly better than before.



In addition, the modifications made to her power plant eliminated the need to always keep a crew member onboard to maintain steam pressure. Before the conversion, half of the coal she burned was for this 'standby' purpose as she idled alongside a pier, awaiting her next work assignment.

When she was a steam-driven tug, HUNTINGTON had a 'bell and jingle' system. This meant that the captain in the pilot house had to pull a chain, causing a bell to jingle in the engine room. The number of jingles and the timing of their transmissions told the engineer what to do.

This crude system of communication was prone to misinterpretation. It also was not fast or good enough in some situations. When moving astern, the force of water against the rudder sometimes built up, over a short period of time, making it difficult to reposition the rudder in a timely fashion; necessitating stopping the tug's motion. An interim air clutch system, installed in 1950, was an improvement, but still lacked the fine control that her master, Captain M. L. Ambrose desired:

*"When I'm backing down, I want to be able to turn my rudder from full port to full starboard (and vice-versa) so I can quickly reposition my tug for the next push, you see."*

Consequently, the shipyard's Plant Engineers created a new design that included two hydraulic cylinders to provide more immediate rudder response. They were powered by a hydraulic pump and reservoir located in the engine room. New electric controls for the rudder were placed in the wheel house and also at an auxiliary steering station on top of the deck house, aft. The rudder was also increased in size, per Captain Ambrose's request, to further assist the tug in turning.



Many of these design modifications were accomplished by apprentice graduates Louis Wood (Toolmaker – 1948) and Hudson Haile (Machinist – 1956). Appropriately, Louis Wood was the first recipient of the Apprentice Alumni Association's annual HOMER L. FERGUSON AWARD.

During her lengthy period of service at NNS, HUNTINGTON had only three Masters. Each of them also carried the additional titles of Senior Tug Master and Docking Pilot. They had the responsibility for docking and undocking huge vessels at NNS, which often entailed coordinating the efforts of numerous tugs.

R. A. Callis, who had previously been captain of another yard tug, became the HUNTINGTON's first skipper when she was first placed in service in 1933. Captain Callis remained as the HUNTINGTON's master until he retired in 1944. Callis was followed by Captain M. L. Ambrose. When HUNTINGTON went into service, Ambrose was a 'plank owner' (i.e., a member of the initial crew).

He had been hired by the shipyard in 1928 as a tugboat deckhand. Captain Ambrose served the longest period of time as the HUNTINGTON's master. He was considered quite a character, but was also highly respected by his peers throughout the maritime community. It once was said of him that he could do more with one tug than others could do with three. Captain Ambrose, acting in his dual role as the yard's docking pilot, often left the pilot house of his tug to direct the movements of a flotilla of tugs from high above, on the bridge of some of the world's largest ships.



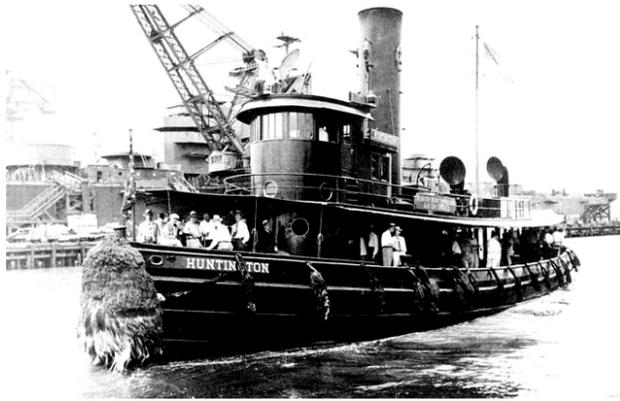
When Captain Ambrose retired, Reggie Hunley, an experienced tug boat captain working elsewhere in the Tidewater area, was hired by NNS to take Ambrose's place. "Captain Reggie" commanded the tug until 1975, when a larger and more powerful (4,000 HP) tug was purchased by the shipyard and he became the new vessel's master. HUNTINGTON was then placed in reserve by the shipyard, but she was periodically activated whenever a number of tugs were needed to handle a large ship, or whenever the newer tug was taken out of service for maintenance or repair work.

In 1996, Captain Reggie participated in work associated with converting the HUNTINGTON from a workboat to a floating museum. Many of the informational placards that remain onboard the tug today were created by reproducing items borrowed from his personal collection of maritime memorabilia. Later that same year, he was a passenger onboard the HUNTINGTON while she was being moved to Norfolk.

An honored guest of the tug's owners at the time, he reminisced about the HUNTINGTON's generous girth, thus validating a wise design decision made decades ago to widen her during construction. Captain Reggie elaborated:

*"See how wide the deck is? Extra space alongside means the smokestack and bridge will not contact the flared sides of huge ships. The HUNTINGTON could get up close and personal. The closer you could get to the bow or stern of a ship, the more you could do. You could slide up under the flare and use that shape to your advantage."*

HUNTINGTON also participated in other activities during her long tenure as the shipyard's biggest tug. One notable event was held annually; a day cruise on the tug by a shipyard sponsored organization. Called the May Club, it was a social group, consisting of NNS superintendents and foremen. While the club's membership changed over decades, it always included a large number of apprentice alumni.



The club's name was derived from the first outing of the group, which took place on May Day in 1897, when members went to Buckroe Beach, by trolley. In later years, a summer excursion on a yard tug became the eagerly awaited norm. For over 35 years, the HUNTINGTON was the only tug assigned this pleasurable duty.

However, when new members of the May Club made their initial cruise, things were often not so enjoyable for them. Neil Woodall well remembers his first such outing, of many, onboard the HUNTINGTON:

*“In 1947, when I was appointed Foreman of the Boilermakers Department, I was initiated on that year's May Club outing along with Jimmie Wynne [Mold Loftsman – 1932] and John Pruden [Machinist – 1938]. We had to strip to our waists, go down into the HUNTINGTON's fire room and shovel coal into the boiler while being drenched with cold beer being poured on us from above.”*



There were other, more serious events that unexpectedly took the tug and her crew away from their normal duties. In 1942, she raced out into the James River to rescue the crew of a downed aircraft. Two years later, she was at the scene of a devastating fire that completely destroyed one of the C&O's merchandise piers, assisting her near-sisters in fighting that conflagration.

On March 7, 1968, she performed a similar duty when a shipyard pier caught fire and its heavily creosoted pilings generated dense clouds of toxic smoke. Under the able direction of Captain Ambrose, HUNTINGTON fought that hard-to-extinguish blaze for thirty hours after first pulling a tanker tied up at the burning pier to safety.

One of HUNTINGTON's finest hours came in October 1974 when she heeded shipyard President Jack Diesel's eloquent edict when responding to a request to preserve the shipyard's first hull...*Bring her home.*

After sailing to the Norfolk side of Hampton Roads, Captain Reggie rafted HUNTINGTON alongside the hulk of the DOROTHY, NNS Hull #1. Pumping all the way to keep DOROTHY afloat, HUNTINGTON did, indeed, 'bring her home'. Home to their common birthplace for restoration and ultimately for permanent display in front of the shipyard's main office building.



On another memorable occasion, Memorial Day 1980, HUNTINGTON participated in welcoming home the NIMITZ Battle Group. Encouraged by the navy and local community leaders to provide a patriotic display, apprentice graduate Bill Lee (Designer, Atomic - 1959) suggested to the shipyard's president that it would be appropriate for Newport News craftsmen who built all the ships in that task force to join in the festivities.

Once that mission was approved, another apprentice alumnus, W.B. 'Miff' Miffleton (Designer, Hull - 1953) organized and led the effort. HUNTINGTON and a smaller shipyard tug sailed out of Hampton Roads, almost to the Chesapeake Bay Bridge. With fire nozzles shooting streams of water skyward, whistles 'tied down' and loaded with wildly cheering shipbuilders, HUNTINGTON and her companion tug were the first visible signs of what soon became an overwhelming welcome for the returning sailors who were manning the rails of NIMITZ, CALIFORNIA and TEXAS.



Throughout her long career at Newport News Shipbuilding, HUNTINGTON also served as a practical training platform for numerous apprentices. Typically, and usually in their senior year, apprentices in the Riggers Department were assigned to duty as deckhands onboard shipyard tugs.

Jim Bush (Riggers – 1980) had that interesting experience, and remembers it well:

*“When I left Martinsville and entered the Apprentice School, I had never been around any waterfront operations in my life. I spent more time onboard the tugs than a lot of rigger apprentices. Although I worked more on the much smaller DAUNTLESS than HUNTINGTON during my apprenticeship, I preferred the bigger boat. Being a crew member in HUNTINGTON was enjoyable, because she was quieter and comfortable.”*

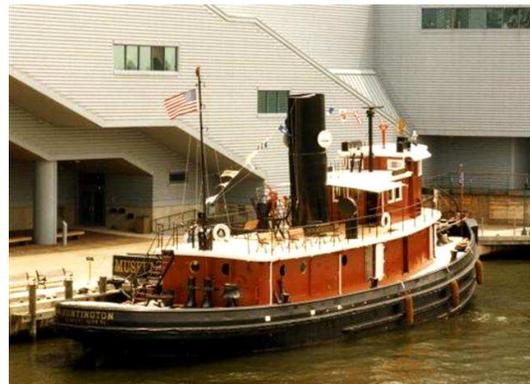
*“Even when the DAUNTLESS was replaced by the more powerful tug, the JOHN P. DIESEL, I preferred HUNTINGTON. Some times, when going from one end of the yard’s waterfront to the other, we would race. Although the DIESEL had much bigger engines, she didn’t have the lines that the HUNTINGTON did. HUNTINGTON was a little faster.”*

In the spring of 1992, HUNTINGTON left the shipyard. Sold to Bay Towing Corporation, her superstructure was repainted red (as a tugboat should have, according to Bay Towing’s President, Captain John Robbins). Her black stack was also given Bay Towing’s trademark two horizontal stripes of red. In June of that same year, she won “Best in Parade” at the annual tugboat parade held during Harborfest.



But she was still a workboat, and for four more years HUNTINGTON’s duties included docking ships in Norfolk, and towing ships to and from the James River Reserve Fleet, passing close by her birthplace on each such trip. She also towed barges as far as Baltimore. Eventually age and the necessity for extensive engine repairs forced her into final retirement from active service.

Bay Towing sold HUNTINGTON to Rover Marine in 1996. She was then moved to the boat harbor in Newport News and modified for future use as a floating museum. During that period of time, her stack was restored to its original height...but not to its ‘as-built’ location. In addition, a replica eagle was added atop her pilot house, and numerous exhibits celebrating her decades of ‘tug-boating’ were installed internally.





When that work was complete, HUNTINGTON was moved again, and moored at the Nauticus Maritime Center in Norfolk. Once there, she was open to the public on December 14, 1996 and widely publicized as a tourist attraction. That same year, HUNTINGTON also had the distinction of being placed on the National Register of Historic Places.

After serving as a static “Workhorse of the Waterways” display for a decade, the tug was offered for sale or donation to a suitable future owner in early 2007. The Palm Beach Maritime Museum responded, and by June of that same year, a transfer of ownership had been consummated. Arrangements were also made for what would prove to be the HUNTINGTON’s longest voyage ever; from Hampton Roads to Palm Beach, Florida.

Ironically, for that trip, she would be ‘on the wrong end’ of a towline. Since HUNTINGTON’s draft was too deep for the Intracoastal Waterway, the trip had to be made offshore. It took a Miami-based tug, the AMANDA K, six days, at an average speed of four knots, to move the HUNTINGTON down the Atlantic seaboard to her new home port.



When asked about the trip, Scott Cowan, master of the AMANDA K and more often called ‘Captain Scott’ noted:

*“Towing HUNTINGTON was like pulling a huge bulldog with his feet dug in. She was very heavy to tow, but she towed straight as an arrow. She is much better built than my tug, with thicker plates, heavier bulwarks and framing. I would sure like to see her restored to running order. She could be perfectly serviceable again.”*

Captain Scott also observed that if there were any weaknesses in HUNTINGTON’s hull, they would have shown up in a pounding she took in a storm off the North Carolina coast.

While she is now gone from the Hampton Roads area, tangible reminders linger there in a wide variety of venues. Two finely detailed models of HUNTINGTON are on display in Newport News. Both are of the same scale, 1:48, and accurately depict the tug as she was originally created. One of them can be viewed by the public at the famed Mariners’ Museum. The second model is in the shipyard’s Apprentice School; an integral part of the heritage of the Company and of that famed and unique institution whose students and alumni had a major role in her creation.



Appropriately, the school's model was commissioned by the Apprentice Alumni Association in 1994 and presented to the Apprentice School on the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the school's formal beginning. The school's model was built by one of the men trained in that very institution: apprentice graduate John Cheevers (Mold Loft Worker – 1980).

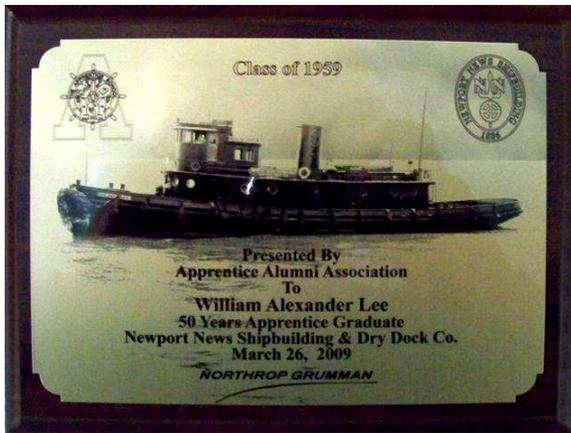
John Cheevers used photographs of DOROTHY's large scale replica eagle as a guide for his tiny bird. Unbeknownst to him, in 1974 another apprentice graduate, Larry Lambroff (Patternmaker – 1968) had previously utilized the original HUNTINGTON eagle as a model for the impressive one he carved in the Mariners' Museum. That treasure now sits atop DOROTHY's restored pilot house. What goes around, comes around...



A spare HUNTINGTON propeller, which had languished for years in a storage yard, was moved a few years ago and placed on a pedestal near the entrance of the school's current athletic center. One oft-told, self-effacing story is that the propeller must have also been made by apprentices, because of the spelling of the vessel's name stamped on one blade of this artifact...



Every year, the Apprentice Alumni Association presents beautiful photo-engraved metallic plaques to alumni members on the fiftieth anniversary of their graduation year. Each plate is personalized and features a photo of the tugboat HUNTINGTON.

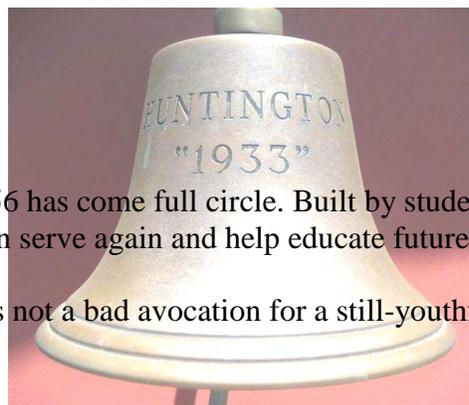


This tradition dates to the mid-1990s, when the Apprentice Alumni Association elected to replace a picture previously utilized for decades of the shipyard's Hull #1 with an image of their 'own' vessel. For many 50-year graduates, she is an appropriate symbol of what shipbuilding was like when they and she were all much younger. Shipbuilders, by and large, for all their rough and tumble reputation, are a sentimental lot.

Since arriving in Palm Beach, the HUNTINGTON has been anchored near the museum's main offices, awaiting availability of a suitable and more permanent (and protected) berth. Before the 2009 hurricane season, the tug is expected to be secured to one of the museum's docks. Next year, preservation work will be completed, allowing her to be viewed and explored by future generations.



HUNTINGTON's planned future includes not only being part of a museum, but, perhaps more importantly, she will also provide a basis for learning by students of a charter school: the Palm Beach Maritime Academy. The school's focus is on maritime studies involving science, technology and history.



In essence, NNS Hull #356 has come full circle. Built by students over 75 years ago, the hope is that she will soon serve again and help educate future generations of students.

Which, after all, is not a bad avocation for a still-youthful maritime lady!

~ *Postscript* ~

Like all graduate apprentices, I have been exposed for decades to various bits and pieces of the HUNTINGTON story. It has been a pleasure and a privilege to bring it all together in one recorded place. While I cannot begin to estimate the number of times I saw her at work on the shipyard waterfront, one memory of her in action is very special to me. On Memorial Day, 1980, I 'went to sea' with a host of other proud shipbuilders in HUNTINGTON to help welcome home the NIMITZ Battle Group.

During part of that memorable event, I was standing to port of her pilot house, happily getting soaked by her watery salute to a trio of NNS-built naval vessels. Apprentice graduate Jim Bush also recalls that great experience, for he was atop the pilot house of the trailing tug in this photo, manning her water cannon.



Recently, apprentice alumnus Hudson Haile, who now, like the HUNTINGTON, is retired and resides in Florida, discovered the presence there of the tug. Since that happening, he has been helping the Palm Beach Maritime Museum formulate plans for the HUNTINGTON's preservation, and is tireless in seeking financial assistance for that project, as well.

The purpose of this article is three-fold: to assist Hudson in those good works, to tell the full story of the tug's rich history for the benefit of apprentice alumni and other ship fanciers, and to inspire current and future students of the Apprentice School.

This story was largely created using information and illustrations found in old shipyard publications, additional materials supplied by the Palm Beach Maritime Museum, the Mariners' Museum and by several interested and previously identified apprentice alumni; in particular Neil Woodall, who started his apprenticeship at NNS in 1927 and helped build HUNTINGTON.

I am particularly indebted to Bill Fox, retired shipbuilder and maritime historian, for his contributions of NNS-built ships' info and illustrations. His knowledge about such things probably exceeds that of anyone else I know. He even had a hand in HUNTINGTON's restoration work in 1996. Bill really should have been an apprentice!

*Bill Lee*

June, 2009