

Aerial View of the Newport News Shipyard Today



This aerial view of the Newport News Shipbuilding and Dry Dock company, taken September 7th of this year, shows the progress and expansion of the plant under the guiding hand and direction of Homer L. Ferguson. From its shipways have been launched the largest vessels in the world, many of which have made naval history in three wars. In the lower right section of this picture can be seen the Aircraft Carrier, Coral Sea, sister ship to the famed Midway, and the SS America, the United States' largest passenger ship. Both were built in Newport News and are seen here while undergoing final fitting in the yard's southside repair basin.

Shipyard Growth

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several types as listed elsewhere in this issue added to the Shipyard's design and construction experience and this work, with improvement in volume of ship repair work, was of considerable sustaining benefit to the town. Of il-

maetic effect, however, on both the Shipyard and the town was the award in January, 1896, of contracts for building two battleships of a then incomparably modern design (Kearsarge and Kentucky). As in the case of the gunboats, low bids for both vessels prevailed against protests in Washington against awarding the entire program to one builder.

The effect on the town was immediate. A bill for incorporation as a city was introduced in the General Assembly then in session. This bill was passed January 16, with W. A. Post as mayor by charter appointment. At the ensuing election he was continued in office for the authorized term of two years.

The effect at the Shipyard was in two closely related parts. First was the necessity for considerable enlargement of shop and material handling facilities including a crane for heavy handling at the outfitting piers in preparation for these improvements the charter was amended by legislative enactment in the January session for in-

creasing the authorized maximum capital stock to six million dollars. The second was increased anxiety arising from heavy losses on past operations and, as work on the battleships advanced, the prospect of repetition of that experience.

Improved Operations

To a reviewer, the conclusion seems inescapable that Mr. Huntington's insistence on superior work, whatever the price to be received for it, was regarded by many in the operating organization as indulgent leniency toward the Yard with respect to cost rather than as an expression of a practical business maxim for a going concern. A clearer expression of his views may be found in his writing that, "Of all things, I think ships that sail the seas should have honest work—and only that—in all particulars." With respect to losses he wrote: "I have always had great faith in the Yard's becoming a great success. . . . The losses are so great that I think few men would have continued the work . . . To be fully satisfactory to the owners, the work will have to be done at a profit instead of at a loss as heretofore . . . would like enough money to pay a reasonable interest on the plant." With the less conditions remedied, and if the plant were not sold, Mr. Huntington said he proposed to spend considerably more money at the Yard.

It was under these conditions, and with the cost of the two battleships already considerably beyond what later would have been called the budget, that W. A. Post was placed in local charge as superintendent of the Shipyard on April 1, 1896.

Mr. Post, to whom previous references have been made as civil engineer in charge of plant construction work, had become widely and favorably known throughout the community and particularly with the more conservative members of the Shipyard organization. This, and his well known administrative ability as president of the First National Bank and as mayor of Newport News, together with consultations with Mr. Huntington on estimates for a proposed new dry dock designed by him, had marked him in Mr. Huntington's estimation as the man needed for a crucial duty.

Further evidence of confidence in Mr. Post was soon to be shown. Proposals for building a second dry dock with a pumping plant consolidated with that of the first

dock, and to cost about a million dollars, had been under consideration for more than a year, but Mr. Huntington had been unwilling to begin the work under the former regime. The new dock was authorized in July for work to begin at once. Similarly, authorization for several new vessels deferred for the same reason, was soon to follow.

A year later, and ten years from the opening of the first dry dock in 1889, a comment from Newport News that "after so many years of failure . . . that the Yard is now on a paying basis admits of no doubt." Mr. Post's responsibilities are large," said Mr. Orcutt; "he is an arduous worker, and the effects of good management are in evidence." Mr. Post is certainly doing well," replied the owner.

Memories of those whose experiences cover this period show this transformation in the company's affairs to have been accomplished in a frictionless manner and without disturbing effect on the daily operations of the plant.

Characteristic of Mr. Post's management was delegation of responsibility to those already in the organization and found competent as may be noted by reference to this period in the several papers on the development of departmental organizations printed elsewhere in this issue of the Bulletin. Equally characteristic was his selection of A. L. Hopkins as technical and administrative assistant upon his release from Spanish War naval duty in the summer of 1898. Formerly Mr. Hopkins had been employed with technical duties in the office of the Superintendent Naval Constructor at the Shipyard when he had transferred to Annapolis for instructional duty in naval architecture prior to entering war service.

This general staff of management at Newport News, with the department organizations indicated, withstood the shock of Mr. Huntington's death in August, 1900, and settlement of accounts with his estate for millions advanced to the Company by him for operating losses. Rumors long current of proposed sale of the plant ceased. With the addition of H. L. Ferguson as superintendent early in 1905, this organization continued until 1911 when Mr. Post was advanced to the presidency. In 1912 Mr. Hopkins became chief executive in New York with Mr. Ferguson as general manager in charge of the plant. Later reviewers will find interest

in setting out particulars of others then and later associated with the executive management of the Company. But the advancement of Mr. Ferguson to the presidency in July, 1915, marked the beginning of long and conspicuous service not only of historical importance to the Shipyard but noteworthy in American industry. As president and general manager he guided the affairs of the Company through World War I and the difficult years that followed, including general revision and enlargement of the charter in 1922 and the attainment of front rank among manufacturers of hydro-electric equipment, any phase of which will afford material for inspiring chapters by the future historian.

HERE and THERE

(Continued From Page Two)

been, but at any rate the folks here have given Mr. Ferguson a reputation for loyalty to his Haywood county, that we feel sure must have strong foundation. We have heard of only one exception when the fact the man was from Haywood failed—that was in the case of a well known colored man here, who applied for work. The report got about that he was a Jap—it was during the war—and not until he hunted one of the Haywood folks to identify him, did he set the employment division right as to his nationality, then he got the job like the rest.

No success story about Mr. Ferguson would be complete without a tribute to his wife "Miss Elise Skinner," daughter of the late Mr. and Mrs. T. C. Skinner of Waynesville and Louisville, Ky. granddaughter of the late governor of Kentucky General Nelson. We have long treasured memories of how she looked. With her blonde hair piled on her head, she was always graced with a smile that radiated an infectious cheer. Her old beaux and all the boys were in love with her, that made all the fall in love with her and like her."

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