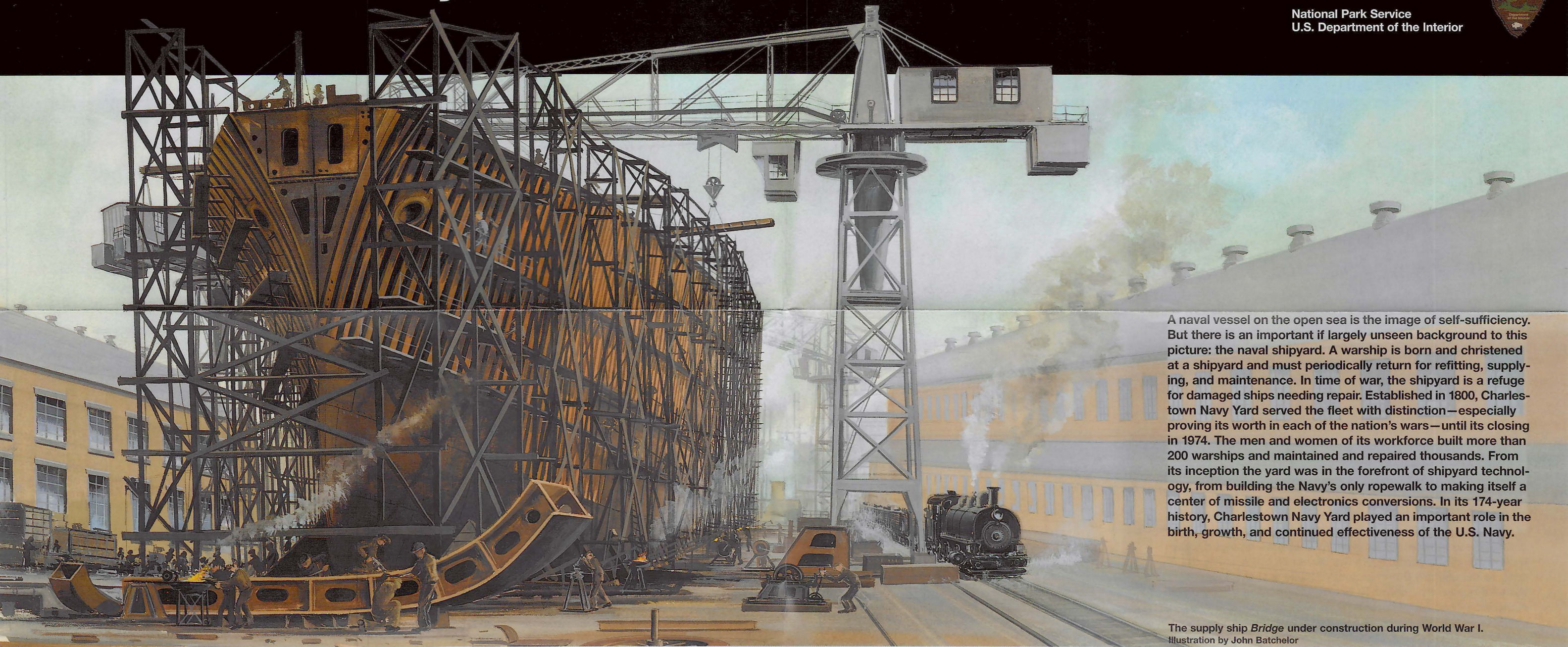


Charlestown Navy Yard

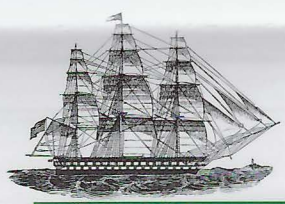
Boston
National Historical Park
Massachusetts

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



A naval vessel on the open sea is the image of self-sufficiency. But there is an important if largely unseen background to this picture: the naval shipyard. A warship is born and christened at a shipyard and must periodically return for refitting, supplying, and maintenance. In time of war, the shipyard is a refuge for damaged ships needing repair. Established in 1800, Charlestown Navy Yard served the fleet with distinction—especially proving its worth in each of the nation's wars—until its closing in 1974. The men and women of its workforce built more than 200 warships and maintained and repaired thousands. From its inception the yard was in the forefront of shipyard technology, from building the Navy's only ropewalk to making itself a center of missile and electronics conversions. In its 174-year history, Charlestown Navy Yard played an important role in the birth, growth, and continued effectiveness of the U.S. Navy.

The supply ship *Bridge* under construction during World War I.
Illustration by John Batchelor



1814

The first ship built by the Charlestown yard, *USS Independence*, was also the nation's first ship of the line—the battleship of its day.



1837

At the steam-powered ropewalk, workers transformed hemp fibers into 1,200-foot lengths of anchor cable.



Wooden hull seams were caulked with oakum, a loose hemp yarn treated with tar. This type of maintenance was a routine task for the yard.

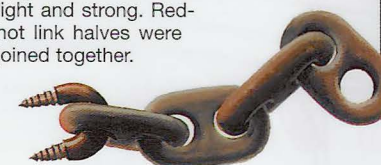


1858

Charlestown-built *USS Hartford* was an early steam-powered "screw sloop." It served as *Adm. David Farragut's* flagship during the Civil War.

The Mariners' Museum
1926

Die-lock chain, invented by yard workers, was light and strong. Red-hot link halves were joined together.



1943

The yard launched more than 170 vessels during World War II. Its workforce peaked at 52,000, with women playing an important role.

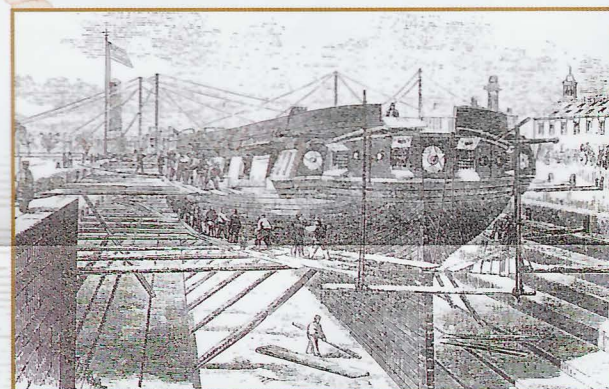


From Sail to Steam: The 19th-Century Yard

In 1798 the United States prepared to defend itself at sea. The Navy Department, hoping to build six ships of the line, established six naval shipyards in 1800–01, one of them in Boston Harbor. The young nation was spurred by the depredations of the Barbary pirates of North Africa and French privateers, who had been plundering U.S. merchant shipping in the 1790s. But the building program died, and in its early years the yard in Charlestown was a small supply depot. The War of 1812 changed that, when Charlestown began work on the nation's first ship of the line. Throughout its history, the yard's primary function would be as a repair and maintenance facility, but it continued to build ships, mostly during wartime. Until the 1890s they were constructed under great shiphouses.

In the 1850s Charlestown began constructing steam warships, and during the Civil War built *Monadnock*, an ironclad monitor. The yard specialized in producing double-ended paddle-wheelers for the Union "brown-water navy." These vessels could reverse direction on narrow southern rivers without turning around.

By 1860 this was a thriving yard with a dry dock, a machine shop that could build steam engines, a ropewalk, and 2,000 workers. But Charlestown suffered in the post-war naval decline; manufacturing—especially rope—kept the yard alive. In the "New Navy" of the late 1880s and '90s the yard was modernized, allowing it to service the steel ships fighting in the Spanish-American War.



USS Constellation was dry docked for scraping, recaulking, and painting before returning to sea in 1859.

Steel Ships and War: The 20th-Century Yard

An ambitious shipbuilding program in the years before World War I made the U.S. Navy one of the most powerful in the world. During the war Charlestown came into its own as a repair yard for battleships, cruisers, and especially destroyers. These all-purpose vessels, a new class developed to counter torpedo ships, were also used for escort duty, antisubmarine warfare, and shore bombardment. Late in the war the yard laid down its first large steel vessels on open ways that had replaced the shiphouses. But post-war naval treaties limiting the size of the world's major navies sharply curtailed the yard's activities. The Depression took away more work, and by 1931 there were calls to close the yard. President Franklin Roosevelt's recovery programs, coupled with Japanese aggression

in Asia, led to a rapidly expanding navy. Charlestown was assigned destroyers, and for the first time it was primarily a construction yard. It continued to build destroyers until the end of World War II, when the time from keel-laying to launching had been cut from 15 months to three. It also built a large number of tank landing ships and destroyer escorts. Its workforce swollen to 52,000, the yard hummed day and night with the intensity of the war effort. In the post-war years, Charlestown found a new role modernizing old destroyers. It specialized in missile, sonar, and radar conversions, converting *Gyatt* into the first guided missile destroyer. The end of the rehabilitation programs and fleet cutbacks finally brought an end to Charlestown's long and honorable history.

Men, Women, and Machines: The Workforce



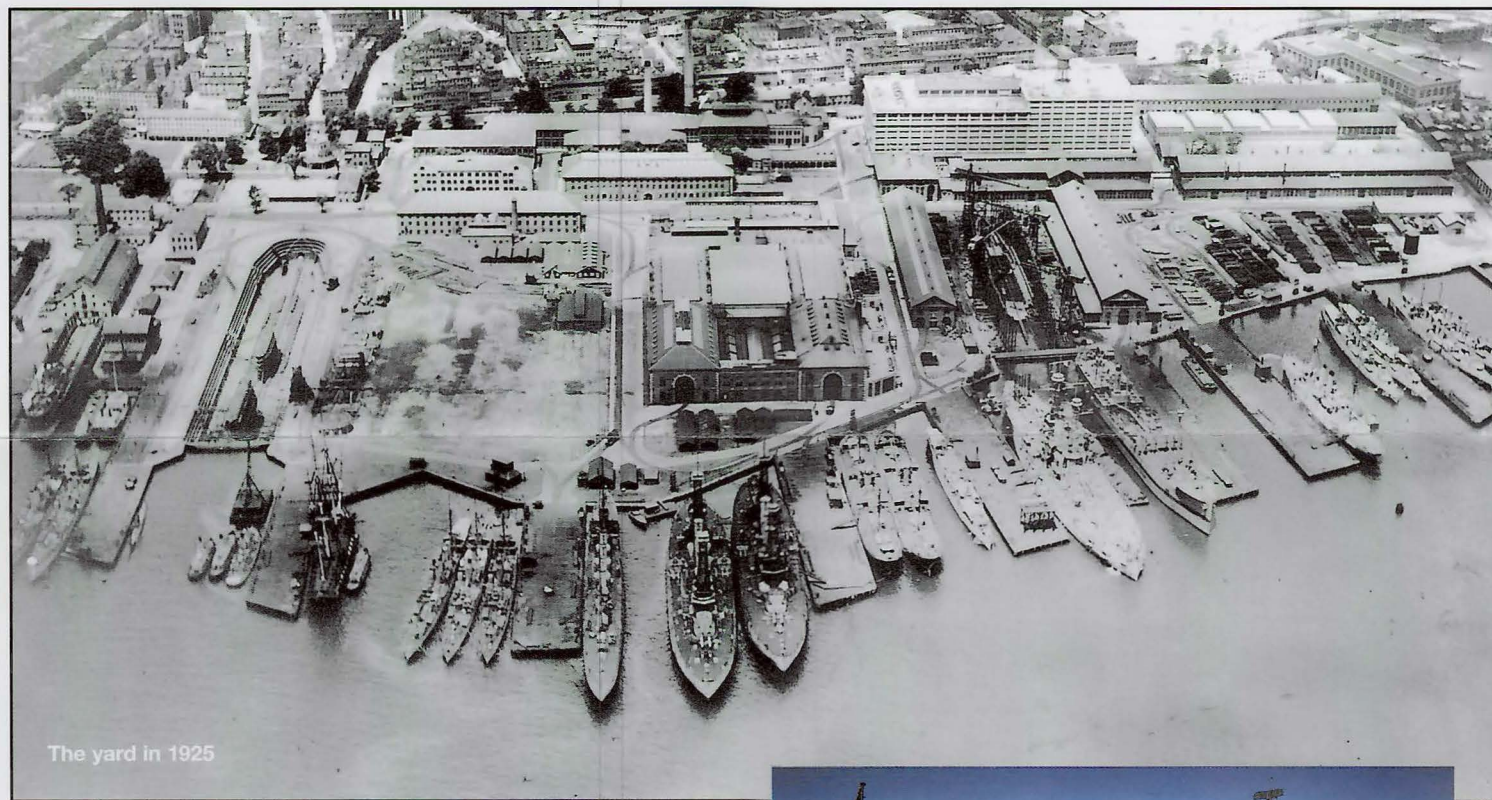
Enormous dry docks, looming cranes, massive naval vessels—the scale of the work was huge, but it all ultimately depended on skilled hands and sharp minds. The civilian workforce who did this demanding, sometimes dangerous work changed as the yard did. Early on they were native New Englanders; later many were immigrants. As wooden ships gave way to steel, metalworkers and boilermakers replaced carpenters and sailmakers. The workforce was reduced during the lean 1880s, then increased to 10,000 during World War I. World War II brought significant numbers of African Americans and women into the yard, the latter working for the first time in the yard's shops.



The yard in 1873; shipbuilding houses are at far right.

Images not otherwise credited: National Park Service

Visiting the Navy Yard



The yard in 1925

A walk through Charlestown Navy Yard will give you a sense of the awesome scope of the work, the array of skills, and the complex and interrelated operations that have always characterized naval shipyards. From the immense basin of the dry dock to the elegant Commandant's House that overlooks it, the yard represents the range of activities carried out by civilian workers and naval personnel. In 1925 (above) 29 battle-ships, cruisers, destroyers, and submarines were docked for maintenance and repair. *Constitution*, visible near Dry Dock 2 at left, was taken into Dry Dock 1 in 1927 for restoration. The shipbuilding ways to the right of the Machine Shop/Foundry complex (see map) is depicted in the cover illustration.



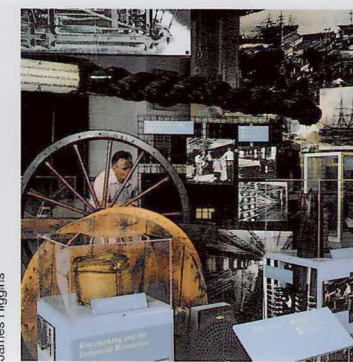
USS Cassin Young



USS Constitution



Portraying women workers



Serving the Fleet exhibit



Mustier House

When the yard was closed in 1974, 30 acres were set aside to form this historic site. The **Visitor Center** offers audio-visual presentations, including the multimedia "The Whites of Their Eyes," about the Battle of Bunker Hill (open seasonally; call 617-241-7575 for group reservations). You can also browse in the Eastern National bookstore. Restrooms are available. The visitor center is wheelchair accessible. See the park at your leisure or take one of the tours.

TOURS During the War of 1812, when *USS Constitution* won three battles against British warships, it became the nation's most famous naval vessel. The 1797 frigate also earned its nickname during the conflict. Legend has it that a crew member, watching shot bounce off *Constitution's* thick oak hull, cried out that its sides were made of iron. The ship has ever since been known as "Old Ironsides." Permanently berthed at Charlestown Navy Yard since 1897, the ship has been overhauled several times in Dry Dock 1. Its annual Turnaround Cruise is on the Fourth of July. Tours on the nation's oldest commissioned warship are given by the U.S. Navy.

USS Cassin Young represents World War II-era destroyers—the Navy's fastest, most versatile ships. Launched in 1943, *Cassin Young* took part in the climactic Battle of Leyte Gulf in 1944, but its fiercest combat experience was in the 1945 invasion of Okinawa. The ship provided supporting fire, then moved out for radar picket duty. Picket ships were the first to be targeted by Kamikaze aircraft—the "Divine Wind." Two struck *Cassin Young*, leaving 23 of her crew dead and more than 100 wounded. During the Cold War in the 1950s *Cassin Young* docked here regularly for modernization and maintenance until it was decommissioned in 1960. The main deck is self-guiding. Park rangers lead tours of the rest of the ship.

Since 1805 the commandants of the yard have lived in the imposing **Commandant's House**. Their high social standing was reflected in the list of dignitaries attending functions at the house, including Presidents James Monroe and Andrew Johnson, Secretary of State John Quincy Adams, and the Marquis de Lafayette. The oldest building in the yard, it is open in the summer for special tours.

ON YOUR OWN One of the nation's first two dry docks, **Dry Dock 1** was completed in 1833 and first used by *Constitution*. After the granite dock was emptied and the ship rested on wooden blocks, workers could repair its hull without "heeling over" the vessel—the arduous and dangerous method used earlier.

From taking a turn at a mock ship's wheel to trying out a seaman's hammock, visitors to the **USS Constitution Museum** learn about life on a 19th-century fighting ship. The ship is brought to life with an extensive collection of logs, journals, charts, and weapons. The museum is in the historic Dry Dock 1 Pump House, where a steam engine drove the great pumps that emptied and filled the dock.

The yard's old Paint Shop houses the **Serving the Fleet** exhibit. Through a far-ranging collection of artifacts, original documents, and images the exhibit tells the yard's story—from the 25-acre storage facility of 1800 to the sprawling repair, maintenance, and conversion yard of the post-World War II period. Open summer only.

The bell atop the **Mustier House** rang to assemble workers. Some reported to the quarter-mile-long **Ropewalk**, which spun most of the Navy's rope. Workers at the **Forge Shop** hammered out armor plate and the anchor chain that replaced rope. U.S. Marines assigned to protect the yard were housed in the **Marine Barracks**. (These sites are closed to the public.)

Connecting Boston's historic sites, the **Freedom Trail** includes *USS Constitution* and the **Bunker Hill Monument**, a short walk from the yard. The obelisk commemorates the first major battle of the American Revolution.

ADMINISTRATION Charlestown Navy Yard is a unit of Boston National Historical Park. It can be reached via I-93 or by public transportation from Boston. Visitors can take a water shuttle to the yard from Long Wharf. **For More Information**, write: Charlestown Navy Yard Visitor Center, Charlestown Navy Yard, Boston, MA 02129; call 617-242-5601; or visit us at www.nps.gov/bost on the Internet.

For Your Safety: Be alert for uneven surfaces, railroad tracks, and moving cranes. **Avoid the edges of piers and dry docks.**

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