

ANOTHER NEWPORT NEWS SHIPYARD

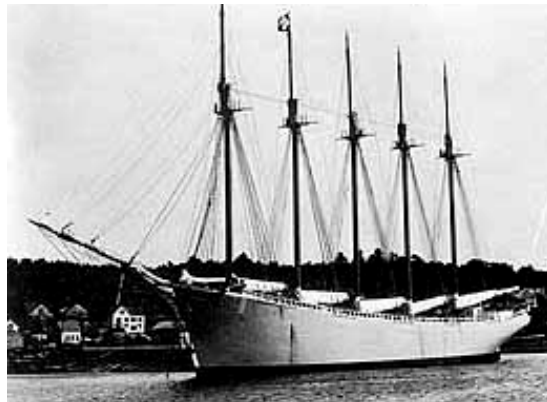


SOUTHERN SHIPYARD CORPORATION 1918-1934

In 1918, a group of Newport News businessmen purchased seventeen acres of land near the city's Small Boat Harbor and set up a 'small yard' shipbuilding and repair organization where the Exxon bunker terminal and a Hampton Roads Sanitation District's waste treatment plant now stand. Located a mile and a half from the center of the Newport News Shipbuilding (NNS) sprawling complex, it largely complimented, rather than directly competed with NNS, since it was only capable of building or repairing ships of just a few thousand tons displacement.

Incorporated in November of 1918, funding for construction of Southern's facilities was raised by selling stock. In addition, a \$275,275 loan from the United States Shipping Board was provided to build a 3,000 ton marine railway.

In 1919, several buildings were erected, including a machine shop, a fabricating shop and other shipbuilding/repair necessities. The firm's marine railway was completed September 1, 1920. The first vessel to be hauled up on Southern's marine railway was the five-masted schooner MARY F. BARRETT of 1,833 tons; built in 1901 in Bath, Maine. A similar sized 'Bath-built five-master' is depicted on the right.



In 1921, Southern constructed six concrete oil barges for the US War Department Transportation Service. Used on inland waterways, they reputedly were the first such barges built in the United States.

The next year, the Southern Shipyard Corporation somewhat emulated the unusual activities being conducted at NNS following World War I in order to stay solvent. Both yards undertook the repair of steam locomotives for the Norfolk & Southern and the C&O railroads. Several vessels were also scrapped at the Southern plant in 1922 in order to generate some much needed work.

Construction of new vessels by the Southern Shipyard did not commence until 1924. By then Prohibition had resulted in rampant rum running off America's shores. In response, the US Coast Guard ordered two hundred 75-foot wooden patrol boats, fitted with powerful twin gasoline engines and displacing 37 tons.



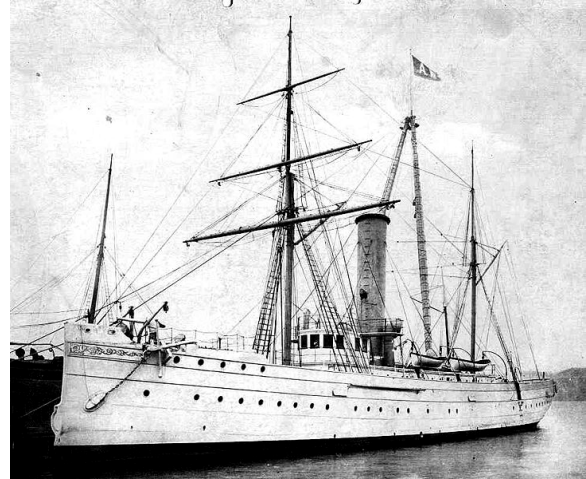
The Southern Shipyard was awarded a contract for ten of these speedy little vessels. In 1924 and 1925, the craftsmen at Southern turned out PC-180 through 189. Six more, slightly larger patrol boats, PC-400 through 405, were contracted for and completed in 1931. The photo on the left shows PC-403 operating at high speed near the mouth of the James River.

Hardly visible in the background of the image of PC-403 is the original James River Bridge. Completed in 1928, the bridge's numerous concrete pilings were constructed on the Southern Shipyard's property by a subcontractor for the bridgework who leased a portion of the shipyard property for this purpose. The biggest of these pilings was 110 feet in length and weighed thirty-five tons.

The largest vessel built by the Southern Shipyard was the US Coast Guard Tender BEECH (WAGL-205). Shown on the right, she was 103 feet long and displaced 255 tons. A 300 horsepower diesel provided her a top speed of eight knots. Completed in 1928, she served continuously in the Coast Guard until 1964, when she was decommissioned and sold. Her final disposition is unknown.



Perhaps the most interesting repair job undertaken by the Southern Shipyard was the extensive reconditioning of the US Coast Guard Cutter MANNING [right]; one of the few composite wood and steel ships still in service then. Other activities undertaken in the late 1920s included the scrapping of fifteen surplus ships which had languished in the James River Reserve Fleet since the end of World War I; plus the conversion of several ships from steam to diesel power.



This kind of miscellaneous work allowed the firm to barely survive until 1934. By then, the Great Depression had deepened to the point that such enterprises as the Southern Shipyard were forced to liquidate their assets and go out of business. Another factor, perhaps, was the aggressive solicitation of marine and industrial work of any size by nearby Newport News Shipbuilding.

The marine railway was sold to the forerunner of today's NORSHIPCO repair yard in Norfolk. The land was sold to a local real estate mogul. Over time, the slip that was once home to the marine railway was filled in and the shipyard's buildings demolished. The Exxon oil terminal and the Hampton Roads sewage treatment plant now occupy the former shipyard site.

All that now remains to indicate that a shipyard ever existed just southwest of Interstate I-664 are the submerged remains of what appears to be two, 220 foot-long coastal freighters. They may be the same vessels visible in the photo at the top of page 1; perhaps surplus after World War I and later abandoned there.



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ADDENDUM - THE RUM WARS

Between 1920, when the Eighteenth Amendment was enacted, and 1933, when Prohibition was repealed, thousands of enterprising individuals engaged in both the manufacture and import of illicit liquor. Smuggling such prohibited spirits at sea from outside the United States' territorial waters was commonly referred to as rum running. For years, their efforts to elude, and occasionally confront America's Coast Guard was colorfully called 'the rum wars'.

The US Coast Guard was assigned the nearly impossible duty of preventing rum running when Prohibition became the law of the land. To counter a huge number and variety of vessels engaged in this practice, the Coast Guard undertook a huge expansion program. Mass producing two hundred 75-foot patrol boats of the type built by the Southern Shipyard was but one effort undertaken.

Surplus naval vessels were also pressed into service, including four destroyers built by Newport News Shipbuilding. The USS MONAGHAN, NNS Hull #134, [right] was one of those vessels. Manned by the Coast Guard, they served between 1924 and 1930; seeking to interdict and destroy 'mother ships' that supplied thousands of gallons of rum and other concoctions to smaller rum running watercraft. Eventually the NNS-built vessels were returned to the US Navy and their original destroyer numbers restored.



But the work of intercepting seemingly innocent sailing and self-powered watercraft of all sizes as they constantly approached America's shores fell largely to the 75-foot patrol boats and their crews. They proved to be sturdy craft, even when required to stay at sea for several days at a time in weather both fair and foul. Manned by a crew of eight, their armament was a single shot, six pounder (57-mm) gun with a maximum range of just over a nautical mile and a few rifles.

Each of the 200 patrol craft mass produced in the mid-1920s was fitted with two six-cylinder gasoline engines that produced a total of 400 horsepower and a speed of around 15 knots. Seventeen different small shipyards and boat manufacturers were ultimately utilized to build them to a standard Coast Guard-created set of plans. These craft cost around \$25,000, on average.

The following images depict one of the 75-footers stopping a suspected rum runner on the high seas, and a close-up of a patrol boat's foredeck, six pounder and confiscated goods taken from a rum runner.



One of the rum runners was a former yacht builder named William McCoy, who illegally...and briefly...imported the best Cuban rum available to Florida. His reputation for selling only the best led to the familiar phrase '*the real McCoy*' becoming a part of American slang. In 1923, he was using two vessels and netting profits of \$100,000 per voyage. But later that year, he was caught and incarcerated for nine months. Despite his legal fees, the loss of his vessels and hefty fines, McCoy still retained enough of his ill-gotten gains to comfortably retire. And he did.

When Prohibition ended, some of the 75-foot patrol boats were kept in service by the Coast Guard. Forty-six of them were turned over to the US Navy and another fourteen went to other government agencies. The last one in Coast Guard service survived until 1946. When their US Government service ended many of them were sold to foreign navies or to private owners for use as pleasure craft.

The six larger and more sea worthy patrol craft built by the Southern Shipyard were transferred to Hawaii. They were placed under US Navy jurisdiction during World War II and sold off immediately following the end of the war. It is not known if any of the patrol boats built by the Southern Shipyard still exist.