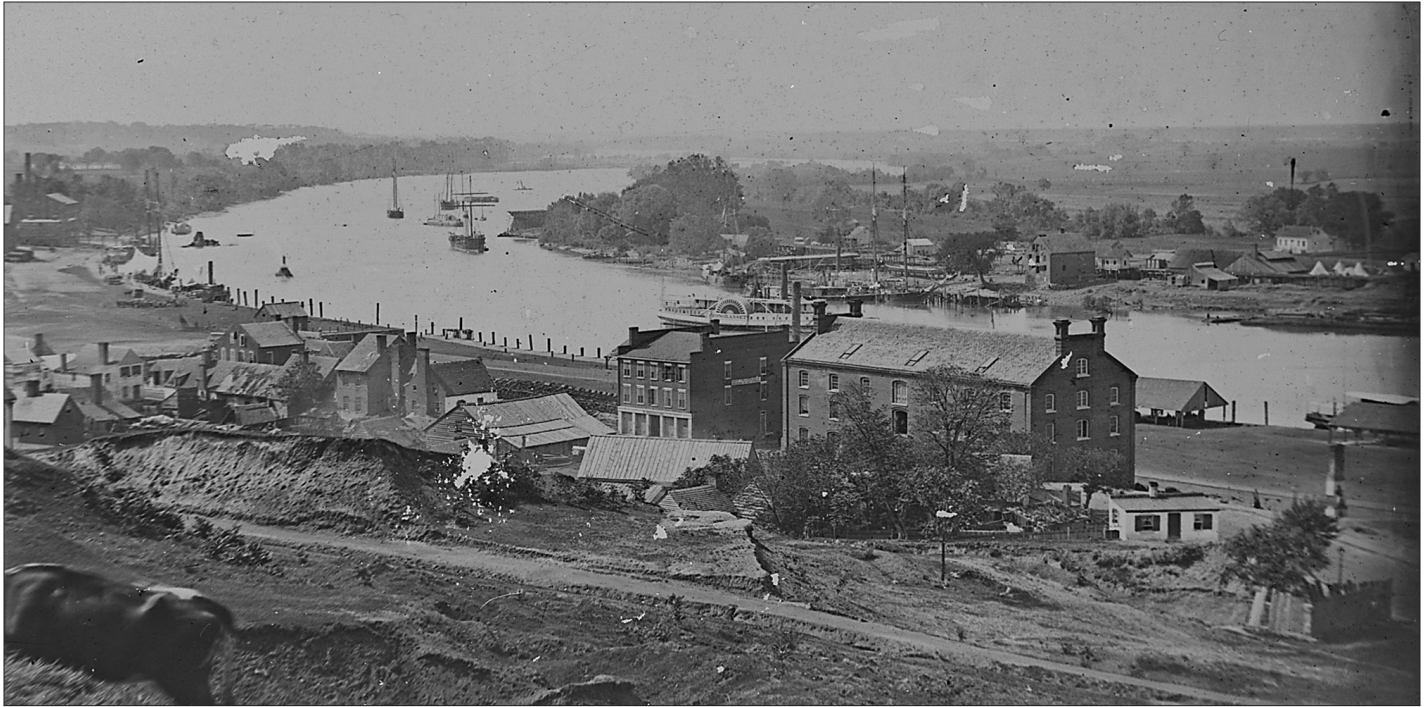


Navy Yards



The Confederate Navy Yard either side of the James River in Richmond was photographed by Andrew J. Russell from Chimborazo Hill after the fall of Richmond in 1865. The large building housed the Confederate Quartermaster Department Building, and the smaller one to its left was the store owned by wealthy ship owner and ship chandler Richard O. Haskins, who was a major supplier to both the Confederate States Army and Navy. The long steamboat landing (Rocketts) can be seen reaching to further buildings in the distance. There is little sign of the burning which is believed to have taken place when the Confederate authorities evacuated the city. National Archives (Identifier 525100, Local Identifier 111-B-695).

Richmond, Virginia, 1861-1865

By Ron Field

THE CONFEDERATE STATES NAVY established a navy yard on both sides of the James River at Richmond, Virginia, in 1861. That on the north bank was situated at the end of Poplar Street in the dock area of the city known as Rocketts (or Rocketts Landing), named after Robert Rockett, an 18th-century ferryman. Sometimes referred to as Grave's Navy Yard, the other was located across the river in Manchester, near the terminus of the Richmond and Danville Railroad. The residential section of Rocketts was one of the main slum areas of the city. Just outside the limits, it was not under the jurisdiction of the city police. As the Civil War progressed, it became a notoriously unsafe area where "wharf rats" preyed on unsuspecting visitors.

Commanded by Captain (later Commander) Robert G. Robb, the Richmond Navy Yards had their origin in 1861

when the steamers *Jamestown* and *Yorktown*, which plied between New York and Richmond, were seized and brought to the wharf at Rocketts for conversion into warships. The work was performed by a gang of mechanics from the Norfolk Navy Yard under the supervision of Acting Naval Constructor Joseph Pierce.

By July 1861, recruiting officer Lieutenant William H. Parker was advertising in the Richmond press for "SEAMEN, ORDINARY SEAMEN and LANDSMEN" for "the Naval Service." Applicants were to apply "on board the steamer *Jamestown*, at Rocketts. Good wages given."¹ Renamed the *Thomas Jefferson*, this vessel was involved in the Battle of Hampton Roads on March 8-9, 1862 and was eventually sunk as a block-ship in the James River on May 15, 1862. Described as "a very beautifully modeled [*sic*] side-wheel steamer, of about 1,400 tons

Richmond, Virginia, 1861-1865



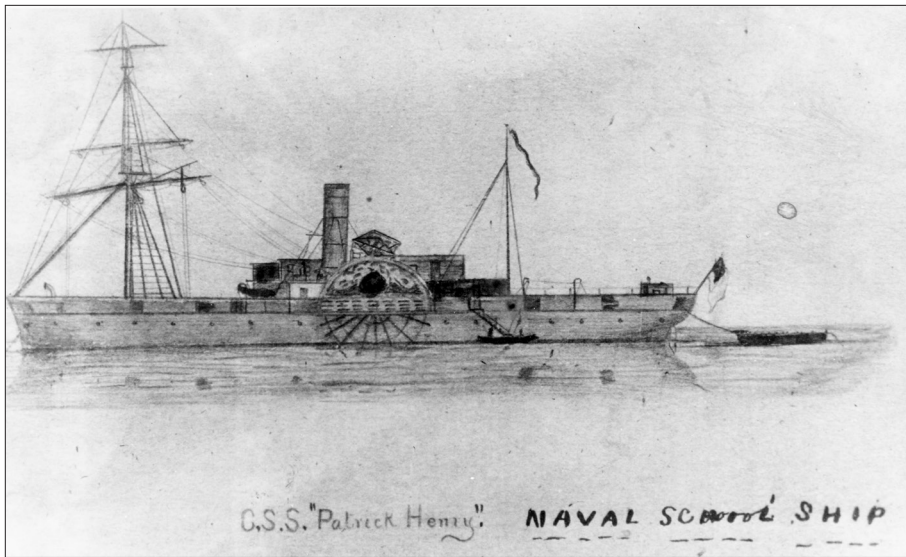
The view across the James River from 'Grave's Navy Yard' (opposite Rocketts) in 1865 gives a clear view of the front of the Confederate Quartermaster building and Haskin's Store. Lower structures can also be seen close by the quayside. In the foreground, a schooner lies at anchor at a once-busy Confederate wharf, complete with loading derrick, which was connected to numerous tracks from the railroad terminus. A few of the buildings of Chimborazo Hospital can be seen on the hilltop in the background. Albumen print on card mount, donated by Colonel Godwin Ordway, 1948. Library of Congress (Control No. 2014645792, LC-DIG-ppmsca-34902).

burden," the *Yorktown* was renamed *Patrick Henry*. Eventually carrying ten guns and a crew of 150 officers and men, she was placed under command of John Randolph Tucker, a Virginian who had resigned his US Navy commission and joined the Virginia Navy.² Damaged at Hampton Roads, the *Patrick Henry* was repaired and housed the Confederate Naval Academy at Drewry's Bluff from October 1863 until it was burned during the evacuation of Richmond on April 3, 1865.³

A major influence on the establishment and growth of the navy yard in Richmond was Richard O. Haskins. A wealthy ship chandler, wholesale grocer, and commission merchant, Haskins had new buildings constructed in

Rocketts in 1861 which housed the Confederate quartermaster. He also owned, or part owned, many ships including the side-wheel steamer *Curtis Peck*, commanded by Captain John H. Freeman, and the schooner *Gallego*. Contracted to the Confederate States Navy in October 1861, the *Curtis Peck* regularly transferred Confederate troops, horses, and freight up and down the James River, while the *Gallego* served as a store ship for the James River Squadron.⁴

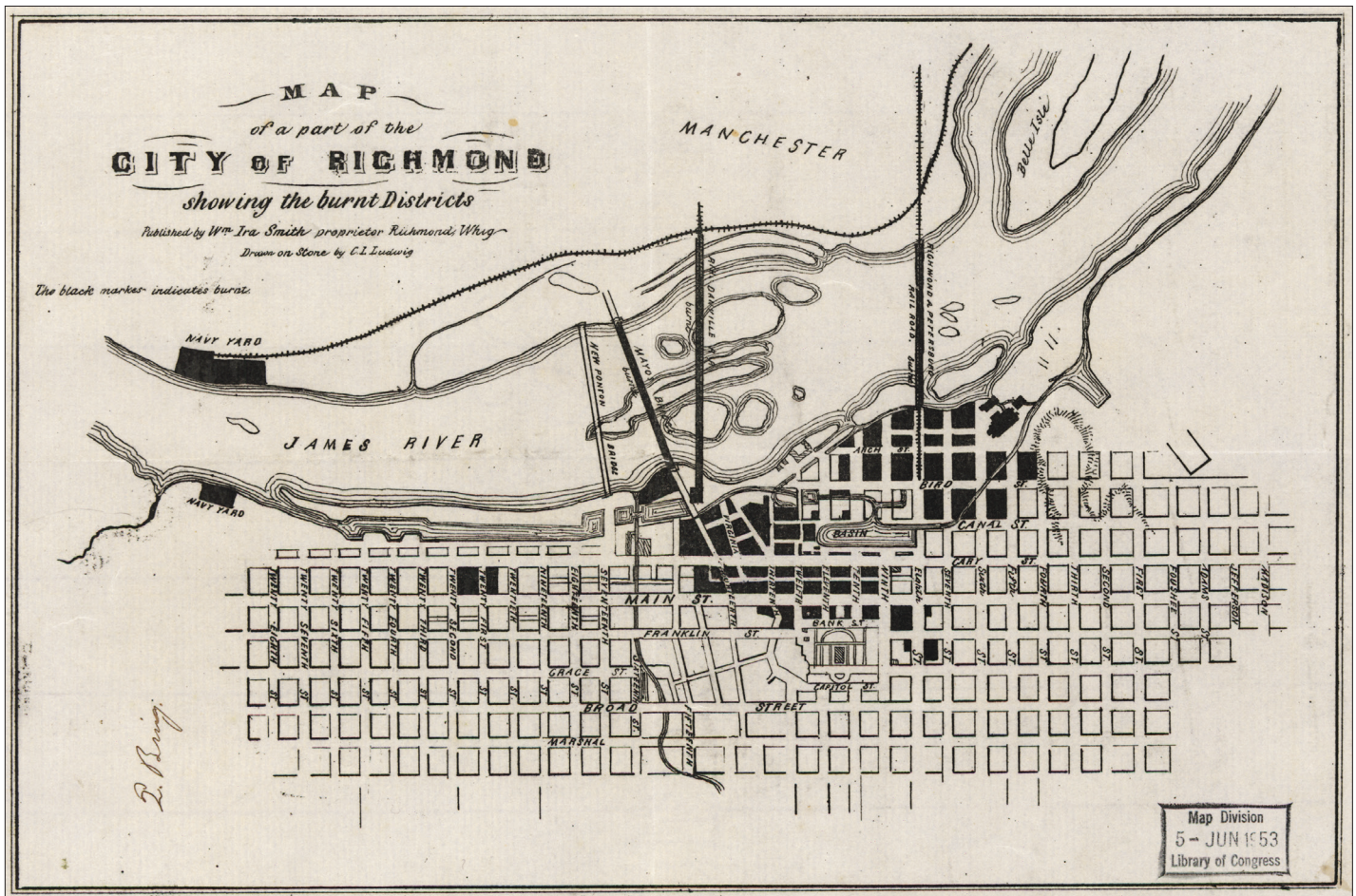
The first Confederate States Marines assigned to the Richmond Navy Yard arrived in February 1863 from Camp Beall at Drewry's Bluff for duty aboard the *Gallego*. On September 30, 1863, a marine guard of one sergeant,



one corporal, and 12 privates, under Second Lieutenant David Bradford, was detailed to guard public property at Rocketts.⁵

Shipbuilding was well underway at this navy yard by 1862. By February 22, 1864, Lieutenant John H. Parker, Confederate States Navy, advertised from his office in the War Department building on the corner of Ninth and Bank Streets in Richmond for “Block and Sheet Lead, Copper, Zinc, Tin and Brass, Wire of different metals, Sheet Iron, Window Glass, Cast Steel and Bar Iron, Chain Rope, and all other articles for Naval

Photographically reproduced sketch of the *Patrick Henry*, school ship of the Confederate Naval Academy, by Midshipman John Thomas Scharf, who studied and served aboard her in 1863 and again in 1864-1865. NH 42807 courtesy of Naval History and Heritage Command.



Published as a handbill on April 8, 1865, this map by William Ira Smith, proprietor of the *Richmond Whig & Public Advertiser*, is the only known contemporary map that shows the location of the navy yard in Richmond. Oriented with north toward the lower right, the darkened areas show the burnt districts that include the navy yard on either side of the river. Drawn on stone by C.L. Ludwig. Scale not given. Library of Congress (Geography and Map Division, Control No. 99448330, <http://hdl.loc.gov/gmd/g3884r.cw0641000>).

Richmond, Virginia, 1861-1865

Purposes.” Doubtless these materials were needed for work going on at Rocketts and across the river.⁶ Across from Rocketts, the Confederate torpedo boats *Wasp*, *Hornet*, and *Scorpion* were constructed.

A report from Secretary of the Navy Stephen Mallory to President Jefferson Davis, dated November 30, 1863, summed up activity at the navy yard. Commanded by North Carolinian Lieutenant Francis Edgar Shepperd, the ironclad ram *Fredericksburg* was “completed and waiting her armament.” The casemate ironclad *Virginia II*, also referred to as *Young Virginia* and *Richmond*, was “receiving her machinery and armor” and would “soon be ready for service.” A further two ironclads, including the *Texas*, were “under construction, and now in their frames.”⁷

The *Fredericksburg* finally received her arms during March 1864, following which she joined the James River Squadron and was in the action at Trent’s Reach on June 21. Also joining her, *Virginia II* was engaged at Trent’s Reach, Dutch Gap, Fort Harrison, and Chapin’s Bluff. Both these vessels were eventually blown up to prevent capture.

The navy yard at Richmond was partially burned and the casemate ironclad *Texas* was seized incomplete when the city was evacuated on April 3, 1865. According to a *New-York Times* report, “About daylight on Monday morning the city was shaken to its foundations by the explosion proceeding from the blowing up of the Confederate iron-clads in the river. The *Patrick Henry* was in flames at Rocketts, and the Navy-yard and all the public buildings therein situated were in process of destruction. Several of the smaller vessels were burned at the city wharves.”⁸

The next day, President Abraham Lincoln, accompanied by his son Tad, arrived off the wharf at Rocketts onboard the side-wheel steamer *Malvern* that anchored and fired a 35-gun salute. Accompanied by a guard of marines and sailors, the President stepped ashore 24 hours later to fulfill his wish to finally see Richmond, which still smouldered in the distance.⁹

There remains little today of where the Confederate navy yard once stood at Richmond, other than a historical marker. A long wooden wharf runs along the Rocketts side of the James, behind which stretches Great Shiplock Park, while further downstream is a modern wharf. Woodland covers the site of the larger navy yard on the opposite side of the river.

Sources

1. “Wanted for the Naval Service,” *Daily Dispatch* (Richmond, VA), July 30, 1861, p 1, col 2.
2. Letter from Lieutenant Rochelle, C.S. Navy, to Flag-Officer Tucker, C.S. Navy, giving an account of the services of the C.S.S. *Patrick Henry* and the part borne by her in the engagement in Hampton Roads, Virginia, March 8 and 9, 1862, January 30, 1865. *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion* (ORN hereafter), Series I, Volume 7: North Atlantic Blockading Squadron (March 8 to September 4, 1862), p 50-54 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1898).
3. Paul H. Silverstone. *Warships of the Civil War Navies* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1989), p 242.
4. See Louis H. Manarin, Editor. *Richmond at War: The Minutes of the City Council 1861-1865* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1966), p 630-631; and fold3.com, *Confederate Citizen's File: Citizen*, R.O. Haskins, Digital Images, p 4, 32.
5. Ralph W. Donnelly. *The Confederate States Marine Corps* (Shippensburg, PA: White Mane Publishing Company, Inc., 1989), p 53.
6. “Navy Department,” *Richmond Enquirer* (Richmond, VA), February 22, 1864, p 3, col 1. Lieutenant Parker would later serve aboard the *Fredericksburg*.
7. Extracts from the report of the Secretary of the Navy, dated November 30, 1863, regarding vessels completed and under construction, November 30, 1863. ORN, Series I, Volume 9: North Atlantic Blockading Squadron (May 5, 1863 to May 5, 1864), p 797-798 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1899).
8. “Details of the Evacuation,” *New-York Times* (New York City, NY), April 8, 1865, p 1, col 5.
9. Abstract log of the U.S.S. *Malvern*, February 5 to April 14, 1865. ORN, Series I, Volume 12: North Atlantic Blockading Squadron (February 2 to August 3, 1865) and South Atlantic Blockading Squadron (October 29, 1861 to May 13, 1862), p 173-176 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1901).



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