

Navy Yards



The Marine Basin, Brooklyn Navy Yard. The receiving ship "North Carolina," in the foreground. Line engraving published in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, Volume III, No. 62, p 169, February 14, 1857.

New York Navy Yard

By Ron Field

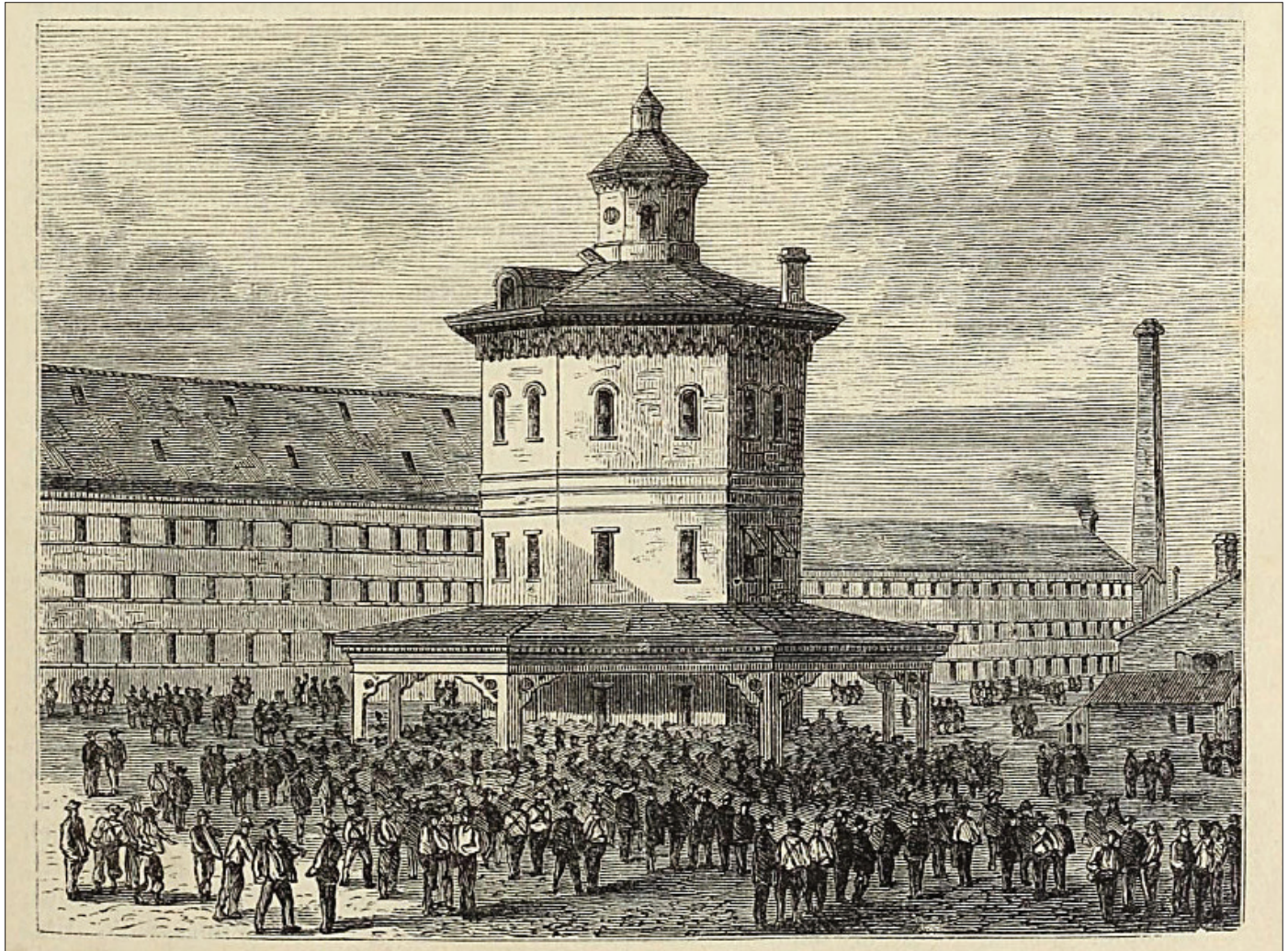
IMPERATIVE TO UNION NAVAL OPERATIONS throughout the Civil War, the New York Navy Yard and Station (also known as the Brooklyn Navy Yard) was established on February 23, 1801, and became an active shipyard five years later. Located east of Manhattan Island, it was situated along a crescent-shaped inlet, one mile wide and a half mile long called Wallabout Bay, which provided protection from the turbulent currents of the East River while giving easy access to both Brooklyn and New York City, and their bustling commerce.

The first steam-propelled warship (or floating battery), *Demologos* was launched there in 1815. Later named the *Fulton*, after her inventor Robert Fulton, she proved unseaworthy and remained moored off the shoreline of the Navy Yard as a receiving ship until destroyed in an explosion killing one officer and 47 men on June 4, 1829. Actual shipbuilding

began at the New York Navy Yard in 1817 with the laying down of the 74-gun ship-of-the-line *Ohio*, which was launched on May 30, 1820. *Ohio* took part in the Mexican War and later became a receiving ship at Boston.



Entrance to the New York Navy Yard from York Street, Brooklyn. The Guard House stands at right. Line engraving published in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, Volume III, No. 62, p 168, February 14, 1857.



Workmen mustered at the Constructing Engineer's office, also known as the Round House, twice each day to find out to which vessel, or location, they would be assigned. Line engraving published in: W.F.G. Shanks. *The Brooklyn Navy-Yard, Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, Volume XLII, No. CCXLVII, p 7, December 1870.

A report from a correspondent of *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* who visited in 1857 provides a prewar description of the New York Navy Yard, "Upon entering the Navy Yard you are first attracted by the Guard House, somewhat prominent for its Grecian portico, and used as a guard room, police office, watchman's room, Lieutenant of Ordnance's office, and for holding court martials [*sic*]. Further down the main avenue to the right is the office where the workmen, often twelve or fifteen hundred in number, are mustered morning and noon. Branching off from the main avenue stands on the left the residence of the commandant of the Yard, which is a handsome but plain building...Farther on is the Naval Lyceum, a substantial structure, founded

in 1833 by the officers connected with the port..."¹

Chief among those who helped establish the Lyceum was Commodore Matthew Perry, who commanded ships in the War of 1812 and the Mexican War, and who played a leading role in the opening of Japan to the West with the Convention of Kanagawa in 1854. Apart from containing a museum, the Lyceum had a mail department that forwarded letters to sailors serving at distant stations. During the Civil War, the subscription-only membership of the Lyceum appears to have been relaxed as, on July 18, 1861, the *New-York Times* reported it to be "alive with activity. From the hungry office-hunter to the last-made middy, every branch of naval employee is represented in the porch, on the lobby...and in the different rooms."²

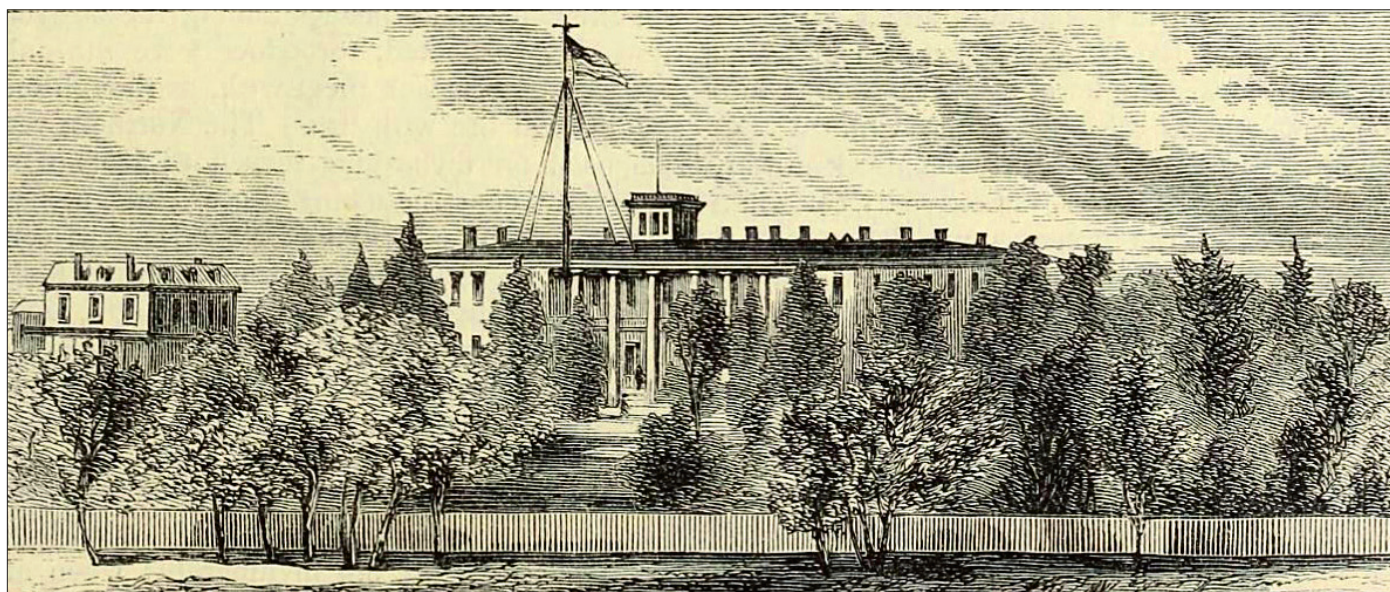
New York Navy Yard

Built in 1806 on a hill just north of the Guard House and overlooking the rest of the Navy Yard, the commandant's house occupied a plot that included a large garden. The Naval Marine Hospital was situated at the southeastern end of the Yard. Originally laid out in 1824, it occupied an elevated site and by 1850 it was enclosed with its own

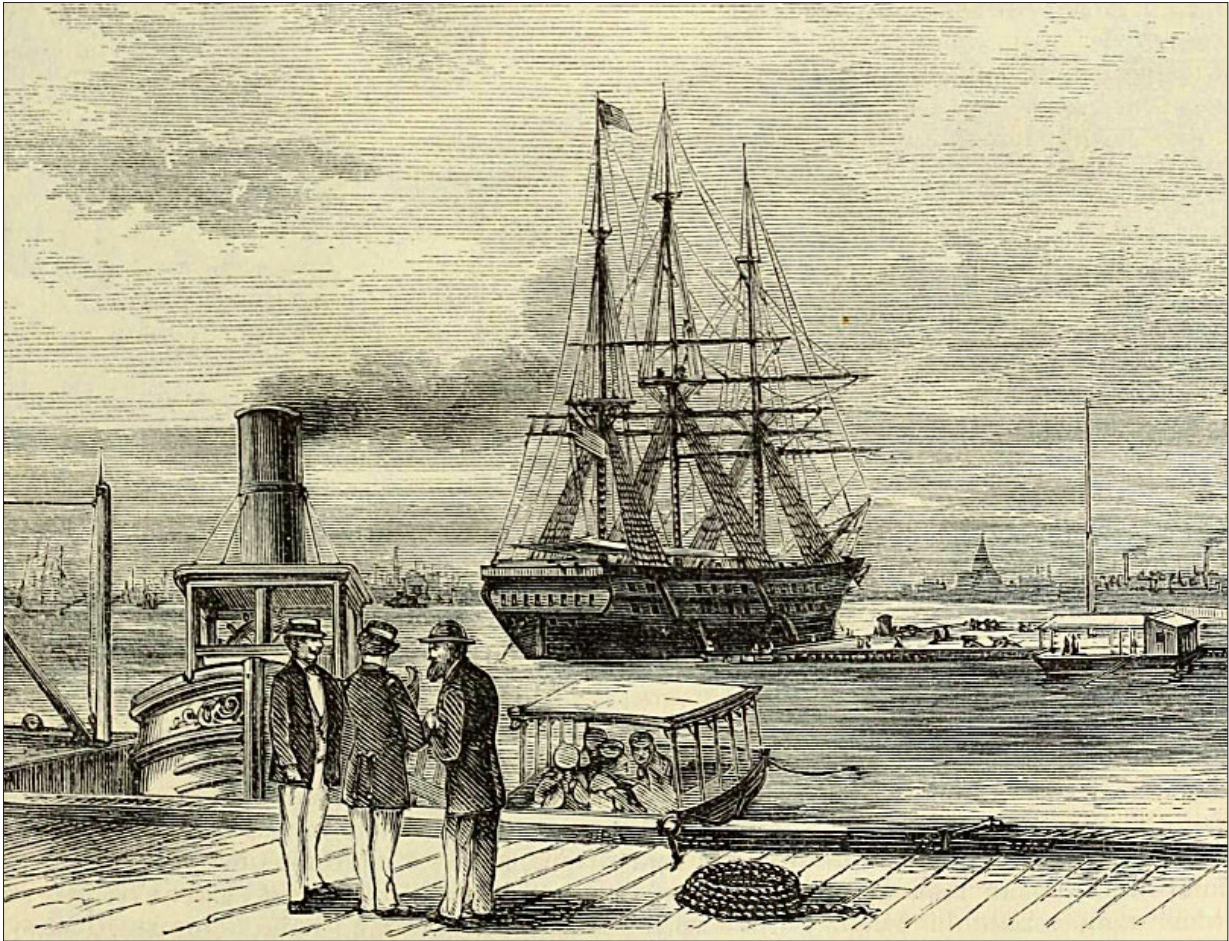
wooded grounds with a gatehouse, laboratory, and cemetery. Although it was built to hold 150 patients, this number soared to about 450 during the Civil War, prompting construction of a wooden annex to the main hospital building, which was torn down when the war ended.



Residence of the Commandant of the Brooklyn Navy Yard. The mill pond seen in the foreground was drained and filled in during the Civil War and became the site for officers' row to serve as quarters for naval officers. Line engraving published in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, Volume III, No. 63, p 168, February 14, 1857.



The Naval Marine Hospital as viewed across the wooded grounds from the north. The Laboratory building stands at the left. Line engraving published in: W.F.G. Shanks. *The Brooklyn Navy-Yard*, *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, Volume XLII, No. CCXLVII, p 11, December 1870.



North Carolina served as a receiving ship at the New York Navy Yard from 1839 through 1866. She was joined in this role by the *Vermont*, which was berthed next to the Gun Park in 1864. Line engraving published in: W.F.G. Shanks. The Brooklyn Navy-Yard, *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, Volume XLII, No. CCXLVII, p 13, December 1870.

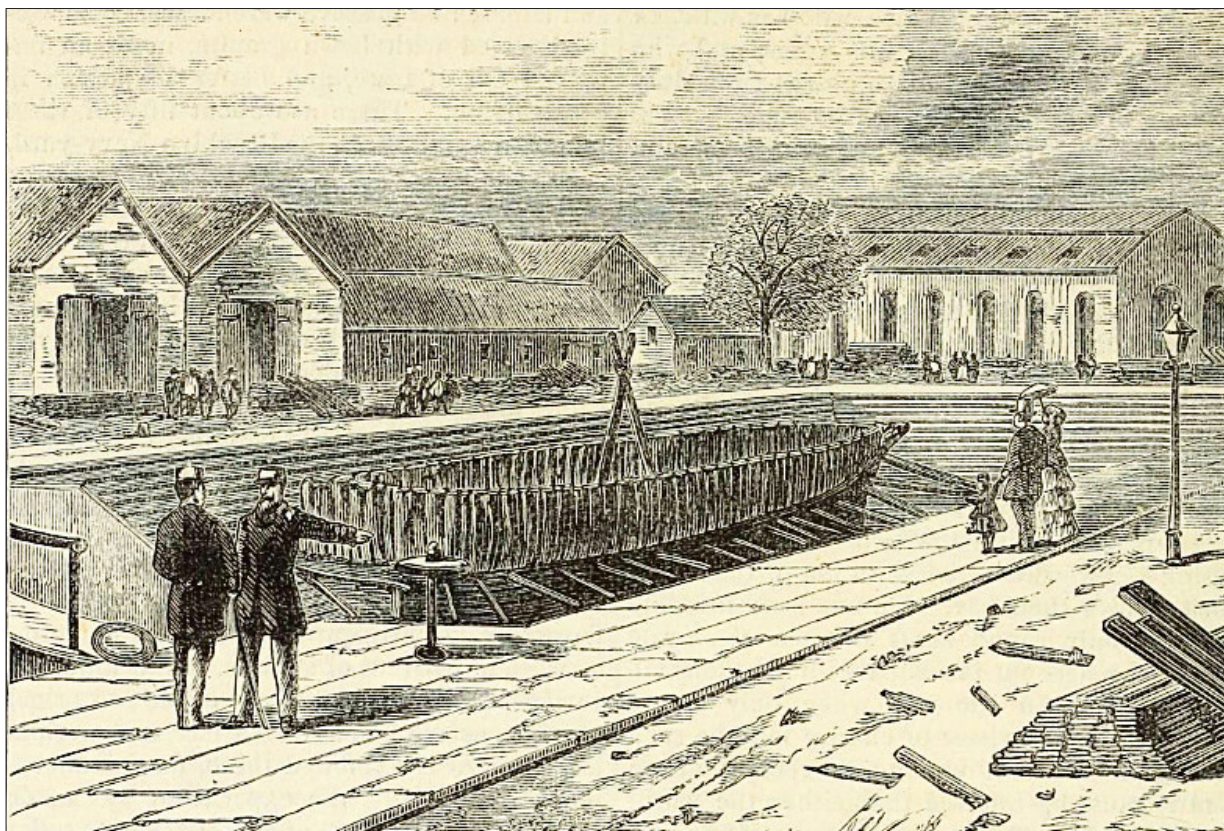
Looking out over Wallabout Bay from the Naval Marine Hospital, the *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* reporter described seeing the receiving ship *North Carolina* berthed along with other naval vessels. He observed several frigates anchored quietly in the bay, beyond which lay civilian merchant ships unloading supplies. He also saw a waterfront lined with iron and brick buildings with smoke billowing from large chimneys in what was a small industrialized town consisting of a 9,000 square foot iron shed for gun carriages; a three-winged smithery containing a labyrinth of underground piping for ventilation; and a 12,000 square foot boiler shop, plus a foundry, oakum warehouse for sealing hulls, carpenter and plumbing shops, and an armory.

A central feature of the Yard was the Cob Dock, established within what was earlier known as Block

Island. Originally formed from a mud flat in Wallabout Bay, this was reportedly expanded with ballast released by departing ships. The basin in the Cob Dock was dug out during the Civil War to accommodate more shipping, while Wallabout Channel was dredged to a lower depth to provide capacity for more vessels to moor. On the northeast end of this island was the Ordnance Dock and Gun Park. Facilities in the Yard proper on the other side of the Channel included two large ship houses, two large lifting derricks, and Dry Dock Number 1, the third oldest dry dock on the East Coast. Begun in 1841 and completed in 1851, it was constructed using 23,000 cubic yards of granite transported from Maine and Connecticut. The Marine Barracks with Commandant's House, officers' quarters (today known as Building 92), and Gatehouse stood at the southern end of the Yard.

Commandant of the New York Navy Yard at the

New York Navy Yard



Approached via a broad paved area, the Dry Dock is shown with the Engineer's Store House and old Iron Plating Shop to its left, and new Iron Plating Shop at rear. Notable vessels that have undergone work in it include USS *Niagara*, famous for laying the Trans-Atlantic Cable, and the ironclad *Monitor*. Line engraving published in: W.F.G. Shanks. *The Brooklyn Navy-Yard*, *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, Volume XLII, No. CCXLVII, p 8, December 1870.

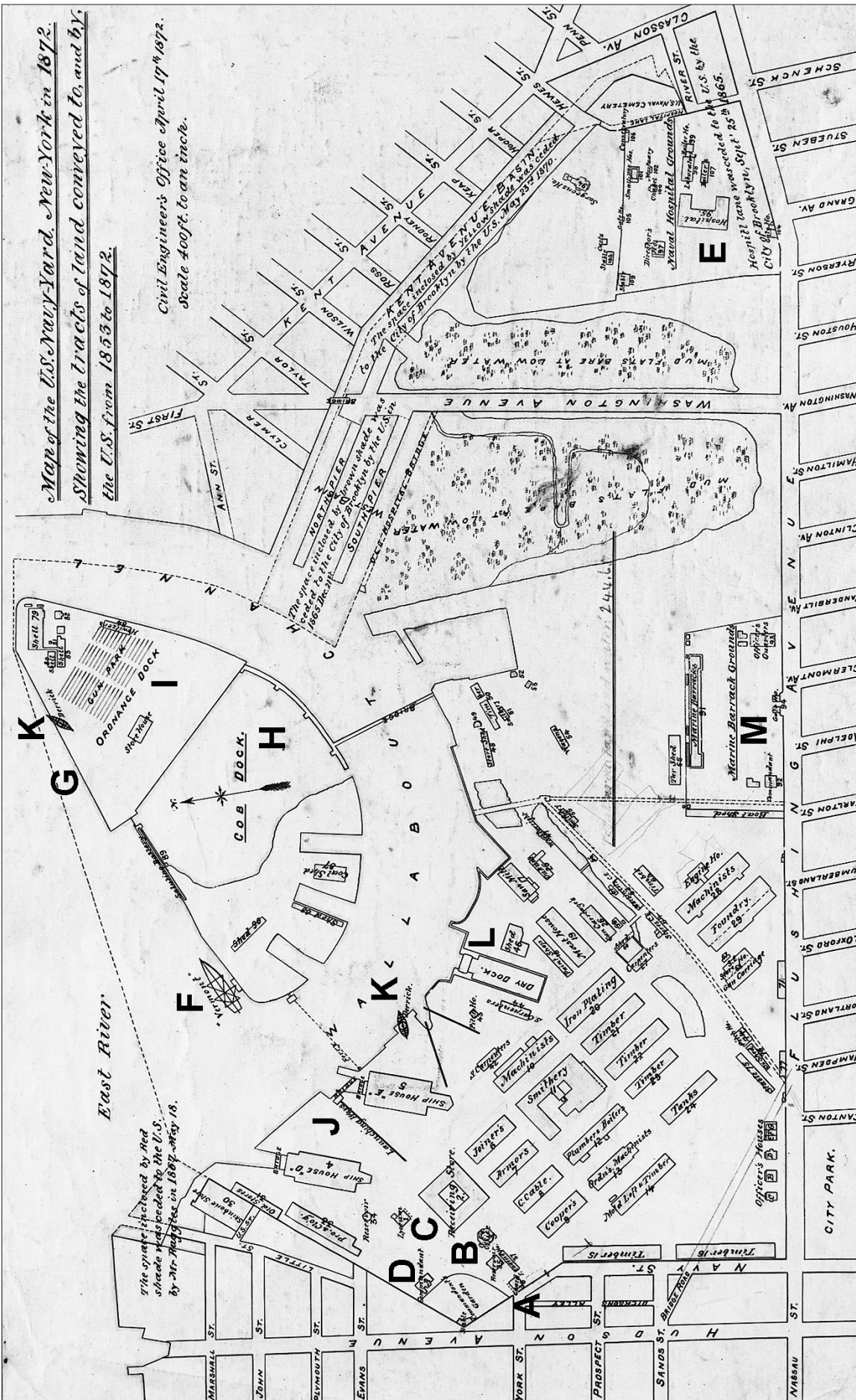
beginning of the Civil War, Commodore Samuel L. Breese was relieved by Commodore (later Rear-Admiral) Hiram Paulding on October 25, 1861, who remained in command of the yard until May 1, 1865, when he was replaced by Commodore Charles H. Bell. The indefatigable work of Paulding on the Ironclad Board during 1861-1862 helped produce the revolutionary "Ericsson Steam Battery," which was subsequently named *Monitor*.

Other officers who served at the Navy Yard throughout most of the war included naval constructor Benjamin F. Delano, whose grandfather built the ship-of-the-line *Constitution*, also known as "Old Ironsides." Essential to shipbuilding operations, William N. Brady was appointed "Master of the Yard" from 1843 until 1852, and returned to the same post during the vital years of 1858 through 1865. A much-respected mariner, Brady

began his naval service in 1836 as Boatswain aboard the ship-of-the-line *North Carolina*, which was stationed in the Pacific until 1839. By 1841, he had written a book entitled *The Naval Apprentice's Kedge Anchor* (New York, NY: Frye & Shaw, 1841 [First Edition]) that was subsequently published in at least 18 editions and remained a valuable reference manual for sailors throughout the rest of the 19th century.³

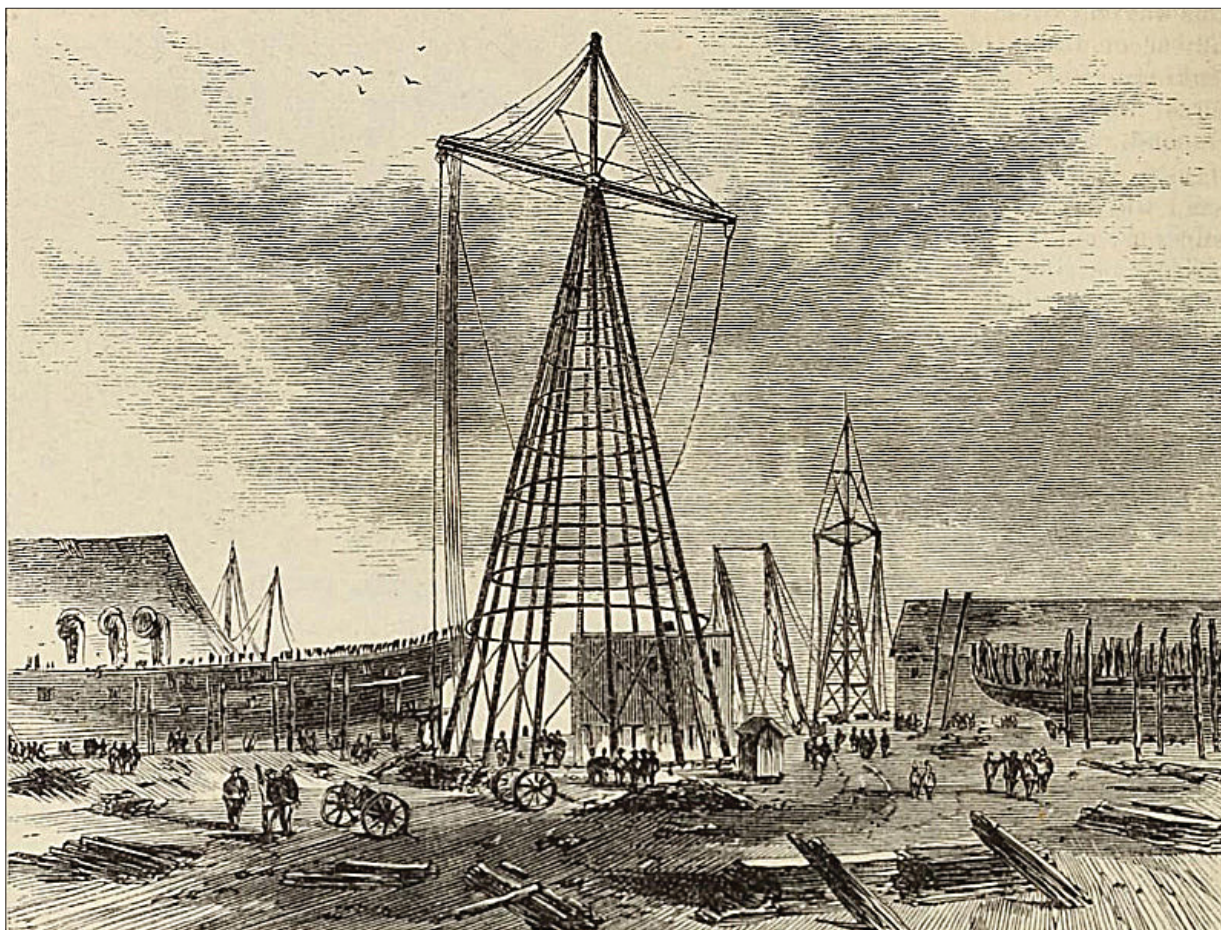
In 1861, the labor force employed in the yard consisted of 3,700 mechanics and laborers, with men working around the clock to convert vessels and build new warships for the war effort. The station logs for January 17, 1863, reflected 3,933 workers on the payroll, with 6,200 employed by the end of the war.⁴

As a result of its important role in supplying other navy stations and, later construction of ships for the blockade of the Confederacy, the New York Navy Yard was



Map of the U.S. Navy Yard, New York in 1872 showing the Tracts of Land Conveyed To, and By, the U.S. from 1855 to 1872. (A) Guard House; (B) Constructing Engineer's office; (C) The Lyceum; (D) Commandant's House; (E) Naval Marine Hospital; (F) Berthing location of receiving ship USS Vermont (berthing location of USS North Carolina until 1866); (G) Berthing location of receiving ship USS Vermont from 1864 to 1866; (H) Cob Dock; (I) Ordnance Dock and Gun Park; (J) Ship Houses; (K) Derricks; (L) Dry Dock; (M) Marine Barracks. National Archives (Identifier 6880560). Buildings, facilities, and vessels labeled by Ron Field.

New York Navy Yard



Two tall derricks, or lifting devices, towered over the Yard. In 1863, a 15-inch gun was carried to the Yard from a distant foundry destined for the armament of the ironclad *Roanoke*. Weighing about 50,000 pounds, it was lifted out of a barge by the derrick and gently deposited on the shore end of one of the docks. By the next morning it had sunk into the quicksand carrying with it a section of dock on which it had rested. When an attempt was made to lift it out of the mire with the derrick, it slipped breech first down into the hole and was almost lost from view. So troublesome was the quicksand that the gun was only eventually lifted out by sinking iron plates around it and building a cofferdam, or water-free enclosure, from within which the gun was eventually lifted and retrieved. Line engraving published in: W.F.G. Shanks. *The Brooklyn Navy-Yard*, *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, Volume XLII, No. CCXLVII, p 10, December 1870.

considered a target for Southern supporters who might attempt to sabotage its facilities. As early as January 23, 1861, rumors of a possible attack prompted extreme defensive measures to be taken. The *New York Herald* reported, “the sailors of the *North Carolina* were exercised by Capt. Ward at the guns, consisting, in addition to the regular armament, of five twelve-pound howitzers, placed in such a manner as to be effective in any quarter from which an enemy might approach. Besides the sailors who were being exercised on board, a large number were being practiced on shore, for active duty there if required. Large quantities of ammunition

were distributed over every part of the yard where either attack or defense can be effectively made, and guns were placed in position to...command Cobb’s dock, should an enemy approach from the direction of Williamsburg, and the same effective weapons of destruction are pointed to every part of Wallabout Bay.”⁵

Although Confederate attacks were not forthcoming, security at the Navy Yard was seriously compromised on several occasions. On April 12, 1863, about \$140,000 of workers’ wages was stolen from the Paymaster’s office despite there being three watchmen whose sole duty was



Describing the Marine Barracks facing south across the formally landscaped parade ground, the *Harper's* reporter remarked that there "was always a squad of marines drilling or pacing the green before their otherwise desolate-looking domicile." Line engraving published in: W.F.G. Shanks. *The Brooklyn Navy-Yard, Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, Volume XLII, No. CCXLVII, p 11, December 1870.

to guard the money.⁶ During the Draft Riots of July 13-16, 1863, all available ships of war, including the gunboats *Granite City* and *Tulip*, plus the receiving ship *North Carolina*, had their guns trained to command the entire station. Furthermore, all approaches to the Yard, Commandant's residence, and armory and magazine were guarded by sailors with howitzers. All available marines were also under arms, and the workmen were speedily turned into their shops to prevent the possibility of their joining the rioters.⁷

In response to a Southern-inspired incendiary plot to burn parts of New York City, including the Navy Yard, in November 1864, Commandant Paulding issued an order on the 29th of that month requiring that all those visiting the Yard should carry a pass. This also created "a special police" to enforce tighter security measures.⁸

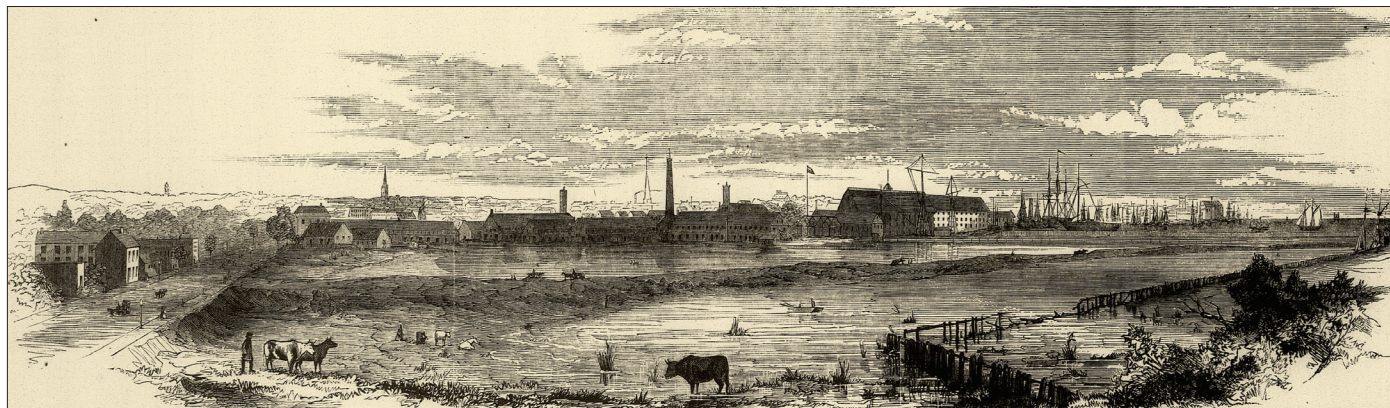
From 1861 to 1865, the New York Navy Yard produced 15 large vessels and converted 416 commercial vessels into warships.⁹ For three months following President Lincoln's "75,000 volunteers" proclamation in April 1861, it was busy placing weapons and armaments on vessels, or refurbishing existing weapons and armaments. According to the *Commercial Advertiser*,

merchant steamers were "sent to the yard one day and the next leave with guns mounted, fancy decks and saloons razed [*sic*] and the ships prepared for blockade or other service."¹⁰

A *Mohican*-class vessel, and sister-ship to the more famous *Kearsarge*, the screw sloop-of-war *Oneida*, launched on November 20, 1861 and commissioned on February 28, 1862, was the first vessel built at the Navy Yard specifically intended for the Civil War. She would participate in the Battle of Forts Jackson and St. Philip in 1862 and in the Battle of Mobile Bay in 1864, as result of which seven of her sailors and one of her marine guard received the Medal of Honor.¹¹

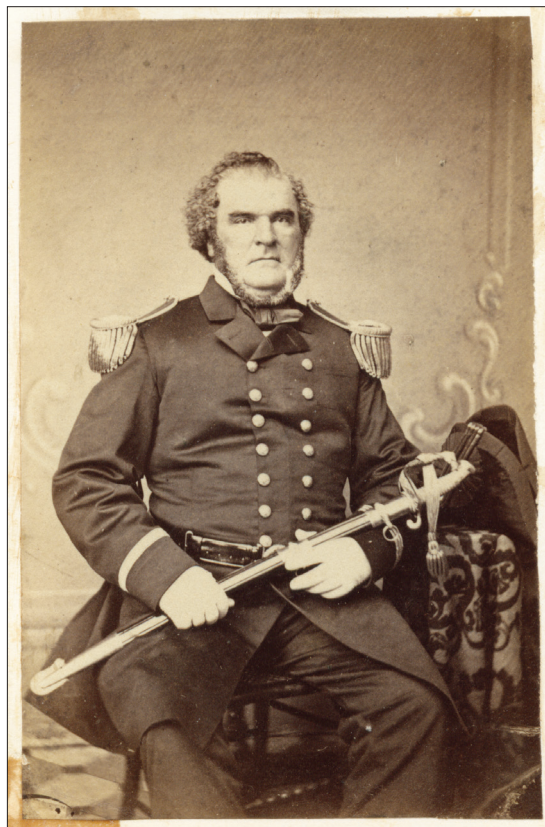
Another vessel outfitted at New York was the famous *Monitor*. Although the hull was built at the Continental Iron Works at Greenpoint, Brooklyn, and the turret was fabricated at the Novelty Iron Works, in New York City, the revolutionary vessel was crewed, provisioned, and fitted with guns at the Yard, and commissioned there on February 25, 1862. Three days later she steamed off accompanied by the sloop-of-war *Dakotah*, only to return the same day due to faulty steering, which was repaired in the Dry Dock.¹²

New York Navy Yard



General view of Brooklyn Navy Yard, from the rear of the Marine Hospital. Line engraving published in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, Volume III, No. 62, p 169, February 14, 1857.

Other vessels completed at the New York Navy Yard during the Civil War included the *Adirondack*, *Ticonderoga*, *Shamrock*, *Mackinaw*, *Peoria*, *Tullahoma*, *Maumee*, *Nyack*, *Miantonomoh*, and *Wampanoag*.¹³



Master of the yard at New York from 1843 to 1852, returning to the same post from 1858 through the end of the Civil War, William N. Brady was photographed circa 1862-1864 at the Brooklyn studio of William F. Hunter. Carte de visite. Ron Field Collection.

The launch of these vessels invariably drew much attention and was attended by huge crowds. Following that of the *Mackinaw* on April 22, 1863, the *New York Tribune* reported, “Notwithstanding the number of launches recently witnessed, the neighborhood of the yard, and all the ships in the stream, were literally crammed with spectators—French, Spanish, and English officers, as well as all those attached to the New-York station being present. Mr. Brady, Master of the yard, and Lieut. [Thomas S.] Fillebrowne [sic], the Executive Officer, having arranged all the details in the most admirable manner, the vessel was floated off at the very moment appointed.”¹⁴ Of the same occasion, the *New York Herald* added that “everything passed off in the best style. Mr. [R.W.] Steele, the master carpenter of the yard, is entitled to much credit in the construction of this vessel.”¹⁵

Reporting the launching of *Peoria* on October 29, 1863, *The World* stated, “The launch was very successful, no accident whatever occurring. Captain Fillebrowne and Mr. Brady having rendered mishaps impossible.”¹⁶ That of *Wampanoag* did not go quite so smoothly. Conducted under the superintendence of naval constructor Benjamin Delano on December 15, 1864, she was reported by the *New York Herald* to have “travelled about three hundred yards into the stream, when she was hauled back by the tugboats. Sailing Master W.N. Brady, of the yard, had her in charge after her launch, and with precision and energy did he discharge his duty. She was brought to her dock about half an hour afterwards.”¹⁷

During the last few days of the Civil War, the New York Navy Yard was hit by a workmen’s strike which began at noon on April 10, 1865, and was caused by the imposition of a wage reduction of 50 cents a day, or one sixth of a day’s earnings. Within three days, the number of strikers had reached about 4,000, and work on vessels and in the

workshops was almost entirely suspended, with men straggling about the Yard determined to do nothing until the order of the Navy Department had been rescinded. According to a report in the *The Sun*, “Of the ship-carpenters, 700 have quit; of the caulkers, 250; of the spar-makers, 50; of the joiners, 275; of the painters, 100.”¹⁸ Despite the visitation of a delegation of workers to Washington, DC, to state their case, their cause ended in failure. By May 2, 1865, the *New York Tribune* reported that the strike at the Yard was “on the wane.” Those who returned to work on reduced wages would be “again employed, while those who held out... would be considered as strangers and run their chances hereafter of getting work.” Accordingly, large numbers of all trades went back to work under protest, but trusted that the Navy Department would give them their just dues.¹⁹

At the end of the war, the Navy Department needed to demobilize the fleet as quickly as it had been assembled and, as the port where most of the civilian vessels had been purchased, New York was where many of them were sold. During the spring of 1865, auctions and ship decommissions soon took precedence over ship outfitting and repair. By June, the entrance to Wallabout Bay was filled with ships waiting to be sold. The newspapers regularly advertised the auctions that included 11 ships on August 15 and 17 ships on September 21, 1865. On the latter occasion, the *New York Tribune* commented, “Some of these vessels are really quite valuable, while others have histories which will live when the vessels are no more.”²⁰ In total, 122 vessels were decommissioned at the New York Navy Yard. Furthermore, Rear-Admiral Samuel F. Du Pont sent all his surplus ordnance to the New York gun park.

When Commodore Hiram Paulding retired from duty at a gathering of heads of department and master-workmen at the Lyceum on May 1, 1865, the *New York Tribune* placed his great contribution to the war effort in context, and also emphasized the importance of the Navy Yard, by stating, “At no naval station in the United States is there so much responsibility attached and more business

transacted, than that at this port, and for the efficiency with which affairs have been conducted at this station much praise is due to the retiring commandant.”²¹

Acknowledgment

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