

FAIRMOUNT RICHMOND ‘MONK’ WHITE

1899 - 1969



***“When the One Great Scorer comes to write against your name;
He writes not if you won or lost, but how you played the game.”***

This familiar quote was a favorite of Monk White. In the all-important ‘game’ of aiding youngsters to become skilled craftsmen...plus gentlemen and good citizens...Monk White’s ‘score’ was one of the highest, if not *the* highest, of any Apprentice School educator. He didn’t do all that badly, either, on the collegiate playing field, or as a high school coach and teacher, devoted husband and father, and church and community leader.

For over three and a half decades this colorful character...make no mistake, he *was* a character...was a Newport News Shipbuilding Apprentice School mainstay. Initially, he coached the school’s athletic teams; then enthusiastically provided immature, inexperienced, wannabe shipbuilders an appreciation for the English language, Economics and even the finer points of etiquette.

In his last dozen years at the shipyard, Monk White served...nay, *presided*...as the Director of Education and Training. In that capacity, he ruled the roost with a refreshing mixture of intelligence, self-assurance and, from time to time, even a bit of earthy humor.

Monk White’s legacy...his ‘score’...if you will, is not only an inspiring life wonderfully and well spent, but one that resides in the attitudes and actions of countless Apprentice School graduates who were fortunate enough to directly benefit from his astute guidance.

I...we...are forever in his debt.

Bill Lee

~ WHAT'S IN A NAME ~

The name **Fairmount Richmond ‘Monk’ White** gives rise to two small mysteries. The first has to do with his somewhat formidable given and middle names; the second is associated with his nickname.

There is no family knowledge as to why he was named Fairmount Richmond. Those are not family names, and his father and brothers all had ‘normal’ names; i.e. his father and one brother were named John, another brother was named William, apparently in honor of their paternal grandfather.

~ A Theory ~

Monk White's paternal grandmother, Sallie Durant Henry, was Patrick Henry's niece. The Fairmount neighborhood in the east end of Richmond, Virginia is close to where Patrick Henry made his 'Give me liberty or give me death' speech. That 'connection' may...just may...have influenced the naming of Fairmount Richmond White. But even if that is not so, I suspect Monk would be amused by my attempt at such a rationalization.

As for his nickname, the origin of that is also unknown. He was referred to as “Monk” as far back as when his many college accomplishments were recorded in yearbooks. But that sobriquet may go back much further; perhaps to his early childhood. Family speculation is that his life-long impish, monkey-like demeanor may have caused childhood play and schoolmates to tag him with the “Monk” moniker. Perhaps they may have called him “Fairmonk”...another theory of mine...but, today, no one really knows.

But to generations of apprentices, shipbuilders and residents of Newport News who were richer for the opportunity to know him, he was always the irrepressible Monk White.

~ A TENUOUS CHILDHOOD ~



Fairmount Richmond White was born on December 4, 1899, in South Norfolk, Virginia. His father, John Edwin White, was a bookkeeper at one or more companies in Tidewater, Virginia. His mother, Lou May White (nee Holloman) is listed in the 1910 US Census as working as sales lady at a grocery store.

In addition to Monk, they had two other sons, one older, one younger than he. There also was a sister, the baby of the family. This image, found alongside Monk White’s senior year college annual’s graduation photo and activities list is the only photo available of him as a baby.

Very little is known of Monk White's early life, except that as a teenager he lived with his parents at 85 Chesapeake Avenue in South Norfolk and finished high school in that community. However, he shared very little else about his formative years with his children; perhaps because his childhood was not an easy or necessarily a happy one.

Monk White's only son, Fairmount R. 'Monte' White, Junior, recently recalled that his father sometimes talked about the family being poor, but that he provided no details. His father did, however, share that he had been 'early on the streets' and that he did not get along very well with his father.

In the following faded family photo, estimated to have been taken around 1907-1908 at his grandparents' rural home in Ahoskie, North Carolina; Monk White is depicted on the far left, astride a small horse. His maternal grandparents are sitting on the porch, near the center of the photograph. His mother is standing between them, holding a broom. The others in the center of the scene are his two brothers and baby sister.



~ FROM SOLDIER TO SCHOLAR ~

At age 17, presumably after finishing high school, he 'manufactured' a new birth-year, claiming to have been born on December 4, 1898 instead of on that same date in 1899. That subterfuge allowed him to instantly and creatively reach the age of 18 by early 1917, thus permitting him to join the army without parental permission. Consequently, Monk White participated in World War I; once optimistically referred to as 'the great war to end all wars'.

**~ Admiration of One Character by
Another of Almost Equal Notoriety ~**

When Monk White retired from NNS, it was a most memorable event (some delightful details to be shared later). The program for that celebration featured a few appropriate cartoons, created by Apprentice Alumnus, Dick Poythress (Painter & Decorator – 1937).

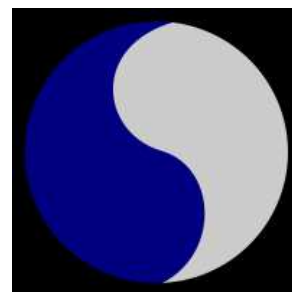
Dick was every bit as much of a character as Monk White...and they were dear friends. The first in his chronological series of drawings, prepared especially for that event appears on the right. Others follow in proper context.



Following World War I, the Virginia War History Commission solicited information from Old Dominion residents who had served in the war. Monk White complied. What follows is largely based on the data he supplied on a questionnaire in August 1919. Interestingly, it includes his correct birth date.

Monk White entered the military on January 19, 1917, the same day that America entered World War I. Initially, he was a private in the Medical Department of the 4th Virginia Infantry Regiment, National Guard. This unit, and several others, later became the 116th Infantry Regiment of the US Army's 29th Division.

The 29th Division was composed of National Guard units from southern and northern states; hence it's nickname...the Blue and Grey Division...and the creation of this distinctive division insignia. Following almost a year of training in Georgia and later Alabama, his outfit was designated to go overseas. His unit embarked on a troop transport in Newport News on June 14, 1918, bound for France.



Two weeks later, their troop ship arrived in St. Nazaire, France. The 29th Division first saw action in the Alsace Region of France a month later. By then Monk White had been promoted to the rank of Sergeant First Class. When the 29th Division moved to the battle front, he was assigned to the Medical Department Headquarters Detachment, in support of two major offensives conducted by Allied forces that year.

He served at two American field hospitals; Base Camp #77, in Mars-sur-Allier and Base Camp #107, in Nievre. These facilities were located in central France, south of Paris. Due to the tremendous number of casualties suffered during World War I's grueling trench warfare, when many soldiers were impaired by the German's inhumane use of mustard gas; these temporary hospitals were huge.



Although the shooting stopped on November 11, 1918, it was several months before the Versailles Peace Treaty was signed. Consequently, American forces stayed in France until the summer of 1919. In March of that year, Monk White was hospitalized with Influenza for a month, but recovered and returned to duty; something many less fortunate than he were unable to do.

On a much brighter note, he was able to start taking college courses at the American E. F. (Expeditionary Force) University, which was established by the US Army at Beaune, France. Candidates for this unique opportunity were placed on detached duty, with full pay, while they studied...and also played. Monk White broke his leg in a football game on March 17, 1919. That was his only 'war' injury.

When the 116th Infantry Regiment received welcome orders to leave France and return to the United States, they retraced their passage from St. Nazaire to Newport News. The troopship POWHATAN, packed with soldiers, arrived in Newport News on May 22, 1919.

On the 25th of that month, his unit and others returning from France marched triumphantly through this wooden Victory Arch hastily erected at war's end in their honor by the citizens of Newport News.

Four days later, Monk White became a civilian and went home to South Norfolk. Before long, he had enrolled in the College of William & Mary and had traded his steel helmet for a freshman beanie.



~ Tangible Treasures from World War I ~

Monk White was extremely proud of both his service to his country and his ability to rapidly advance to the rank of Sergeant First Class: an accomplishment he shared with his children on numerous occasions.

Like many a veteran, he kept and treasured the uniform he wore when he was discharged, including a helmet and gas mask. When he passed away, they were donated to the War Memorial Museum in Newport News. Currently on display there is his time-worn helmet, with its distinctive 'Blue/Grey Division logo still visible.



The questionnaire that Monk White filled out in August of 1919 included space for 'additional information'. Using a manual typewriter, he dutifully filled in the requisite blanks.

But he did so in his own inimitable fashion, as anyone who ever knew Monk White firsthand would certainly expect. The following direct quotes are vivid reminders of his wit...and wisdom.

Asked about his attitude toward military service, he had this to offer:

"The military service at times seemed rotten, but it is all in the man who is in the service. It is my opinion it is what you made it".

Responding to a query about his camp (i.e., training) experience in the United States, he replied:

"My camp experience must have made me better physically. If it had not I would have died during the winter of 1917. Mentally, well that's up to you. I don't know".

Questioned about the effect of his experiences on religious beliefs, he said:

"It was one time in my life when I believed in everything. It made be better personally. Of course, everyone has a number of personal opinions that you would not put down on paper".

He ended that section of the questionnaire with the following:

"It all made me feel older and I think more broad minded about everything. I thought I wanted to travel, but now I have changed".

~ A STELLAR COLLEGE CAREER ~



By the time Monk White got to Williamsburg, he had developed...or perhaps refined...an engaging personality that only got better with age. Gregarious, both street and scholastically smart, he was also an accomplished athlete who participated in numerous other college organizations. In other words, when he threw his freshman beanie into the social ring...Monk White pretty much took the college by storm.

The 1920-1923 issues of the *Colonial Echo*...William & Mary's yearbook...are filled with information and illustrations associated with Monk White's college days. Perhaps, best remembered for his exploits on the football field as a star half back for the Tribe, he also played on the college's baseball team in center field.



Scholastically, his grades were good enough for him to be a Rhodes Scholar candidate in his junior and senior years. In addition, he found time to engage in a bewildering and wide-ranging assortment of diverse activities at William & Mary.

A number of fellas who were in the same army division during World War I also attending W&M following the cessation of hostilities. In 1919-1920, he was a member of a social organization called the Twenty-Ninth Division Club. Their colors, as one might suspect, were Blue and Grey.

In addition to many other, similar activities, including being elected as president of his class in his junior year, he found time to dabble in journalistic endeavors too. The 1921 edition of the *Colonial Echo* includes a lengthy tongue-in-cheek letter that is entitled "Duc's" Letter. Addressed to "Dear Pa", it reflects the style of humor popular in early 1920's. For example, the first few sentences read as follows:

"School has commenced. I got here alright. They must have been waiting for me because they met me at the train and school started right after I got here".

The three-page letter includes a lengthy description of what may well have been the inspiration for Andy Griffiths' 'What it was...was football' comedy routine. Of course, student White may have 'borrowed' it too! The epistle ends with his signature and a PS:

"Tell Ma to send me some soap and about four clothes pins".

Monk White even tried his hand at poetry. Based on the following first few lines of a poem entitled 'Ode to Our Waiters' that appeared in the 1922 edition of the *Colonial Echo*, its not surprising that his future literary efforts were largely...but not entirely...limited to prose and editing.

"See that waiter over there,
With that sad and vacant stare?
Do you notice how his face
Reminds one of an empty space?"

Monk White graduated from the College of William & Mary in June 1923; receiving a Bachelor of Arts degree. He had amassed so many accomplishments that the editor of that year's *Colonial Echo* had to change the font halfway through an extensive listing of Monk White's many achievements to get everything on one page, along with his photograph.



Numerous entries that denote that he was voted 'Best All-Round College Man', 'Most Popular Man', 'Wittiest' and 'Most Original' should come as no surprise to anyone who ever knew him. Perhaps one of the more telling notations that appears in his senior yearbook on a page entitled *Can You Imagine?* (which poked fun at a number of seniors) reads as follows:

"Monk White with nothing to say"

Following graduation, he joined the faculty at Newport News High School; then located in the city's East End. Monk White soon was engaged in multiple activities. He became the high school's athletic director, coach of several sports and a classroom teacher. He joined a local church and played in a Sunday School baseball league.



"Monk": His honors are Theta Delta Chi; S. O. S.; Football, 1919-20-21-22; Baseball, 1921-22-23; President, Athletic Association, 1922-23; President, Tidewater Club, 1920-21; President, Overseas Club, 1921-22; President, South Norfolk Club, 1922-23; Elected President Junior Class, 1921-22; Secretary, Senior Class, 1922-23; Secretary and Treasurer, Sophomore Class, 1920-21; Secretary, College Band, 1921-22; Vice-Commander, College Post of American Legion, 1921-22; Vice-President, Law Club, 1921-22; Applicant, Rhodes Scholarship, 1922-23; Associate Editor, Flat Hat, 1920-21-22; Colonial Echo Staff, 1920-21-22-23; Grand Marshall, Mace Presentation, 1923; Best All-Round College Man, 1922-23; Best Football Player, 1920-22; Most Popular Man, 1921-22, 1922-23; Wittiest, 1920-21-22; Most Original, 1920-21-22-23; Sergeant Arms, Member Executive Committee Phoenix Literary Society, 1921-22; "K" Club; Monogram Club; Cotillion Club; Treasurer of Golf Club, 1920-21; End Man College Minstrels, 1920-21-22; Counsel Supreme Court, 1920-21-22-23; Blue and Gray Club, 1919-20; Assistant Alumni Secretary, 1920-21-22.

~ **BACK IN HIGH SCHOOL** ~



Monk White worked for the Newport News Public School System from the fall of 1923 until the spring of 1929. He was the high school's Athletic Director for that entire time period. One year, he was listed as the only faculty member in the Physical Education Department.

Editions of the *Beacon*, the NNHS annual that were published in the 1920's are filled with pictures and accounts of his multiple coaching assignments. During his tenure there, he coached the boy's football, baseball and track teams, plus the girl's basketball team.

In 1924, the Newport News High School football team he coached won the state championship. Although difficult to discern in this photograph of their treasured trophy...unless it is greatly enlarged...the first name engraved above the football is 'F. R. White, Coach'.



Monk White's activities at NNHS were not just limited to the athletic fields. He taught English and served as the February 1929 graduating class sponsor. The following yearbook entry certainly speaks to his character:

February Class Sponsor

“God hates a liar”—his motto;
 And thus he lives his daily life,
 Teaching us to live as well as speak
 The truth that banishes all strife.
 “Pep” and good sense—his attributes,
 His true heart speaks to all the same:
 “When the One Great Scorer comes to write against
 your name,
 He writes not that you won or lost, but how you played
 the game.”

~ A SHIP CARPENTER'S SUMMER...& MEETING HIS MATCH ~

Newport News Shipbuilding records indicate that Monk White was employed at the shipyard for the first time in the summer of 1924. He was assigned to the Ship Carpenter's Department. What tasks he performed are unknown, but most likely that experience served as an introduction to the 'over the shoulder' method of training which largely predominated then throughout the shipyard waterfront.

Possibly, he may have worked on one or more of the ships under construction at NNS in the summer of 1924. Vessels that would have required the talents of ship carpenters included the passenger & cargo vessels GEORGE WASHINGTON and ROBERT E. LEE, and the yacht NENEMOOSHA.

Far more significant was the occasion when he met Mary Elizabeth Rosenberger. Unfortunately, the exact timing and circumstances of their becoming acquainted is not known. Born in 1905 and raised in Winchester, Virginia, she attended Randolph-Macon Women's College, where she played field hockey. Mary Rosenberger graduated in 1926, earning a Bachelor of Science degree in Chemistry. After spending some time working as a laboratory technician with the New York City Health Department, she took a similar position with the City of Newport News.

Quite possibly, they may have met at the First Presbyterian Church in Newport News, where Monk White had already become a member by the late 1920's. The length of their courtship is also unknown, but Monk White likely moved as fast in endearing himself to Mary Rosenberger as he ever did on the football field at W&M.

Mary Rosenberger was a very determined lady. It was generally acknowledged by those who knew them both well that she was perhaps the only person who could consistently handle the mischievous Monk. This endearing photograph shows them strolling on the grounds of the Hotel Chamberlain; likely before they were married on April 5, 1928, in Winchester.




That event was followed by the birth of their first child, Gretchen, in 1929. That same year, Monk White commenced what ultimately proved to be a three decades-plus career at Newport News Shipbuilding when he became the Athletic Director of the shipyard's Apprentice School.

~ **TRAINING BY INTENTION** ~

When Monk White joined the Apprentice School on July 18, 1929, the school was just barely ten years old. Although an apprenticeship system had been in effect at the shipyard almost since its inception, it was not until 1919 that the apprentice program, per se, became formalized. That year, G. Guy Via became Supervisor of Apprentices, fulltime instructors were authorized and students, for the first time, were paid to attend classes.

What was first called a ‘training by intention’ approach soon won widespread recognition as a model of how to effectively blend traditional, albeit quite informal ‘over-the-shoulder’ training of apprentice shipbuilders with structured instruction in technical subjects. Nevertheless, the modest facilities provided were, shall we say, unique.

~ **Building 63...now a University** ~



In 1929, a two-story brick structure built in 1890, designated Building 63, was remodeled and renovated to become the Apprentice School's first dedicated facility. The fact that this building had previously been a mule stable was not lost on the school's detractors of that period. Shortly after it opened, a shipyard publication featured this image.

Nevertheless, it was in this building where many advancements were made in the education and training of NNS apprentices. But it was the only apprentice facility available when Monk White became the school's athletic director. There was no athletic center, stadium, gymnasium or dormitory.

But he did come into an athletic atmosphere that had existed since the Apprentice Athletic Association was created in 1919.

This situation was not unlike that which Monk White had experienced at Newport News High School. Sports were conducted in a variety of mostly make-shift venues in Newport News during the early part of the 20th century. For example, it was not until 1935 that the football field and stands, located behind NNHS, were completed.

Monk White fared much better at NNS. In part because Homer L. Ferguson, the shipyard's president who had authorized the creation of the Apprentice School, had also expressed strong support for student sports:

"Anyone who neglects the athletic side of training boys neglects about 50 percent of the whole proposition."

In 1929, apprentices and their instructors undertook the construction of the school's first football field and track, and adjacent, wooden stands on vacant land adjacent to the shipyard's main gate. Encouraged by this effort, Homer L. Ferguson authorized construction of the original Apprentice Athletic Building in 1932. The structure was erected by a local construction firm, but most of the interior finish work was done by apprentices, their instructors and alumni. The building itself, and lighting for the adjacent football field were completed in 1933.



Quite possibly, this follow-on accomplishment was due in some measure to Monk White's efforts to not only gain shipyard financial support, but to also entice Apprentice School students and alumni to participate in the physical work. Likely, he was also right there with them when the wood-paneled finish work in the building lobby... akin to the kind of work he probably did during his short sojourn in the ship carpenters trade... was performed.

During his tenure as Athletic Director, apprentice teams in a variety of sports did well, in spite of competing with much larger schools. In addition, intramural and 'shipyard league' organizations benefited from his support. In 1940, Frank Dobson took his place.

In addition to being athletic director, Monk White also taught subjects seemingly unrelated to shipbuilding; i.e., his 'Three E's'... English, Economics and Etiquette. According to Ollie King Goodwin (Designer, Hull - 1944), before the educational building was erected in 1943, Monk White 'held court' in a first floor classroom located on the left side of the old mule barn's entrance.



In 2011, King provided the following memory of Monk White's unique and often off-beat brand of philosophy. At some point in one of his economics lectures, Monk White startled his students by saying:

"Hey! Don't buy insurance. Start now putting those premiums in the bank. By the time you retire, you'll have a fortune."

Apparently, Monk White understood the basics of 401-K savings' programs long before that financial concept was invented and became a part of our everyday lexicon.

In addition to his coaching and teaching duties, the versatile Monk White served as associate editor for the Shipyard Bulletin from 1929 until 1941, when he became editor of that publication. He maintained that latter position for another sixteen years.

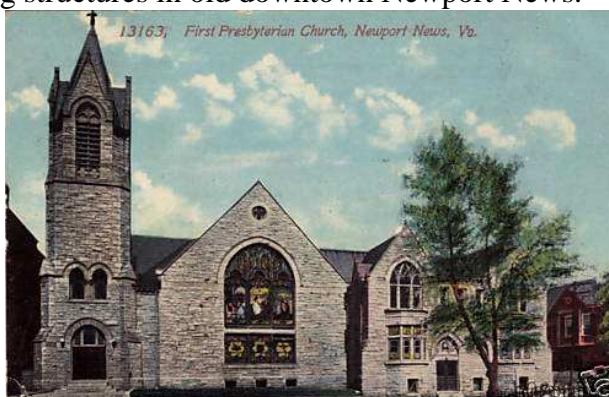
~ FAMILY, FAITH & FRATERNAL FRIENDSHIPS ~

In 1930, many shipyard employees lived in old downtown Newport News, within walking distance of NNS. Monk White was no exception, at first. The US Census for that year indicates that he and Mary, and their less-than-a-year-old daughter resided at 230-30th Street. Only a few blocks from the main gate at the shipyard. Two blocks from First Presbyterian Church and only a half-block from Newport News High School.

The census also indicates that twelve families resided at 230-30th Street. Mostly married couples, their ages ranged from mid-20 to early 40. A few, like the Whites, had one child. The structure that once stood at that address, either an apartment building or a huge boarding house is now gone. In 1930 its residents were mostly shipyard workers plus a few school teachers and railroad workers. And with Monk White as their neighbor, things must have been lively in those days when entertainment was mostly self-generated.

Over the next two decades, Monk and Mary White moved into progressively larger quarters as their family increased in size. First-born Gretchen was followed in 1932 by Mary 'Mary Lib' Elizabeth. Five years later Eleanor 'Fritz' Fritts was born, and in 1942 Fairmount 'Monte' Junior's arrival completed the White family. The children all attended public schools on the Virginia Peninsula and, like their parents, were members of the First Presbyterian Church. That 32nd Street structure, now serving another denomination, is one of the few surviving structures in old downtown Newport News.

Mary White had a 'lovely, big contralto voice', and studied with the director of the church choir. Monk White taught the Young Adult Sunday School Class until approximately 1960, when Ed Peeples followed in that role. A White family neighbor and friend, Ed Peeples recently and amusingly recalled:



"By the time I took over, the class had been renamed the Mixed Adult Class. Some people referred to it as the Mixed-Up Adult Class", which I do not think was any reflection on Monk White's often enthusiastic interpretations of the Bible!"

Monk White also was a deacon in the church, but his human interactions ranged far beyond his religious responsibilities. He was a Shriner, a Knight Templar, a member of the local Kiwanis club, and a charter member of the James River Country Club.

By 1941, Monk White had already relinquished his athletic director duties and had become a full-time instructor in the Apprentice School. His assigned and assumed courses were eclectic, to say the least!

~ **HIS THREE 'E's' OF EDUCATION** ~

For the next twenty-two years, Monk White continued to teach what might be called his Three 'E's' of education: English, Economics and Etiquette. Plus he added a little sex education for good measure, from time to time. This image of him appears in the Apprentice School's very first yearbook, the 1940 *Binnacle*. Ever supportive of his students, Monk White served as the Faculty Advisor for that first edition.



Although he became the shipyard's Assistant Director of Education & Training on March 1, 1947, he continued to teach. Three and a half years later, when named Director of Education and Training (the school's head master), he still taught in the classroom.

As he continued to do for the twelve years he held that position. Consequently, unlike most institution's leaders, he had a direct influence on hundreds of aspiring shipbuilders. His interfaces with his 'boys' are legendary, and remain vivid to many, even now.

~ **A Sampling of Innumerable Monk-isms** ~

"Always tip your hat to a lady...even if you suspect she may not be a lady"

"Don't expect to rate if you expectorate on the sidewalk"

"Get a lot while you're young"

[When giving advice about acquiring real estate in his Economics Class...presumably!]

Etiquette was never on the school's formal listing of subjects. But Monk White understood that new apprentices were a diverse lot and many arrived accompanied by few social graces. So, under the guise of conducting an 'orientation' class, he dispensed pointers on etiquette to hundreds of initially startled apprentices. Ty Bowman (Designer, Electrical – 1950) was one of them. Ty came to the school from a very rural upbringing. His memories of that first classroom experience at NNS are very insightful into the caring nature of the man he respectfully referred to as Mr. White:

"He was seriously interested in the overall welfare of apprentices, including their social life and the impressions they made in the community. His full place setting of china and silver was something many of us had not seen previously. He demonstrated its proper use and quizzed us until he was sure we understood. It seemed strange to me that a trade school would have such a course.

“Mr. White also discussed and demonstrated the proper clothes to wear; casual, business and formal. Then there were many courtesies, such as how to hold a hymn book for your lady friend in church, and manners relative to attending movies and plays.

“All this, I think, was done on his own initiative. I know that it made a great and positive impact on many young men. He was one positive, positive influence.”

~ THE SHIPYARD BULLETIN ~

In addition to his apprentice-related duties, Monk White not only continued to serve as the Associate Editor for the *Shipyards Bulletin*, in 1941 he assumed further responsibility for the shipyard’s employee publication when he became its editor. During the next few years, he had a leadership role in increasing the frequency of publication from quarterly to bi-monthly, and then to a monthly schedule.

He also saw to it that the quantity and quality of the publication increased. He often relied on T. C. Skinner, resident artist at the shipyard and his close friend to create colorful covers for many an edition. He also included maritime-themed photos taken by Marcus Ritger (Designer, Hull – 1941) and historical essays about Newport News-built ships written by George C. Mason; a fellow Apprentice School faculty member and friend.

~ Safety Jingle Contests ~

Many issues of the Shipyards Bulletin which were produced while Monk White was editor included a series of Safety Jingle Contests. Each contest featured an incomplete poem and a cartoon created by his friend and former student, Dick Poythress.

SUPPLY LAST LINE TO JINGLE BELOW

BEHOLD BEFORE YOU “SORRY SAM”
WHOSE FINGER IS SWOLLEN AS BIG AS A YAM!
A MINUTE’S CARE –
WORTH A WEEK’S DESPAIR....



Employees were encouraged on a monthly basis to submit a last line for the poem. The winning entry was awarded a small monetary prize.

Those incomplete poems had all the earmarks of Monk White’s collegiate humor.

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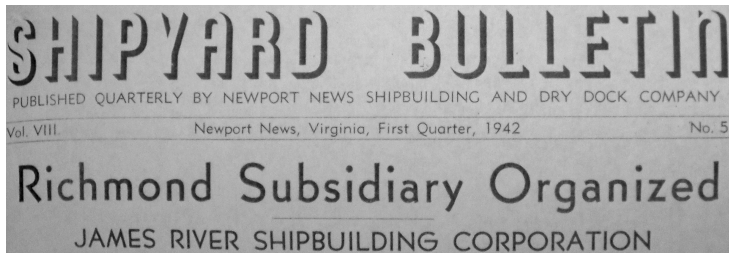
The winning entry for this one ended with the word ‘jam’...not a word most shipbuilders might have suggested!

One of Monk White's most beneficial journalistic accomplishments was the 80-page, history-rich January 1946 issue of the *Shipyards Bulletin*, celebrating the 60th anniversary of NNS. This impressive keepsake issue contains an intriguing early history of the shipyard and an illustrated, record of all the ships built by NNS through the end of World War II. Much of this historical information was incorporated later that year in a book commemorating the 50th anniversary of the incorporation of the city of Newport News.

In addition, Monk White included administrative, engineering, design and waterfront departmental histories. Those early individual department records contain much detail that might otherwise have been lost, had he not had the foresight to have them created and included. Monk White turned over his editor duties in mid-1957 to Bob Hopkins, who...like Monk White...had served an 'apprenticeship' as associate editor of the *Shipyards Bulletin* for a number of years.

~ **WORLD WAR II DIVERSIONS** ~

In early 1942, the Navy asked NNS to undertake the construction of Destroyer Escorts. In order to respond to this request, plans were rapidly set in motion to create a brand-new shipbuilding facility capable of mass-producing urgently needed escort vessels.



The James River Shipbuilding Corporation (JRSC), was created in February 1942, with the intention of building the contemplated yard near Richmond, Virginia, on the banks of the James River.

Design and preliminary construction work for this facility quickly advanced. In parallel, a number of NNS employees were dispatched to Richmond, including twenty-five from the parent company's Personnel Department. Monk White was named that group's leader.

Given the title JRSC Personnel Manager, he was officially 'released' from NNS on March 1, 1942. By the end of the next month, he had opened an employment office in Richmond. By April 1, 1942 his staff had received and were busily processing over 6,200 applications, and had hired and put into welder training about two dozen individuals.

Then, on April 30, 1942, the Navy Department suddenly and unexpectedly notified NNS that its destroyer escort shipbuilding contract was being cancelled. The Navy had decided that other American shipyards, which were already engaged in the construction of DE's, could meet the Navy's wartime needs. On June 2, 1942, the Navy Department formally terminated its shipbuilding contract with the JRSC...which shortly thereafter was disestablished. Monk White and his team returned to Newport News, where he resumed his teaching and associate editorial duties.

His next wartime diversion was far more pleasurable. Gretchen, oldest of the White children, was provided the opportunity to christen a warship built at Newport News. During 1942, NNS had begun to mass-produce LST's on a rush basis for the Navy. Landing Ship, Tank was the official designation given to these amphibious vessels. Otherwise, they only received numbers.

In rapid order, a total of eighteen LST's were turned out by Newport News Shipbuilding. Mostly built six at a time in Graving Dock #11, they were all christened by teenage daughters of shipyard employees.

On November 23, 1942, Gretchen White, accompanied by her proud father, stood on the foredeck of LST-397 and smashed a bottle of champagne against a bow fitting. She was thirteen when that once-in-a-lifetime opportunity came her way. November 23rd that year fell on a Monday, so likely she had to have an excuse to be out of school to serve as a ship sponsor. One can only imagine what an interesting note her father must have compiled for that purpose!

The next year, Mary and Monk White journeyed to Wilmington, North Carolina to be with close friends Elizabeth and Paul Peeples and their son Ed at another christening ceremony Mrs. Peeples had been chosen to sponsor the SS MONSOON, a vessel under construction at the NNS subsidiary shipyard in Wilmington. This was not Monk White's only visit to Wilmington during World War II. He made several additional trips to help create and organize an apprentice program there.

Depicted on the launching stand on October 26, 1943, are left to right: Muriel Wornom, Monk White, Mary White, Paul Peeples, Elizabeth Peeples, 'Sandy' McMahon and Ed Peeples. They all were Newport News residents, although Paul Peeples and Sandy McMahon were employees of the North Carolina Shipbuilding Company during World War II. Mary White and Muriel Wornom, the wife of Alex Wornom (Molder – 1934), and later foreman of the NNS foundry, served as attendants to Elizabeth Peeples.



Less enjoyable but no doubt more challenging for Monk White and other staff members of the Apprentice School was the cancellation in April of 1944 of all occupational deferments for apprentices. During the early 1940's, the school's student body size had ballooned to over a thousand.

The apprentice dormitory, erected in 1941, and the educational building, completed in 1943, helped accommodate such a large number of aspiring shipbuilders. But in a few weeks, the number of apprentices at NNS plummeted to just a handful. Ironically, in the midst this drastic decline in 1944, the Virginia State Board of Education recognized the Apprentice School as a Two-Year Technical Institute with a Junior College rating.

At the same time, the education of thousands of inexperienced shipbuilders was ongoing. The faculty of the Apprentice School was detailed to help with that effort. And, of course, Monk White had his *Shipyards Bulletin* editorial duties to attend to, as well.

Following the end of World War II, a number of former apprentices returned to Newport News to finish their time. Activities that had been totally disrupted during the war were revitalized. In 1947, for the first time since 1942, the *Binnacle* was again published. That same year, Monk White became the assistant director of education and training and three years later was named head of the Apprentice School when G. Guy Via retired.

~ MONK'S HEAD MASTER YEARS ~



The title Director of Education & Training may seem a bit cumbersome, but it reflects the unique nature of the Apprentice School. The institution had a highly capable academic faculty that numbered twelve, including four drawing room instructors.

The school also had a much larger vocational faculty of shop instructors in some 32 different waterfront trades). All but four of the vocational faculty were also apprentice school alumni. An administrative staff of five completed the school's personnel assets when Monk White assumed the school's top position on October 1, 1950.

As previously noted, he continued to teach and inspire, but he also put his personal stamp on just about everything associated with the school. In fact, the unofficial nickname of "Monk White's Boys' School" soon became widespread; not only throughout the shipyard, but the community as well.

During the dozen years he served as 'head master' of the Apprentice School, Monk White was faced with some interesting challenges. For example, Company policy dictated that apprentices were not allowed to be married until their senior year, and then only with the acquiescence of the Director of Education & Training. Many an apprentice made his way...by appointment...to the corner office in the educational building to seek his approval. Most were subjected to questions and a lecture, but there is no indication that Monk White ever refused to give permission to a love-struck applicant.

On the other hand, a number of apprentices ignored the policy, and married secretly. If discovered, they had to be dismissed from the apprentice program. That was the inflexible rule in the 50's and 60's. In many cases, these indiscretions were known to many. Monk White may have heard rumors, from time to time, about such violations, but never pursued them. Had he done so, his popularity would have plummeted, and worse, many a subsequently successful shipbuilder would have been lost to the Company.

On Monk White's watch, in 1956, the first African-American began his apprenticeship; graduating in 1960. The significance of this bold move on the part of NNS can be better appreciated when viewed in context. It was December of 1955 when Rosa Parks refused to give up her bus seat to a white man in Alabama. That was the real start of the civil rights moment in the United States. The Civil Rights Act did not become law until four years after the Apprentice School graduated its first black apprentice.

How much Monk White had to do with this change in Company policy is not known, but it is well documented that he served on the City of Newport News' Human Relations Committee when civil rights issues were predominant throughout America. In addition, and to his credit, the admission of a black student to the school was without incident.

Another task that befell Monk White was dealing with student misbehavior. A couple of examples of his always interesting decisions to resolve such 'boys will be boys' issues follow. As Tal Hardy (Designer, Hull – 1959) recalls:

"When I was Student Body President, I was called into Mr. White's office to witness a hearing for two apprentices about to be dismissed. They had come in late one night, intoxicated, and had broken off a few auto antennae on their way back to the dorm. After some discussion and much repentance by the two offenders, Mr. White decided to give them another chance; if they made full restitution and kept a clean record thereafter.

"Thanks to a merciful man, the two completed their time and went on to long and successful shipyard careers. One of them rose to become a high level manager in the company. Thus, I saw a side of Mr. White that impressed me for life. Stupid acts don't always require severe measures. His job required toughness, but he also showed me that he also had a heart."

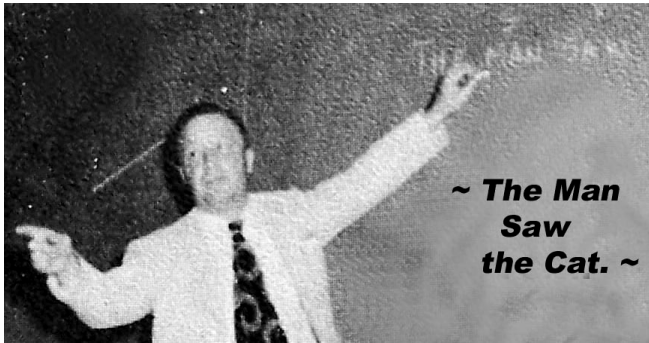
On another occasion, an apprentice living in the dorm was accused of stealing a *Playboy* magazine from Mushy's Soda Shop; once located directly in front of the dormitory building. Not only did the soda shop do a thriving business with apprentices, Mushy Hoffman faithfully supported the school by advertising in the Apprentice School's newspaper and yearbook.



When the accused and his accuser met with Monk White and a representative of the student body government, it quickly became apparent that it was a ‘he said/she said’ situation with no real evidence to be offered by either side. As the story goes, Monk White had the accused swear that he had paid for the magazine. Then, Mr. White asked if the centerfold was still attached to the magazine! Assured that it was, Monk White instructed the apprentice to return the magazine to the soda shop.

Finally, he convinced an initially somewhat-less-than-satisfied Mushy Hoffman that this solution was preferable to something more drastic, like dismissal...which might ‘possibly’ lead to other apprentices boycotting his business.

Very Solomon-like, with a light touch of blackmail. Vintage Monk White.



Monk White's love of the English language came with a curious twist in the classroom. He often told his students that he would teach them everything they needed to know about English grammar in one session. Then he would write a simple sentence on the blackboard, followed by defining what each part of speech each word represented.

*Next he would embellish the text by adding adjectives, adverbs, etc. For example: **The fat man saw quickly the old, black cat.** Further additions demonstrated all remaining parts of English grammar essentials. Simple. Effective. Memorable...obviously.*

One of his standard ‘get your attention’ tactics took place during orientation for new apprentices. Each year, a new crop of students were favored with the wit and wisdom of Monk White. Several who witnessed one of his memorable antics decades ago still remember and can recount...and do...the following story; almost word for word.

Orientation at the Apprentice School, when Monk White was the instructor for that course, not only provided him the opportunity to dispense lessons in etiquette, he also delved into sex education. If the shipyard’s senior management ever knew about what today might be an unthinkable topic to discuss is not known.

At one point, he would tell his slightly embarrassed, captive audience all about how a single sperm, with a one in a million chance, would unite with an egg and create a human being. Then, he would nimbly jump down from the raised platform at the front of the room, shake the hand of a startled student sitting in the front row and loudly proclaim:

“Congratulations, young man, you made it!”

As an integral...and largely pleasurable...part of his duties, each year Monk White called into his office a number of students that had high scholastic averages to offer them the opportunity to transfer from a waterfront trade to one of the shipyard's technical divisions. This decision was not one to be made lightly, for it added a fifth year to an individual's time, and also required taking advanced courses.

While this was a desirable and choice for many, the 'summons' were made without advance notice or reason given, so many a student entered the corner office in hesitation to sit uncomfortably on a hard wooden chair to learn why he had been told to be there. In at least one case, the individual was secretly married. His considerable relief, when told of his selection, can be easily imagined.

Each year, when graduation ceremonies took place, Monk White deferred to whoever was the shipyard president to hand out the treasured certificates of apprenticeship completion. But he almost always proudly presented various awards and monograms for scholastic and athletic achievement. And to individually wish 'his boys' well in the future.

Regardless what document was given out on those occasions, they all, invariably, included the following signature.


Lairmont White
DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING



The Apprentice School's most memorable head master of all time, in the opinion of hundreds who became skilled craftsmen under his tutelage, stepped down in September 1, 1962 at age 63. He had experienced some serious health problems by then, including a lengthy hospitalization a decade earlier. But instead of retiring in 1962, he accepted a new job; Assistant to the General Manager for Development of Supervisory Personnel. In making that announcement, shipyard General Manager L. R. Sorenson had this to say:

"Monk White is affectionately known by literally thousands of Yard employees. He has a reputation as an extremely fine educator in Virginia and elsewhere. He has long sought to reduce educational materials to clear and concise form without sacrifice of essentials. Monk White's career as head of the Apprentice School is one which has seen that institution achieve national recognition as an outstanding example of the Industrial School Concept. Never once in his shipyard career, however, has Monk White ever sacrificed the 'total education' of his students. He has always firmly believed that, however well you educate the mechanic, you cannot neglect the education of the man."

~ APPRENTICE ASSOCIATED ACCOLADES ~

As anticipated, Monk White energetically undertook his new assignment. His friend Dick Poythress took a playful poke at Monk White by creating this cartoon, including a not-so-subtle misquote.

No doubt, some of the methods he had honed to perfection in the apprentice school classroom were carried into his talks to fledgling supervisory personnel. More than one apprentice graduate present got to hear it all over again!

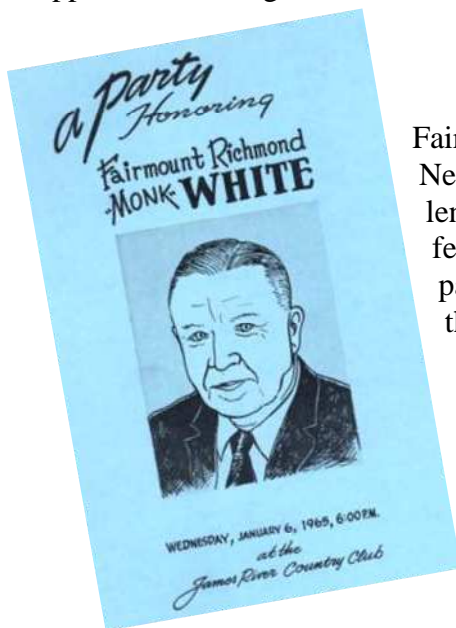
Both the Apprentice School student body and the Apprentice Alumni Association were quick to follow with expressions of appreciation for Monk White's years of service to the school. The 1962 Binnacle was dedicated to him. The next year, the alumni association made Monk White an honorary member. That same year, Monk White was presented with a special commendation from the Department of Labor for outstanding service in the field of apprentice training.



~ A RETIREMENT TO REMEMBER ~

Fairmount Richmond 'Monk' White retired from Newport News Shipbuilding on January 1, 1965. His length of service was thirty-six years and six months. A few days later, one of the more memorable retirement parties in the history of NNS was held in his honor at the James River Country Club.

Attendees included almost the entire hierarchy of the shipyard plus a number of his academic associates and as many apprentice alumni as the place would hold. Following the requisite speeches and platitudes, and the presentation of a retirement gift, then it was his turn...



While pontificating on a variety of subjects, as only he could do, Monk White brought the house down at one point. Don Holden had assumed the position of president of the shipyard on the same day that Monk White had retired. In commenting on that change, Monk White dryly commented:

"I don't know what kind of president Don Holden is going to make for us, but I can say he is the prettiest one we have ever had."



This photograph was taken immediately following that remark. From left to right can be seen Don Holden, and shipyard executives Lloyd Sorenson and Fred Davis laughing as Monk White strikes a comical pose. It certainly was a fitting climax to the career of one of the shipyard's most colorful characters. This copy of the photo was later autographed and presented to the retiree, who undoubtedly treasured it.

As might be expected, retirement did not deter Monk White from making further contributions to his community. Nor from spending more quality time with his family. In addition, he pursued with typical vigor the game of golf. He also renewed a prior interest in creative writing; creating a few diverse, but interesting articles and even three books.

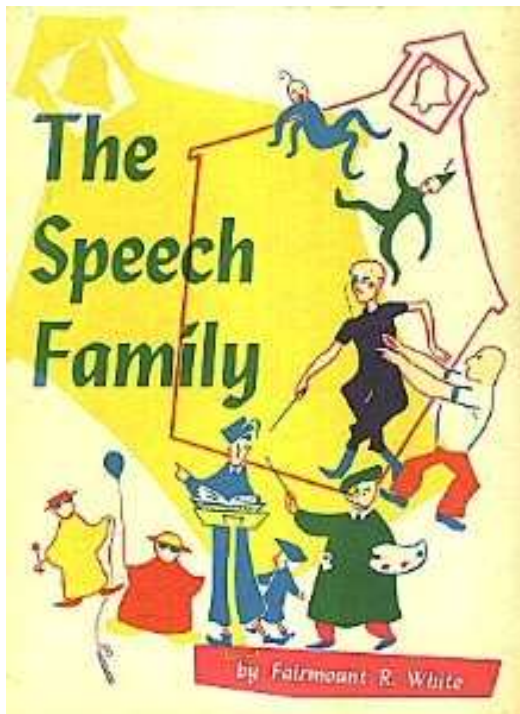
~ 5700 HUNTINGTON AVENUE ~

Sometime in 1951/1952, the White family moved into this large brownstone home that former shipyard President Homer L. Ferguson had built in 1906. The structure had become shipyard property when Mr. Ferguson built a newer, smaller home further up the Peninsula after he retired.



For some period of time, the house served as a sort of annex to the apprentice dormitory, but without the level of supervision or amenities provided in the dorm. The shipyard property management folks were not happy with that arrangement, so Monk White was afforded the opportunity to rent the spacious place.

Previously, between 1939 and 1947/1948, the White family had lived on Ivy Homes Road in Hampton. Then they moved closer to the shipyard, renting a home at 357-57th Street until they took up residence at the corner of 57th Street and Huntington Avenue. Soon, the stately old Ferguson home was alive with activity, driven by the irrepressible Monk White, his energetic wife, Mary, and their teenage daughters and younger son.



Shortly after moving to Huntington Avenue, Monk White authored a children's book that included cartoon-like characters representing the eight parts of speech. Entitled *The Speech Family*, it was created because Monk White felt it might help young school children more easily grasp the intricacies and oft-times confusing aspects of the English language.

The book does not contain this sentence so familiar to many apprentices: THE MAN SAW THE CAT. However, the slim volume does reflect, on several pages, Monk White's propensity to use rhymes to illustrate a point.

For example:

MR. ADVERB IS A BUSY MAN
THAT I DO DECLARE:
HE TELLS THE VERBS 'HOW' & WHEN'
AND ALSO 'WHY' AND 'WHERE'

That book also served another purpose. Mary White, depicted here with her girls in 1939, loved all children. When parents in their neighborhood expressed a desire to get their children off to a good start, Mary and Monk White decided to offer classes; kindergarten through the second grade. The spacious Ferguson house had enough room and a large yard suitable for such an enterprise, so they hired a teacher and went into the private school business for a time.



In 1954, when the USS FORRESTAL was nearing completion at NNS, Monk White created a paperback compilation that provided an illustrated account describing the design and construction of the nation's first supercarrier. His last book was published in 1962, under the interesting title: *Golf in the Seventies for Those in Their Sixties*.

Also in 1962, he provided the principal address at the dedication of Homer L. Ferguson High School (now the Ferguson Center for the Performing Arts at Christopher Newport University). A few selected lines from Monk White's presentation follow:

"He was not a status-seeker, but he attained such fame that he became a legend in his lifetime. Homer Lenoir Ferguson was a humanitarian. He loved people. He was also a philosopher. He once told a group of apprentices: 'What a young man needs is inspiration; education will follow.'"

Monk White had many fans, including his children. His youngest daughter, Fritz, provides a small but warm glimpse of his home life:

"Dad loved greens and our mother would cook a huge pot of them every day. After the family was done, he would finish up whatever was left. Dad would not tolerate anyone telling lies and would punish us if we did lie by giving us a whipping. He would take care of the needs of anyone who needed a little help. He would tell me I was as pretty as Ava Gardner to make me feel better because I was overweight as a child."

To those thoughts, his only son, Monte, adds:

"He was an over achiever, I think, in part, to prove something to himself. He coached many men on and off the playing field and took great pride in that."

His last known journalistic effort appeared in 1968. In an article published by the *Daily Press*, he reported on the 50th reunion of his World War I division. He augmented that account with a self-deprecatory story entitled *A 'Hero' Until After Breakfast!* One day in 1918, he mistakenly led his men into an area under heavy bombardment. Hailed the next day as a hero for rushing to the rescue of wounded soldiers, Monk White confessed over breakfast that he had actually been trying to get away from, not into the battle zone!

~ *MEDICAL MONK-EY BUSINESS* ~

Monk White was hospitalized in April and May 1952 at the old Riverside Hospital on 50th Street due to a severe coronary thrombosis. Confined to a hospital bed, he somehow managed to gain access to a manual typewriter and pecked out two newsletters...although he was supposed to lying flat at all times.



How those messages got reproduced and distributed is not known, but a prime suspect is Jane Heath (nee Dibble), his longtime and loyal secretary at the Apprentice School. Perhaps he gained access to a Xerox machine at the hospital or sweet-talked an employee there to do his bidding. In any case, a vintage copy saved by a friend includes the following notation, penned on the last page by Mary White:

“Thanks for your concern. Monk spends his time thinking up this foolishness. Do come to see us.”

He entitled those journalistic gems *Bulletins One and Two...from down by the Riverside*. His bulletins were similar in slapstick style to his ‘Duc’s Letter’ that had appeared three decades previously in the William & Mary yearbook. He complained at length about just about everything. But unlike what another patient might say under similar circumstances, his rambling rhetoric was filled with corny and caustic comments. Here’s a sampling:

“They must have looked a long time to find a place with the necessary number of decibels. [Old Riverside was on 50th Street, adjacent to the yard’s noisy north side]

“This room is so high-priced that they are thinking of putting a plaque on the door listing the names of people wealthy enough to stay here.

“One well-meaning visitor said: ‘Oh, you’ll be up soon; you’ll die with your boots on.’ That was consoling, since I don’t have a pair of boots. However, I’ve been watching what is brought into the room. You can never tell when someone might slip you a pair.”

One nice spring day, he had had enough. He conned someone into giving him a ride home, and when his frantic family found him, he was sitting in the garden at 5700 Huntington Avenue, happily shelling and eating peanuts. His doctor was not amused.

Unfortunately, over the next two decades, Monk White’s heart condition got progressively worse. On Tuesday, April 15, 1969, he passed away at home.

~ *IN MEMORY AND TRIBUTE* ~

Amongst the many tributes to him, a memorial editorial appeared in the *Daily Press* on April 17th, the day he was interred in the National Cemetery in Hampton. Whoever wrote that tribute apparently knew him well. Excerpts follow:



“Fairmount Richmond “Monk” White was one of the most outstanding influences for what is right and good that the Virginia Peninsula has ever known. No other man touched the lives of so many young people of our area.

“As a teacher, coach, adviser, supervisory trainer, writer and speaker, Monk White always directed his thoughts towards what was modern and current. In many ways he stayed ahead of his time.

“The generations of boys and young men who came under his tutelage had their formative years enriched by his firmness and understanding. His dealings with youngsters were tempered and enlightened by a balanced philosophy of life and a cultivated knowledge of psychology.

“Straightforward honesty and unmistakable courage added to the respect with which this man came to be regarded. He was small only in physical stature.”

Amen. When Monk White was laid to rest, his pallbearers numbered ten; all of whom were friends, associates and/or neighbors. To limit the list to that number must have been extremely difficult for Mary White. In addition, honorary pallbearers included the students and alumni of the Apprentice School. It must have been extremely crowded in the cemetery that day...

His tombstone marker, in the style required by national cemeteries, highlights his service to his county. Monk White would no doubt be greatly amused that it includes his ‘creative’ date of birth, which he fashioned to circumvent ‘the system’ in 1917.

FAIRMOUNT R. WHITE

VIRGINIA SFC ARMY USA

BASE HOSPITAL 107

WORLD WAR I

12/4/1898 - 4/15/1969

Interment 4/17/1969

~ *POSTSCRIPT* ~

Like many apprentices who preceded and followed me, I have many fond memories of Monk White. As does my older brother, Howard E. Lee, Jr. (Designer, Piping – 1947).

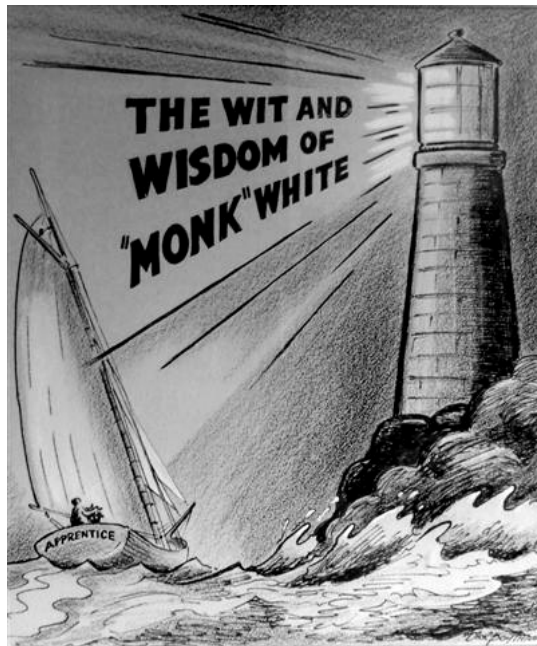
Our father was a contemporary and good friend of Monk White. In 1940, and again in 1954, they conspired to encourage the two of us to consider apprenticeship. Once we indicated a desire to become apprentices, Monk White made our entry into the world of shipbuilding a reality. As a result, he changed our lives immeasurably. Hence this long overdue acknowledgement of his influence on our lives....and those of so many others.

Thank you, Mr. White! NOTE: I never, ever called him ‘Monk’ while in my apprenticeship...and doubt if many others did, either.

Bill Lee

(Designer, Atomic – 1959)

The following Dick Poythress illustration appeared in the 1965 retirement party program. It nicely serves as a timeless tribute to the memory of **Fairmount R. “Monk” White**.



~ *The Last Word* ~

*It only seems appropriate to give Monk White the final word.
The following philosophical quote is from his book, The Speech Family.*

***“You must not try so hard to remember.
You should understand, and then you can never forget.”***