

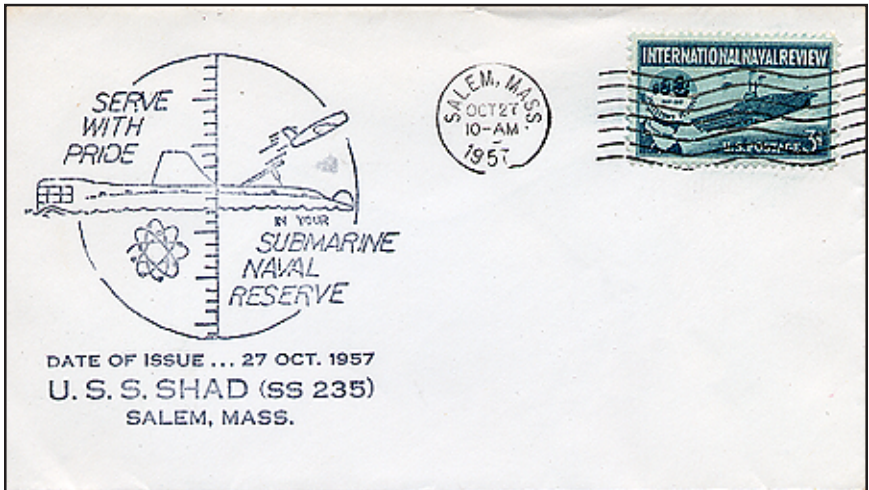
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior



Salem Maritime National Historic Site  
Salem, Massachusetts

# Pickled Fish and Salted Provisions

## *Historical Musings from Salem Maritime NHS*



## Salem Maritime Joins the Navy

Volume VI, number 4  
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On the cover: first day issue cover featuring the USS *Shad*.

Below: visitors admire the submarine at Central Wharf, c. 1960.



*Sometimes visitors to Salem Maritime National Historic Site ask “What happened to the submarine?” From present appearances a submarine is the last thing you would expect to see, but there really was a submarine docked at Central Wharf years ago. As a matter of fact, there was more than one submarine and a minesweeper as well.*

During the Second World War, the National Park Service provided administrative space in the Salem Custom House to the US Coast Guard from 1942 through October 1944.<sup>1</sup> However, the site did not become involved with the Navy until the war was over, when in 1947 construction began on a Naval Reserve training center on Central Wharf.

Following the close of World War II, with fresh memories of Pearl Harbor forever burned into the American consciousness, the Navy thought it prudent to establish an extensive naval reserve system to maintain readiness in the event of future conflicts.

This was not a new concept.<sup>2</sup> After the Civil War, Senator Washington C. Whitthorne, a concerned proponent of naval readiness, unsuccessfully introduced bills in Congress “To create a naval reserve of auxiliary cruisers, officers and men from the mercantile marine of the United States”<sup>3</sup> and enroll men in a naval militia system. Budgetary constraints prevented Federal implementation of this movement until 1891.

The Massachusetts legislature led the way toward resolving the issue by passing an act adding a Naval Battalion to the volunteer militia establishment on May 17, 1888.

### **The Massachusetts Militia and the National Guard**

Initially, during the 1600s, militias were organized by the various colonies (subsequently, states) from all eligible males for self-defense against Indian attacks and invasion. Composed of citizen soldiers, the Militia system provided troops during the American Revolution and other American conflicts up to and including the Civil War. Under law, the Militia could not provide forces to be used beyond American shores. Overseas expeditions were the responsibility of the Federal government. Following the Civil War, the changing nature of United States policy in world politics required an adjustment in the way military preparedness was conducted. By 1916, the old Militia establishment had gradually evolved into a comprehensive National Guard entity. Under the National Defense Act of 1916, the “National Guard of the United States” became an element of the US Army for war purposes. At the state level, the states’ National Guard units re-

tained the functions of training and appointment of officers, emergency response, and law enforcement (the regular US forces are prohibited from serving as police without special authorization by Congress<sup>4</sup>). However, they were, and continue to be, subject to being called up for overseas service if circumstances require it. The descendants of the old colonial Militias have been transformed into a standing national force.

The Naval Appropriations Act of March 2, 1891, was the first Federal legislation to provide funding for arms and equipment for the newly organized naval militias. A positive showing by the participants gained them permission to drill aboard active service vessels, and in 1894 Congress authorized the loan of old naval vessels to state naval militias for training purposes.

Although the system was far from perfect, naval militias provided trained personnel during the Spanish American War and World War I. In 1916 Congress passed the Naval Reserve Force Act, which funded a United States Naval Reserve, and in 1918 it repealed the Federal laws concerning naval militias. States kept the dormant naval militias alive on the books, and some were reactivated during World War II to provide a degree of local auxiliary service.

#### **The Naval Reserve Comes to Salem**

By September 1946, the Navy identified the underutilized wharves at Salem Maritime National Historic Site as a potential location for a Naval Reserve training facility. There was political disagreement concerning appropriate use of the area, but on October 6, 1947, a special-use permit to establish a temporary



Above: Dedication of the Naval Reserve Training Center at Salem Maritime NHS on June 21, 1948.

Naval Reserve Armory on Central Wharf adjacent to Derby Street was signed. Begun on October 27, 1947, the facility was dedicated June 21, 1948. Blueprints for the facility survive in the archival collection at Salem Maritime NHS. Specifications indicate that the east side of Central Wharf was dredged to seventeen feet to accommodate submarines and the west side, facing Pickering Wharf, deepened to twelve feet to accommodate USS *Ruff* (AMS-54), a minesweeper.

In an attempt to avoid a repeat of the disastrous lack of resources prior to World War II, the new submarine training program, established in 1946, was to rapidly provide experienced Reserve personnel for the submarine service in event of mobilization.

A Navy Department press release dated July 30, 1948,<sup>5</sup> describes the organization and its objectives: “A total of 56 Organized Reserve divisions and 16 battalions are now engaged in an intensive training program at Naval Reserve training centers throughout the country [including Great Lakes cities].” The requirements for joining were: “Naval Reserve personnel under 27 years of age and without previous submarine experience may qualify for membership in an Organized Reserve submarine unit. The age limit is 30 years for Reservists with some submarine experience, and under 34 years for qualified submarinemen.”

There is not a lot of detailed information available about what actually went on in the training center, but the 1948 press release gives some idea of the initial intent: “During their instruction periods aboard the vessels, Reservists become qualified in all phases of submarine operation. Later, advanced trainees receive additional training in cruises aboard fleet submarines.”

The Navy encouraged opening the facility to the public on weekends, and both Salem residents and out of town visitors recall being allowed aboard “the submarine.”

Park Ranger Peter LaChapelle relates an experience at the Naval Reserve Center during the early 1960s. The local youngsters often went aboard, and one day Peter took his dog King, a bull mastiff, down into the sub with him. King ran through the vessel, and in spite of difficulty getting back up the ladder, found the lure irresistible. From time to time afterward, Peter would get a call from the Chief Petty Officer in charge: “Peter, come and get King.” King, when unleashed, sometimes found his way back inside without any help and got trapped every time. Peter had to go in and boost him back up the ladder.<sup>6</sup>

Naval Reserve veterans remember going there weekly in the early evening for classes and for drilling on Derby Wharf. Some things left vivid memories.<sup>7</sup> The first floor of polished hardwood was referred to as “The Quarterdeck.” There was a five-inch gun and a flagpole on the grounds. The structure was sturdily built and designed to blend in with the historic wharves. Muster was held in the

second floor drill hall. The room smelled of the men's woolen uniforms and floor wax.

Part of the First Naval District, Salem hosted Surface Division 1-26, a Seabee Naval Construction Battalion, and a security unit. Training was given in radar operation in classes of twenty men.<sup>8</sup> The members were assigned to various naval vessels for cruises as part of their training, sometimes on the Salem based minesweeper USS *Ruff* (AMS-54) or other ships of the fleet not berthed at Salem, such as the destroyer escort USS *Johnnie Hutchins* (DE 360).<sup>9</sup>

### Navy Vessels at Central Wharf

The vessels that berthed at Central Wharf were veterans of World War II and had served in various theaters of the war.

Although the US Navy Department news release dated July 30, 1948, lists Salem as the port assigned to the USS *Kingfish* (SS-234), the first submarine positively documented to Salem's new training center appears to have been the "Gato" class USS *Shad* (SS-235). National Park Service blueprints for the Central Wharf berthing facility specifically indicate the intended presence of SS-235 (*Shad*) as of June 10, 1948. Whether *Kingfish* ever moored there has not been established.

Built at the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard, the 1,475 ton, 307-foot long *Shad* was launched April 15, 1942. At Salem from shortly after September 23, 1948,<sup>10</sup> to February 16, 1960, *Shad* earned six battle stars in both the Atlantic and Pacific theaters over the course of eleven war patrols. She was struck from the Navy List on April 1, 1960 and sold for scrap.

The next submarine at Salem was the 311.7-foot, "Balao" class, USS *Sea Dog* (SS-401). She was launched at Portsmouth Naval Yard on March 28, 1944. Assigned to the Pacific theater, she was leaving for her fifth war patrol from Pearl Harbor in August 1945 when the war ended. She was awarded two battle stars. *Sea Dog*



Above: stern of USS *Shad* and forward section of *Ruff* at Central Wharf with oil barge *Seaboard* at Pickering Wharf, January 6, 1949.



was at Central Wharf from February 25, 1960, to December 23, 1968.<sup>11</sup> She was struck from the Navy List on December 2, 1968, and eventually scrapped.

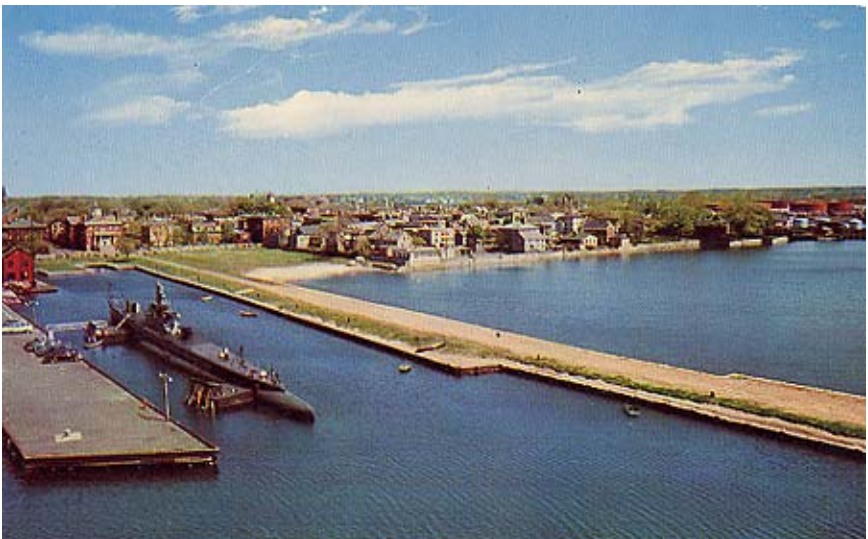
Salem was the homeport of the 136-foot minesweeper USS *Ruff* (AMS-54) intermittently from October 29, 1948<sup>12</sup> to the summer of 1957, when she was reassigned to Panama City, Florida. *Ruff* was built by the Ballard Marine Railway Co., Inc., of Seattle, Washington, as YMS-327. Launched on December 5, 1942, she was commissioned April 19, 1943, and known by her YMS-327 designation during World War II. Decommissioned at the end of the war and placed in the Green Cove Springs Group, Atlantic Reserve Fleet, she was reclassified as AMS-54 and named USS *Ruff* on September 1, 1947. *Ruff*, who had earned six battle stars for her World War II service, was struck from the Navy List on November 14, 1969, and sold.

### The End of an Era

The Navy operated the Naval Reserve Training Center under a series of five-year renewable special use permits.<sup>13</sup> Used heavily during the 1950s and 60s, the wharf fell into disrepair and funding was not secured to repair it. In 1972 the Navy vacated the facility and jurisdiction for the property reverted to the National Park Service.<sup>14</sup> Two wings of the main building and other structures were demolished during the winter and spring of 1974.<sup>15</sup>

The last remaining bay of the large, barn-red, two-story wood-frame structure was removed (with great difficulty) by a contractor starting on October 25, 1977, after almost thirty years to the day after it appeared as a feature at Salem Maritime. By December 5, it was just a memory.

Below: postcard showing Salem Maritime NHS and the USS *Shad*, c. 1970.





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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Pauline Chase Harrell, Carol Eley and Stanley Moss, *Administrative History of the Salem Maritime National Historic Site* (Boston, MA 1993), pp. 68, 69.

<sup>2</sup> A concise history of the origins of the naval militia movement leading up to the establishment of the US Naval Reserve organization may be found in *Naval Militia: A Historical Perspective* by CPL Jon B. Silvis, State Guard Association of the United States, Inc. (SGAUS). See [http://www.sgaus.org/hist\\_nm.htm](http://www.sgaus.org/hist_nm.htm).

<sup>3</sup> Senator Washington C. Whitthorne (1825-1891) of Tennessee unsuccessfully introduced a series of bills beginning with S. 3320 on February 17, 1887, to establish and equip a naval reserve force.

<sup>4</sup> The Posse Comitatus Act of 1878, June 18, 1878.

<sup>5</sup> US Department of the Navy press release dated July 30, 1948: TWENTY-TWO SUBMARINES ASSIGNED FOR NAVAL RESERVE TRAINING.

<sup>6</sup> Peter D. LaChapelle, April 12, 2004

<sup>7</sup> Based on the author's conversations with former Naval Reservists Douglas P. Sabin, retired National Park Service Historian at Minuteman National Historical Park, and Robert A. Hiltunen, site volunteer at Salem Maritime NHS, March 2004.

<sup>8</sup> Douglas P. Sabin, March 30, 2004

<sup>9</sup> Robert A. Hiltunen, March 31, 2004

<sup>10</sup> An article in the *Salem Evening News* for September 23, 1948 indicates that the USS *Shad* would wait at Beverly until the Salem mooring facility was ready to receive her.

<sup>11</sup> *Sea Dog's* departure from Central Wharf is noted in a *Salem Evening News* clipping dated December 23, 1968.

<sup>12</sup> USS *Ruff* arrived at Salem on October 29, 1948 under the command of Lieutenant George L. Young. She was scheduled to leave two days later on a cruise, commanded by Lieutenant Commander Charles Lyness. The crew was to consist of members of the Salem unit and thirty-five men from Worcester Naval Reserve Division-132 (*Salem Evening News*, October 29, 1948).

<sup>13</sup> Merrill Ann Wilson and Geoffrey P. Moran, *Historic Structure Report: Central Wharf Architectural and Archeological Data, Salem Maritime National Historic Site, Massachusetts* (National Park Service, Denver, CO June 1980), p. 10

<sup>14</sup> The final lease expired June 30, 1972.

<sup>15</sup> Wilson and Moran, p. 12

Author: John Frayler, Park Historian, Salem Maritime NHS

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