



# Norfolk Naval Shipyard

Portsmouth, Virginia

## Cultural Resources Fact Sheet



Figure 1. Present-Day View of the Norfolk Naval Shipyard

### Location

Located in Portsmouth, Virginia, Norfolk Naval Shipyard (NNSY) stands on the west bank of the Elizabeth River's Southern Branch. NNSY's 1,275-acre operational base includes the 465-acre main site and four nearby noncontiguous annexes, also sited alongside the Elizabeth River, in Portsmouth and Chesapeake. The main site's waterfront Industrial Area Precinct includes ship berthing, maintenance, and repair facilities, with five operable dry docks and four major piers. Approximately 5,000-6,000 military personnel and 11,000 civilians work at NNSY. Between 1,500 and 3,000 contractors work at the shipyard daily, providing support and services.

### Mission

NNSY's mission is to improve the US Navy's fleet abilities through repairing, overhauling, and modernizing ships, aircraft carriers, and submarines. Throughout the shipyard's two centuries its mission has changed several times—shipbuilding, education, munitions production—but it has remained steadfast in its commitment to continuously serving the fleet with quality work, on schedule, and within budget. With the proposed changes under shipyard modernization, NNSY will focus on modernizing the shipyard's dry docks; updating facility layouts to increase efficient production and service to the fleet; and investing in innovative equipment and technology.

### History

Norfolk Naval Shipyard has continuously operated for over 250 years under four flags—Britain, the State of Virginia, the Confederate Navy, and the United States Navy. In 1798, the newly created Department of the Navy chose the circa-1767 Gosport Shipyard as a prime location for shipbuilding, purchasing it from Virginia in June 1801. Opening the nation's first operating dry dock in 1833 further solidified the importance of this base for the Chesapeake.

Gosport's geographic position and status made it a desirable entity during the Civil War. After seizing Gosport from the Union in April 1861, the Confederate Navy salvaged the scuttled U.S.S. *Merrimack*. With the addition of steam engines and metal superstructure over its hull, the *Merrimack*, rechristened the C.S.S. *Virginia*, engaged the U.S.S. *Monitor* in the Battle of Hampton Roads in March 1862, the world's first ironclad conflict. Union forces retook the devastated Gosport in May 1862, renaming it the U.S. Navy Yard, Norfolk, Virginia.

During World War I, workers constructed Dry Docks 4, 6, and 7, and several monumental steel-frame buildings within the Industrial Precinct. World War II further increased the shipyard's workforce, buildings, and production. New structures included Dry Dock 8 and another significant extant structure, Hammerhead Crane. By the

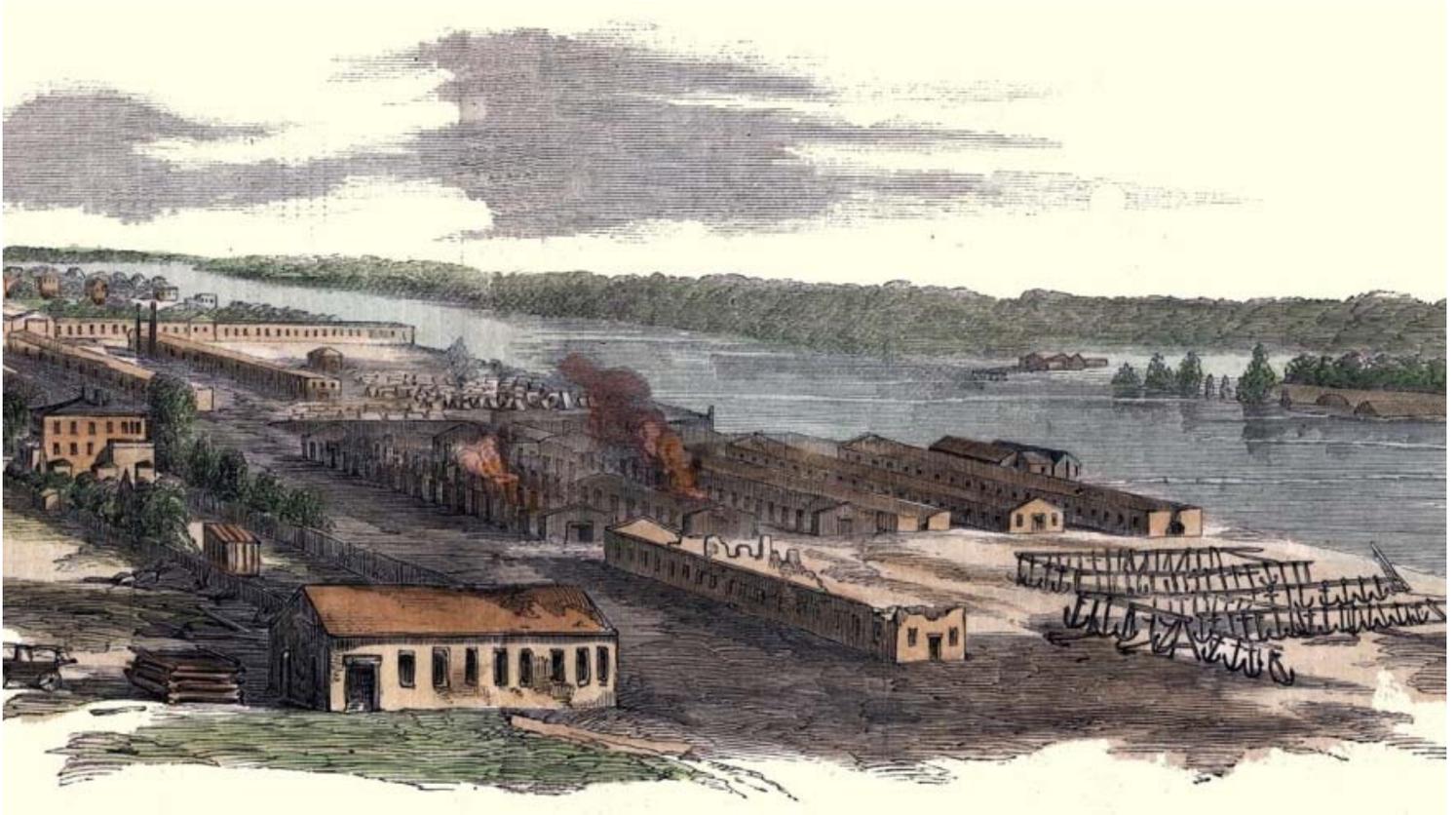


Figure 2. Harper's Weekly Illustration of the Norfolk Naval Shipyard, 1861

end of World War II, more than 250 new ships had been commissioned and thousands of ships repaired at the yard. In 1945, the shipyard was officially designated Norfolk Naval Shipyard (NNSY), the name it retains.

As the shipyard entered the 1960s-1970s Cold War era, Dry Docks 1 and 2 were converted to accommodate regular and nuclear submarines. In the early 1970s, NNSY erected "Rickover's Fence," separating sensitive and non-sensitive areas of the installation, which has continued into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### Historic Properties

The Norfolk Naval Shipyard Historic District has been determined eligible for the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP), and is listed in the Virginia Landmarks Register. Dry Dock 1, designed and constructed between 1827 and 1833, is the shipyard's sole National Historic Landmark. NNSY's 469.59-acre historic district encompasses the main site and holds 206 resources, 86 of which are contributing buildings, structures, and one site. It is eligible under Criterion C and Criterion A. Areas of significance include Military, Industry, Transportation, Architecture, and Engineering. Buildings and structures within the district illustrate the development of American naval shipyards, as evidenced by Gosport Precinct, the 19<sup>th</sup>-century shipyard distinguished by brick buildings and a grid format, versus the monumental steel frame

buildings, and looming portal cranes of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century Industrial Precinct. The NNSY Historic District's period of significance extends from 1827, when the shipyard's earliest extant structures were planned, to 1945, when the shipyard achieved its present overall layout. There are eight identified archaeological sites on NNSY main site; five have been determined to be potentially eligible for listing on the NRHP. These sites generally range from the 18<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, with one site containing intact pre-military deposits.

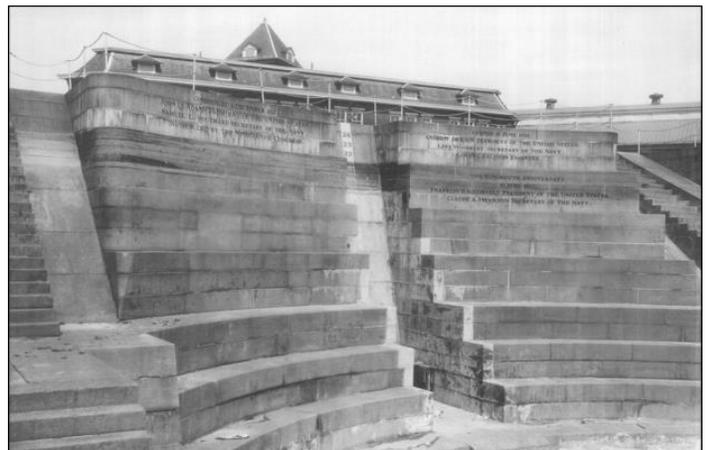


Figure 3. Dry Dock 1, 1933