



# Portsmouth Naval Shipyard

Kittery, Maine

## Cultural Resources Fact Sheet



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

### Location

Portsmouth Naval Shipyard (PNSY) is located in the Town of Kittery, Maine at the southernmost tip of the state, and is approximately 50 miles from Boston, Massachusetts, Portland, Maine, and Manchester, New Hampshire. PNSY occupies approximately 280 acres on Seavey Island, situated at the mouth of the Piscataqua River between Portsmouth, New Hampshire and Kittery, Maine.

### Mission

Established on June 12, 1800 as one of the six original naval shipyards, Portsmouth is the Nation's oldest continuously operating Naval Shipyard. Originally developed to build wooden ships for the Navy's Fleet, the shipyard's mission evolved as technologies changed. During World War I, PNSY took on a new and important role, the construction of submarines in addition to the overhaul and repair of surface vessels. Portsmouth continued to build

submarines until 1969. Today, Portsmouth's primary mission is the overhaul, repair and modernization of submarines. Portsmouth Naval Shipyard provides the U.S. Navy's nuclear powered submarine fleet with quality overhaul work in a safe, timely and affordable manner.

Approximately 6,500 civilian employees currently work at PNSY, along with 1,000 active duty military personnel assigned to the Shipyard and Installation, submarine and Coast Guard cutter crews and an additional 1,000 civilians assigned to tenant commands. Although PNSY functions primarily as an industrial facility for the overhauling of submarines, it also provides support facilities for the U.S. Navy Survival, Evasion, Resistance, & Escape (SERE) School, the Naval Branch Health Clinic Portsmouth, U.S. Army New England Recruiting Battalion, the Defense Logistics Agency, and the U.S. Coast Guard. PNSY also supports military personnel with on-base berthing, family-oriented programs, and recreational opportunities.



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Figure 2. Portsmouth Naval Shipyard, 1943

### History

Located on what were originally five islands at the mouth of the Piscataqua River, Portsmouth Naval Shipyard (PNSY) was established by Congress in 1800. Selected for its geographic advantages and the availability of experienced shipbuilders, PNSY began by producing wooden ships for the Navy. Evolving with Navy requirements, the Shipyard mission significantly transformed during World War I. In 1917, PNSY designed and constructed the L-8, the first government-built submarine. Shortly thereafter, in 1923, PNSY was designated as the Navy's primary submarine shipyard. World War II (WWII) brought massive expansion to PNSY in support of the increased demand for submarines. During WWII, PNSY produced 77 submarines, approximately half of the US submarine fleet. Following World War II, PNSY was named the Navy's center for submarine design and development. The research submarine, USS Albacore, with its revolutionary "tear drop" shaped hull and round cross section, was designed and launched at Portsmouth in 1953. The Albacore set the standard for all subsequent submarine hull design world-wide. PNSY continued to build submarines until 1969, when the last submarine built in a public shipyard, the USS Sand Lance, was launched. The mission was then realigned to function exclusively as a submarine overhaul facility.

The archaeological record indicates that, typical of coastal Maine, portions of the Shipyard were used by Native Americans as transitory fishing and camping sites during the pre-contact and post-contact eras. European occupation of the Shipyard islands is documented beginning in the late seventeenth century. The islands were used for residential occupation, and may have been used for fish drying. As the Navy's needs changed, they expanded by purchasing nearby islands and filling the areas between them to create the one island known today.

### Historic Properties

The Portsmouth Naval Shipyard Historic District was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1977, and was expanded in 2008 to include two additional eligible districts. The District, which encompasses approximately two-thirds of Seavey Island, contains buildings, structures, objects, and archaeological sites with a period of significance ranging from 1800 - 1987. While additional criteria are likely applicable, the District was determined to have significance under Criteria A and C. Significant archaeological sites ranging from prehistoric to Twentieth-Century Navy-related occupation have also been identified outside of the Historic District.