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The Official Journal of the Organization

The Hoboken Historical Museum Newsletter

OF BY And FOR MuSeum MemberS.

NOVEMBER 1990 HOBOKEN, NJ No. 43

Hoboken Historical Museum's Fifth Annual Exhibition
"The Shipyards of Hoboken: Past and Present"

OPENING RECEPTION

at City Hall, First and Washington Streets, Hoboken, N.J.
Friday, November 16, 1990, 6:30 to 9:30 pm
Slide Lecture by Bill Miller at 8 pm

Hoboken's former shipyard industry will be displayed in pictures, artifacts, and informative panels in the Museum's ground-floor gallery in City Hall. Displays include the former W. & A. Fletcher Co. North River Iron Works, The Tietjen & Lang Dry Dock, and successor Todd Shipyards, the Bethlehem Steel Co. yard formerly occupied by the Fletcher Co., and the Union Dry Dock & Repair Co.

Admission to the exhibition and the opening night reception is free. There will be entertainment by Frankie Fame and other musicians. Refreshments will be served.

STEVENS SHIPYARD

(Continued from the September issue)

Having contracted in 1842 to build for the United States government a large ironclad naval steamer impervious to cannon shot and shell, Robert L. Stevens of Hoboken with his brothers James C. and Edwin A. immediately dug a dry dock at Hoboken and began to work on the vessel designed many years earlier by their father, Col. John Stevens (1749-1838). It was the first ironclad ever ready for construction.

A little later, however, the terms of the contract were changed, to make the armor superior to newer and stronger artillery, and this process of interruption and delay kept up until 1856, when Robert died, leaving the Stevens Battery (as the vessel was called) in its basin at Hoboken, partially complete with twin

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screw engines and boiler in position. She was the then 410 feet long by 45 feet wide, with a square fixed turret housing cannon which could be depressed. Six years later, John Ericsson built ironclads of the Monitor type that were similar to the Battery except that they had a circular turret that could rotate, as suggested by Col. John Stevens in 1813.

After many experiments at Hoboken, the Colonel's son Robert took out a patent about 1844. It was for rotating a naval steamship by means of a cross propeller near the stern so that if one of the batteries were disabled, the ship could almost instantly present the other.

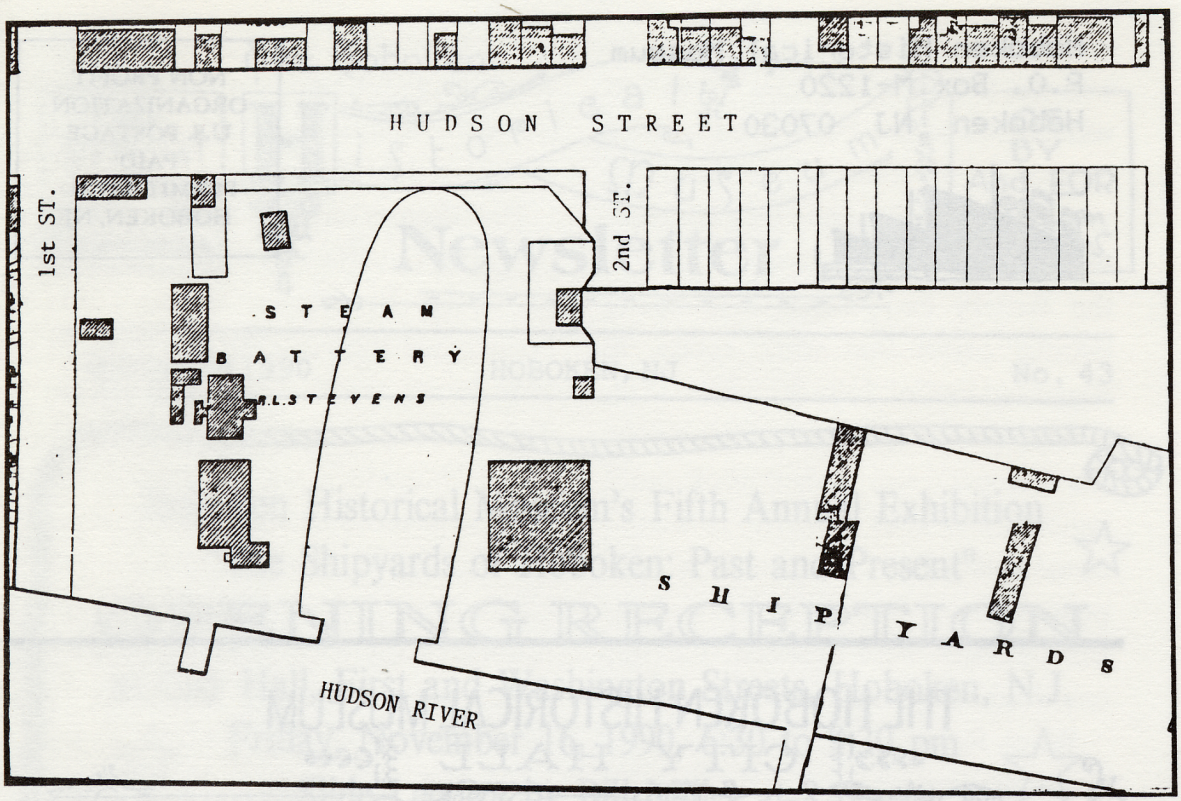
When Robert died, the ship needed armor plating, a design for the "fighting house" and a decision on the number and size of its guns. At the beginning of the Civil War, Robert's brothers Edwin and John C. presented the government with a plan for completing the Battery together with another small warship called the Naugatuck. *Scientific American*, February 25, 1861, in an article on "Altering Our Naval Vessels," said: "It seems that Stevens' unfinished floating battery, at Hoboken, about which so many paragraphs have been published, has been the means effecting a great revolution in the principal navies of the world. *The London Quarterly Review* says that the experiments made by Mr. Stevens at the expense of the United States government, in 1845, first demonstrated that wrought iron plates six inches thick form a perfect shield against the force of cannon balls...thus the three leading naval powers of the world [England, France, and Russia] are [now] providing themselves with fleets of iron-plated ships."

The US government, however, refused to appropriate the money for the plans proposed by Edwin Stevens. He bequeathed the vessel to the State of New Jersey, together with one million dollars for its completion. The smaller vessel, Naugatuck, was accepted by the Federal government and was one of the Union fleet that attacked the Confederate ironclad Virginia in its historic encounter with the Monitor.

The Naugatuck was intended to demonstrate the practicality of the principles embodied in the Stevens Battery. With its twin screw, it could be turned completely around in a minute and a quarter. Taking on water ballast, could lower it in the water three feet below its load waterline, keeping it below the horizon for longer. Pumping out the ballast could raise it again in 8 minutes. The Naugatuck was thus a forerunner of the modern submarine.

After New Jersey, in a vain endeavor, had spent the money to be used for completion of the Stevens Battery, it was sold, for $62,770, according to the *Hudson County Democrat* on October 1, 1880, presumably as scrap. It was dismantled in 1881.

It was Edwin A. Stevens who founded Stevens Institute of Technology at Castle Point, Hoboken, the Stevens estate. He bequeathed land valued at $100,000, a building fund of $150,000,



HOBOKEN FOUNDRY & SHIPBUILDERS

and an endowment of $500,000 to it.

The Stevens brothers' dry dock and shipyard, which included their Camden & Amboy rail road repair shops, was on the river's edge from First to Second Streets, extending inland to Hudson Street. Other shipbuilders shared the Hoboken waterfront there at the foot of Second Street, with their yards extending to Third Street.

Among them at the time this map was published, 1851-1852, were Isaac C. Smith, Michael S. Allison, and John W. Capes. Allison lived on Hudson near Third St. Capes had a home on Union Place (the name then given to the west side of Hudson St. between Third and Fourth Sts.). Another shipbuilder known to be in Hoboken at the time was C.C. Joralemon. There were also a few yacht and boat builders on the Hoboken waterfront.

GIFT MEMBERSHIPS NOW AVAILABLE

We now offer members and others the opportunity to give annual gift memberships in the Hoboken Historical Museum. Complete information is on the gift membership form accompanying this issue of the Newsletter. Each recipient of a gift membership receives our attractive membership card and a full-color certificate bearing the donor's name, which will be enclosed with our December Newsletter, due to be mailed December 10.

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THE HOBOKEN HISTORICAL MUSEUM

CITY HALL

WASHINGTON AND FIRST STS. HOBOKEN, N.J.

SPECIAL MEETING

The Hoboken Historical Museum will conduct its *November meeting at City Hall*, on Wednesday, November 14 at 7:30 pm, to help set up the 1990-1991 exhibition on Shipyards Past and Present. All members and non-members are invited to come and lend a hand after a very brief business session. Please bring a friend.

MUSEUM NEWSLETTER

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