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The Iron Age Comes To Newburgh Shipbuilding

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Iron shipbuilding came to Newburgh in the 1870s. That this happened at all can best be attributed to the serendipitous conjunction of several forces. For us to better understand how these forces acted, we must start by examining briefly the industrial domain of Newburgh's waterfront, its facilities and its people, immediately after the Civil War.

With the exception of the Newburgh Steam Mills and the newly-established Higginson Manufacturing Company (the former a cotton mill and the latter a plaster mill, both located to the north of South Street), Newburgh's major industrial activity along the river was centered around the foot of Washington Street.

Here could be found the foundry and machine shops of the Washington Iron Works, which had been active during the war building machinery for naval vessels. Dating from the 1850s and under the management of Isaac Stanton and his partner named Mallery, its normal peacetime activity included the building of sugar-mill machinery, much of which was exported to plantations in Cuba and elsewhere throughout the Caribbean region. The works' output also included sawmills, shingle mills, and steam engines and boilers. (It is of interest to note that some of this company's buildings from that period survive at the southwest corner of South Water and Washington Streets, and that one lathe from their machine shop was still in use by Harry Marvel as late as 1946.)

Clustered around the iron works could be found the boiler shops—first that of D. A. Rheutan (and later that of Alexander Cauldwell), as well as the machine shop of Melrose and Moss. Pat Delany, who would later have a boiler shop at the corner of Renwick and South Colden Streets, served an apprenticeship with Cauldwell. Further to the south were the village's shipyards—George F. Riley (who had once been a partner of Thomas S. Marvel) and a newcomer, Adam Bulman, who had a short-lived partnership with L. Stewart. Later he teamed with Joel W. Brown to form



Side-wheeler "Montclair", 1876

Bulman and Brown, and maintained a shipbuilding and repair yard to the south of the foot of Washington Street.

In the late 1860s, Thomas S. Marvel had left Newburgh and was engaged in shipbuilding at Port Richmond, New York, and Denton, Maryland. Near the foot of Renwick Street had been the sawmill and planing mill of James Bigler, and nearby the lumber yard of D. Moore. Bigler built many wooden gun carriages there during the war.

At this time, heavy industry in Newburgh was composed of two parts-wooden shipbuilding and the iron-working trades. Changes were taking place, in that the Washington Iron Works had gone bankrupt, and their shops were taken over by William Wright, who came to Newburgh from Providence, Rhode Island. (Wright who had been employed at the engine works of George Corliss, was allegedly the inventor of the poppet-valve mechanism which made the Corliss engine so popular, but Corliss himself took credit for this technological breakthrough and Wright eventually departed.)

In 1872, some of those previously associated with the Washington Iron Works-Luther C. Ward, Samuel Stanton (Isaac's son) and John Delany (Pat's brother)-founded Ward, Stanton and Company for the purpose of continuing the manufacture of the defunct firm's machinery line. To this was added marine engines, and a short time later they bid upon and won the contract for a wooden tugboat for the City of New York. Lacking shipbuilding experience, they sub-contracted the hull and joiner work to Bulman and Brown, whose yard was adjacent to their shops. Ward, Stanton and Company built the engine, boiler and other machinery, and installed these components in the completed hull. The tug, named Manhattan, was delivered in August 1874. At about the same time, they had constructed engines and boilers for two small steam yachts, Revenge and Fanny (built elsewhere), and, apparently, a small iron-hulled steam lighter was built for use in Mexico. (The construction of the last named vessel has never been verified.)

With these initial forays into small-ship construction, the partners concluded that this was a way of expanding the firm's business, and, at some undetermined time, Thomas S. Marvel joined Ward, Stanton and Company to oversee the firm's shipbuilding activities. Concurrently came what is considered the first major contract for a vessel with an iron hull-a steamboat for Greenwood Lake..

Incorporated in 1874, the Montclair Railway Company was built to provide access to Greenwood Lake for vacationing New Yorkers. In the 1870s, the lake, which straddles the New York-New Jersey state line, had become an important resort area with hotels lining the shore on both sides. What was needed was a large steamboat to move passengers to the hotels from the rail terminus at the lower end of the lake, replacing an inefficient and unreliable "mosquito fleet."

The railroad contracted with Ward, Stanton and Company for the steamboat, a classic little side-wheeler whose iron hull was erected at the Newburgh yard using bolts instead of rivets. When complete, the hull was unbolted, moved to a site at the head of the lake and re-erected, this time using rivets. She was launched on June 29, 1876, at which time she was named Montclair. The engine and boiler were then installed, the joiner work fitted, and the completed vessel made her first revenue trip in the late summer of 1876. A crew of Ward, Stanton's artisans from Newburgh assembled the steamer at the lake site.

What should have been a time of celebration was indeed not. The Montclair Railway had declared bankruptcy before Montclair was delivered, but the steam-

boat was handed over to a successor company. After still another bankruptcy and change of name, the company, now the New York and Greenwood Lake Railroad, became part of the Erie. The steamboat continued to run regularly, making the scheduled hotel landings and stopping on signal at other piers along the lake. She ran until the 1920s, when her machinery and joiner work were removed and the hull scuttled in the middle of the lake.

A handsome little steamboat, Montclair was 80 feet long, with a beam of 20 feet. Her beam engine, built by Ward, Stanton and Company, was equally diminutive, with a cylinder eighteen inches in diameter and a piston stroke of four feet. The shipbuilders also built her boiler.

The construction of Montclair was sufficient to convince Messrs. Ward, Stanton and Delany that iron shipbuilding, so successfully introduced in the Delaware River shipyards but rarely seen in New York, was the key to their future success. Delaware River shipbuilders like Neafie and Levy, John H. Dialogue, Harlan and Hollingsworth and others were much closer to sources of iron plates and shapes, and their iron hulls were therefore able to compete with wood in the 1860s. By the late 1870s improved rail connections to the east lessened this handicap for New York and Hudson River shipbuilders, but by this time shipbuilding in New York City was nearly extinct.

A gradual transition at Ward, Stanton's shops saw shipbuilding commence in earnest in 1879, when ten wooden vessels and the iron-hulled ferryboat City of Newburgh were completed. In 1880, the output was seven hulls of wood and two of iron, including the large Hoboken side-wheel ferry Lackawanna. The following year, there were three wooden vessels, a composite yacht (with iron frames and wood planking) and a second Hoboken ferry, and in 1882, iron finally surpassed wood-four vessels to three.

The year 1883 was a determinant one for the yard; seven iron hulls and a single wooden one (the powerful tug John H. Cordts, built for the Washburn Steamboat Company of Saugerties, but acquired by the Cornell Steamboat Company in 1884.) The following year, 1884, three iron hulls and two wooden vessels were completed, and contracts for two more iron ferryboats were in hand.

Alas, 1884, proved to be the end of the line for Ward, Stanton and Company. After a disastrous fire the year before and for other reasons, the company was declared bankrupt a few days before Christmas. Of the partners, Luther C. Ward became what was then called a "commercial traveler," Samuel Stanton retired and moved his family to Bradenton Florida, aboard the steamboat Manatee (perhaps the last vessel completed by Ward, Stanton and Company) and John Delany entered into a partnership with Thomas S. Marvel under the name T. S. Marvel and Company.

The shipbuilding facilities would be shared between T. S. Marvel and Company and James Bigler (who won the contract to complete the two unfinished ferries) until Bigler retired from shipbuilding in the early 1890s. T. S. Marvel and Company (later T. S. Marvel Shipbuilding Company) would quickly earn a reputation for quality ship construction in iron and steel, turning out such noted vessels as the Cornell Steamboat Company's tug Geo. W. Washburn in 1890, J. P. Morgan's steam yacht Corsair in 1898, and the Hudson River Day Line's Hendrick Hudson in 1906.

But it was the building of the side-wheeler Montclair that was the turning point. The age of iron had finally come to the New York region, the Hudson River and to Newburgh.