

M. M. DAVIS SHIPYARD DURING THE GREAT WAR

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Abstract: A century ago, the world was embroiled in a conflict called the Great War or World War. A Calvert County, Maryland, business that grew to meet the wartime demand was Solomons' own M. M. Davis & Son shipyard. On the eve of America's involvement in the war, the business acquired land to expand its shipyard, restructured its finances, enlarged its workforce, and enhanced its shipbuilding capabilities. The shipyard was prepared to do its part in the war effort.

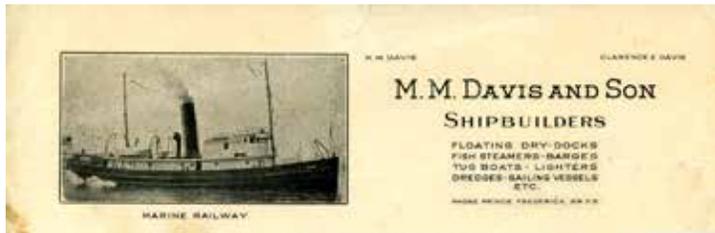


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Introduction

The Great War in Europe began in 1914 and soon spread to affect the world. The United States was reluctant to become militarily involved in the conflict, but was willing and able to help furnish capital, supplies, and equipment needed by the Allies to combat the Central Powers. As predations on merchant fleets by German submarines grew, Europe and Great Britain increasingly turned to shipyards across the world to supply seagoing vessels. Specializing in wooden shipbuilding, M. M. Davis & Son was one of many shipyards that expanded its operations in the prewar years to supply merchant shipping to the American domestic market.

A combination of factors, including news of wartime atrocities and the effects of unrestricted German submarine warfare, eventually swayed American public and political sentiment. The United States declared war on Germany on April 6, 1917, propelling the nation into the World War.



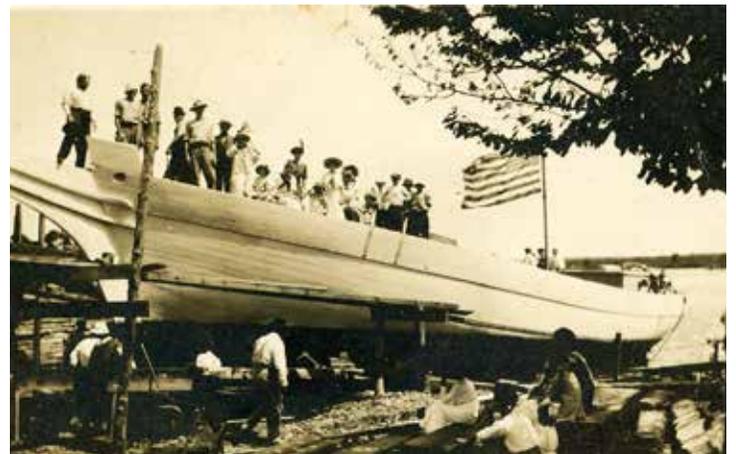
M.M. Davis & Son letterhead, ca. 1910

M. M. Davis Shipyard Background

Marcellus Mitchell Davis, a fourth-generation boat builder, came to Solomons Island from Dorchester County, Maryland, in 1879. He developed his first shipyard on the island in 1885.¹ In 1892, he established the “M. M. Davis Marine Railway Co. of Calvert County” and built a larger shipyard nearby on the Narrows.² Davis constructed commercial sailing craft, including sloops, bugeyes, and schooners, while conducting repair work on vessels engaged in the oyster trade. In 1896, the Davis yard built its first steam-powered vessel.³ Although Davis and his family relocated to Baltimore in 1898, they returned to Solomons in 1900 where he resumed his boatbuilding activities.⁴ In 1904, he formed a partnership with his 21-year-old son, Clarence. Under the name M. M. Davis & Son⁵, the firm continued building commercial sail and steam-powered vessels and conducted repair work.

In 1910, M. M. Davis & Son purchased property on the mainland on nearby Mill Creek to develop an expanded shipyard⁶. Comprising five lots of the Rousby Hall subdivision, this property afforded a deeper launch site and room to grow. Over the course of several years, the

partners expanded their Rousby property by acquiring several adjacent lots. While developing the facilities on Mill Creek, the partners maintained their earlier shipyard along the Narrows for conducting boat repair work. At their Rousby site, they secured contracts to build larger vessels than were feasible at their smaller shipyard site on Solomons Island. In addition to commercial sailing craft, they built and launched large barges, menhaden fishing steamers, steam-powered tugboats, and a few government vessels at their new shipyard⁷. Despite the larger facilities, a contemporary trade journal reported that the Davis yard turned out only a few vessels per year prior to the World War.⁸



Launch ceremony at their new shipyard site in 1912 for the *Leroy Woodburn*, the last bugeye built by Davis. (P-02998)

Prewar Era at M. M. Davis & Son Shipyard

Beginning in Europe in 1914, the World War soon spread to the open seas, disrupting commercial shipping. As the war wore on, Americans became increasingly affected and the demand for seagoing vessels grew. Activity at shipyards like M. M. Davis & Son was already increasing to respond to the demand long before the United States entered the war in 1917.⁹

The Davis yard was busy in the prewar years. According to Orem Elliott, whose father was a carpenter at Davis, the shipyard moved across the creek to the Rousby property around 1915.¹⁰ At that time, according to worker J. Barnes Lusby, there was only a one-room office and a dwelling house on the site and a water-boy was employed to carry water from a nearby artesian well to the office and the workmen.¹¹

For M. M. Davis & Son, the engineering and logistics involved in expanding facilities to construct large wooden ships at Rousby was challenging. Its waterfront location on Mill Creek was ideal for shipbuilding, but it was isolated and not served by an all-weather road.

Practically all lumber, hardware, and fittings needed for boat-building were shipped to the yard by water. Most of the workmen, too, traveled to the shipyard daily by boat.¹² Large areas needed be cleared and the ground graded to unload and store the building materials and to prepare sites to accommodate large shipbuilding ways. Additional equipment had to be procured and installed to handle and shape the wood and more skilled carpenters and laborers were needed to undertake the increased workload.



Marcellus M. Davis in his shipyard's lumber yard. (P-06863)

In late 1915, the Davis yard secured a contract for an 80-foot U.S. Coast Guard harbor cutter¹³ and the *Tioga* was launched with much fanfare on May 4, 1916.¹⁴ The 140-foot steam-tug *Essex*, part of the Northern Transportation Company fleet, was rebuilt at the yard and launched by May of 1916.¹⁵ A month later, a local newspaper reported “an enormous barge” was being built at the Rousby shipyard.¹⁶



M.M. Davis & Son letterhead, ca. 1915

In 1916, with the prospect of America's possible entry into the war, the U.S. Congress passed the Shipping Bill that created the United States Shipping Board (USSB). This government-run corporation was charged with the regulation and promotion of American merchant shipping in the interest of national defense.

To expand their operations, the partners purchased an additional five lots at Rousby in 1916¹⁷ and added new equipment. In May of 1916, the partners purchased a 35-horsepower boiler and 25-horsepower horizontal cross-compound steam engine to power machinery.¹⁸ Orem Elliott began working at the shipyard as a laborer that year, carrying scrap wood to fire the boiler for the steam engine. He estimated there were perhaps fifty workers employed at the shipyard at the time.¹⁹ J. Barnes Lusby recalled that the steam engine ran the planer and the band saw, but all the other work, including boring holes in timbers, driving bolts, and handling of heavy materials, was done by manpower.²⁰

Davis launched the 200-foot *Northern No. 8*, the first in a series of seagoing barges built for the Northern Transportation Company, in December of 1916.²¹ In March of 1917, the shipyard received the burned hull of the 175-foot bay steamer *Tivoli* to be rebuilt and converted into a barge for the Baltimore and Carolina Steamship Company.²² That month, a second 215-foot barge for the Northern Transportation Company was already in frame.²³ In February of 1917, the shipyard had telephone service extended to the Rousby site and two adjacent lots of land were added to the shipyard property later that year.²⁴

M.M. Davis & Son Prepares for War

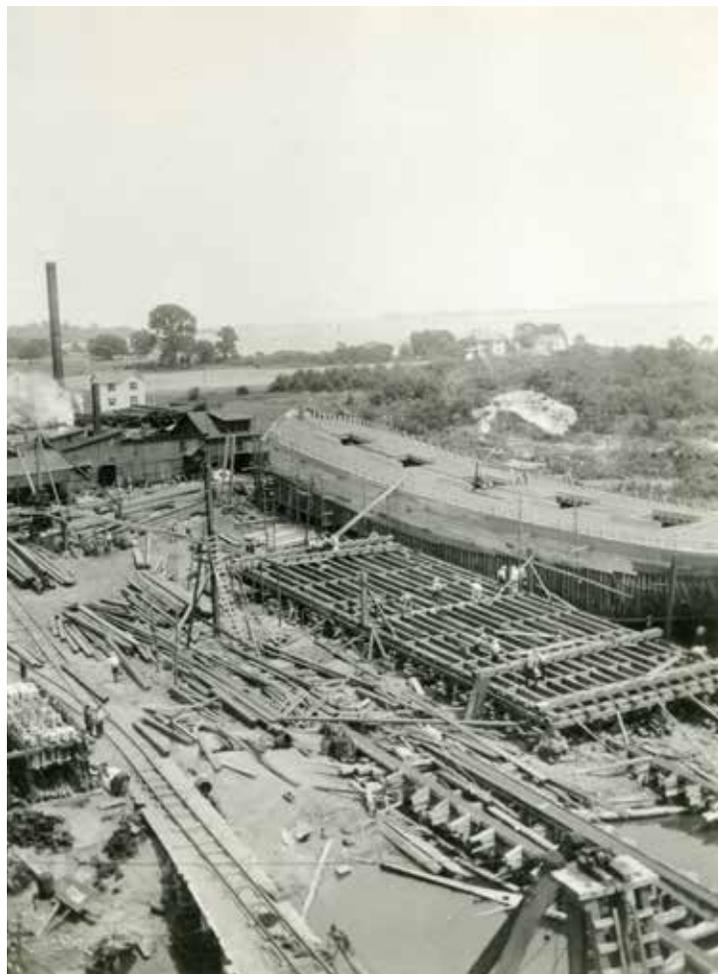
At the outset of the American involvement in the Great War, the U.S. government turned to shipyards across the nation to supply seagoing vessels. M. M. Davis & Son was one of many shipyards that expanded its operations to prepare for the war effort. Specializing in wooden shipbuilding, the yard secured government contracts to build barges and seagoing tugboats at Solomons.

On April 2, 1917, the United States joined the Allies and entered the World War. Two weeks later, the United States Shipping Board (USSB) established the Emergency Fleet Corporation (EFC) to acquire, maintain, and operate a merchant fleet to meet the needs of national defense and to support domestic and foreign commerce. In July, President Woodrow Wilson signed an executive order to delegate to the EFC his wartime power to acquire existing ships and build and maintain vessels and shipbuilding yards.²⁵

To meet the demand for soldiers and sailors needed to wage war, the U.S. introduced the selective service, mobilizing nearly four million military personnel during the course of the conflict. It also incentivized the American private sector to increase production to meet the wartime demands for equipment, materiel, and food. Millions of American civilians engaged in home front activities to support the war effort. It took a while for the private sector to ramp up its production capabilities, but, by the time the Armistice was signed on November 11, 1918, the American economy was fully engaged in the war effort.

In April, *The Evening Star* reported that Marcellus Davis was in Washington “on business connected with building of wooden merchant vessels for service in meeting the German submarine menace” and he expected his yard to be “called upon to build several vessels.”²⁶ Anticipating an increased workload, a local newspaper reported in late April of 1917 that “nearly one hundred men are now employed. The Rousby yard has been enlarged to accommodate some Government contracts.”²⁷ A month later, Elliott Dixon and his team of horses were busy grading and leveling the ground to expand operations at the shipyard.²⁸

When the United States entered the World War, M. M. Davis & Son shipyard was already busy building large barges and a freighter for private businesses. A contract was well underway to construct a series of seagoing barges for the Northern Transportation Company of Baltimore.²⁹ One had already been launched and a second was in frame when war was declared.³⁰ The 206-foot steam-powered freighter, *Sarah Weems*, being built for the Baltimore and Carolina Steamship Company, was launched from the shipyard on May 19, 1917,³¹ and towed to Newport News, Virginia, to have her boiler installed.³² But, with the prospect of lucrative government wartime contracts, the partners sought to restructure their company and seek outside capital to further expand their shipbuilding capabilities.



Building ways with hull of freighter *Sarah Weems* and a barge under construction, 1917. (P-00014)

On October 15, 1917, the partnership was dissolved in favor of a stock corporation that would raise the company’s profile and infuse the business with outside capital, placing it in a position to further expand its operations and secure government contracts. The partners were joined in the venture by the New York marine engineering firm of Moses, Pope, and Trainer to form M. M. Davis & Son, Incorporated.³³ (Earlier in 1917, Moses, Pope, & Trainer, Inc., had been incorporated in Manhattan.)³⁴

Under the terms of its Articles of Incorporation, the new company was limited to five years and its capital stock was set at \$100,000.00. It was overseen by a board of six directors, including Marcellus Davis, president; Clarence Davis, vice-president; John N. Trainer, Jr., secretary and treasurer; and directors Edna Davis, Percival Moses, and Frederick Pope. The corporation maintained its principal office at Solomons, but raised its national profile by opening a New York office at 366 Fifth Street³⁵ and, later, a Baltimore office in the

Munsey Building.³⁶ These moves placed the shipyard in a prime position to expand its market and seek wartime contracts from the government.

When the corporation was formed, the shipyard had two seagoing barges and a large tugboat under construction in its building ways.³⁷ A brief, but successful, labor strike for a nine-hour workday in November had little impact on productivity³⁸ and on November 14, 1917, the barge, *Northern No. 16*, was launched. It measured 215-foot long with a 30-foot beam, 14-foot depth and a dead weight capacity of 1,400 tons.³⁹ Another seagoing barge, *Northern No. 11*, measuring 238-feet with a deadweight capacity of 1,700 tons, was launched March 7, 1918.⁴⁰ The 130-foot steam-powered seagoing tug *Progress*, built for the Bethlehem Shipbuilding Corporation, was launched at the shipyard in April of 1918.⁴¹

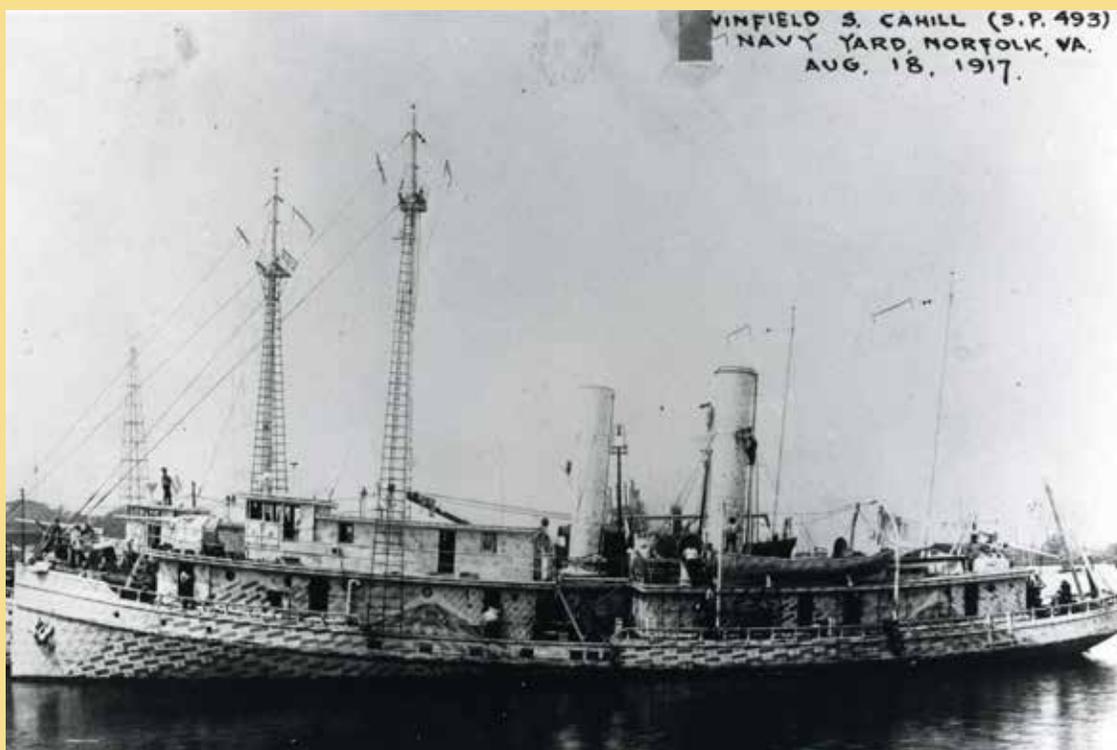


Davis shipyard with sawmill and lumberyard in foreground. (P-00015)

The United States declared war on Germany on April 6, 1917, and the U.S. Navy immediately began purchasing existing merchant ships to augment its fleet. These included a number of wooden vessels that M. M. Davis built in the years preceding the war. Five menhaden fishing trawlers, built in 1912 and 1913 and ranging in length from 150 feet to 160 feet, were acquired from their owners and converted for use as minesweepers. The first, appropriately named the *M.M. Davis*, was purchased on April 7, 1917. By July of 1917, the Davis-built *Kenneth L. McNeal*, *Philip K. Bauman*, *Winfield*

S. Cahill, *Wilbert A. Edwards* were added to the ranks. Several of these vessels crossed the Atlantic to act as coastal escorts and engage in minesweeping patrols along the Brittany coast.

Built by Davis in 1916, the U.S.C.G. harbor cutter *Tioga* was transferred, along with the rest of the Coast Guard fleet, to U.S. Navy command on April 6, 1917. During the war, the 80-foot *Tioga* operated on local patrol duty in the Fifth Naval District.



USS *Winfield S. Cahill* (S.P. 493) docked at the Norfolk Navy Yard in August 1917. Note the hull is painted in a geometric "razzle" camouflage to confuse German U-boat commanders. (courtesy, U.S. Navy, P-06894)

M. M. Davis & Company Goes to War

In February, as work was nearing completion on the tug *Progress* and the last Northern Transportation Company barge, the Davis yard received two separate government contracts to build tugboats and barges. On February 16, 1918, M. M. Davis & Son, Inc., was successful in being awarded Contract Number 166 to build eight oceangoing tugs with an initial contract price of \$215,000 per vessel. The contract completion date was October 31, 1919.⁴² These were 133-foot long, 29-foot beam, wooden steam-powered tugs for the EFC⁴³ and were similar in size to the *Progress*.⁴⁴

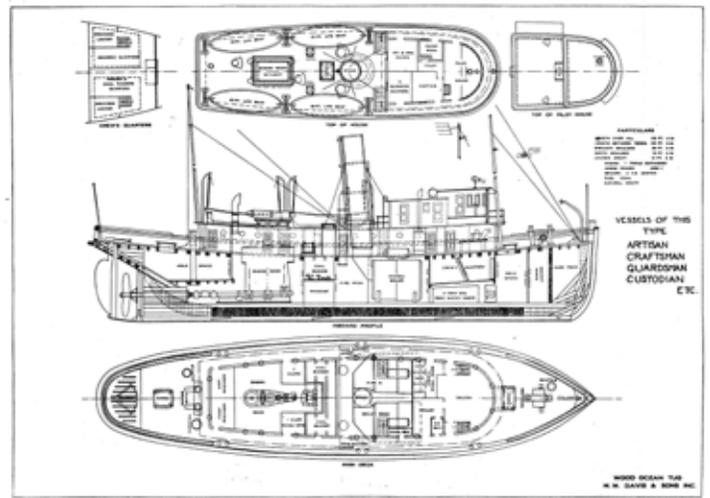
In addition to the EFC contract for tugs, the Cantonment Division of the U.S. Army's Quartermaster Corps awarded a contract for fourteen barges to the Davis yard on February 25, 1918.⁴⁵ Described as lighters for use at Curtis Bay, Baltimore,⁴⁶ these were 600-ton barges. In its March 30 edition, the *Calvert Gazette* reported that "government work" had started at the Davis shipyard⁴⁷ and the *Calvert Journal* stated:

*"A large number of men and some boys have been added to the force in M. M. Davis & Sons Inc. shipyard and numerous Government officials are inspecting the building of vessels for Government purposes."*⁴⁸

The Solomons shipyard was a small part of a vast national shipbuilding campaign to develop a merchant fleet to support the war effort. The EFC reported that as of March 21, 1918, it had requisitioned 427 ships that were already in use or under construction for private parties and had entered into contracts for an additional 1,298 new ships. The EFC needed cargo boats, tankers, transports, refrigerator ships, colliers, ore carriers, horse transports, and passenger and cargo boats. These vessels had hulls made of steel, wood, concrete, or composite materials. In addition, the EFC had contracts for 24 steel tugs and 14 wooden tugs. At that time, Davis was one of 71 shipyards across the nation contracted to build vessels with wooden hulls for the EFC.

The first government tug begun by Davis, named *Artisan*, was built according to EFC design with its keel, keelsons, frames, and stem made of oak and her hull sheathed with yellow pine planking.⁵⁰ Her keel was laid on April 8, 1918. On April 17, the keel for a second EFC tug was laid and, by the end of the year, all eight keels had been laid.⁵¹ To ensure compliance with contract specifications, Capt. Leonard S. Tawes

was appointed as the USSB's resident inspector at the Davis yard and served in that capacity throughout the tug building program.⁵²



Emergency Fleet Corporation Design 1061 for eight ocean going tugs built at M. M. Davis & Son, Inc., 1918-1919 (*Register of Ships Owned by United States Shipping Board, August 1, 1920, 12125-20 No. 72*)

Marcellus and Clarence Davis purchased an additional dozen lots of the Rousby Hall subdivision on May 17, 1918. This doubled the size of their property,⁵³ increased its water frontage, provided much needed space for additional shipbuilding ways, and facilitated the expansion of the corporation's overall operations.



Marcellus M. Davis inspecting tugboat hull. (P-06872)

In the June, 1918, edition of the trade publication *International Marine Engineering*, the corporation ran a quarter-page advertisement boasting "M. M. Davis & Son, Inc. are specialists in building complete TUGS" and noted that the yard was in the process of building its seventy-third tug.⁵⁴ By drawing on the engineering talent offered by Moses, Pope, and Trainer, the shipyard was now in a position to supervise the installation

of steam propulsion systems in conjunction with an assembly plant in nearby Baltimore.⁵⁵ On August 2, 1918, the EFC awarded Contract Number 422 to Davis to construct an additional twelve oceangoing tugs.⁵⁶ By then, the Davis yard had already laid the keels for four tugs from the first contract.⁵⁷

The shipyard continued to expand and modernize its infrastructure to meet the wartime production demands. According to Barnes Lusby, a rough shed was built to house “a very Heavy Diesel Power + Compressor combination plant” that enabled the workers to operate heavy pneumatic boring machines and air hammers for driving bolts. (Lusby described the diesel power plant as a “man-killer” because it took four men to hand-start the beast. Two men stepped in the spokes of the flywheel while two other men pulled on its rim to turn over the engine for starting.) Another improvement was the expansion of a small railway track system, to facilitate the transport of heavy timbers around the yard using railcars.⁵⁸



M. M. Davis laborers moving large timbers on railway, 1918. (P-06862)

In October of 1918, the Davis yard reported to the government that it had a total of 249 employees on its payroll with 227 working on the EFC contracts.⁵⁹ This made it the largest employer in Calvert County. But the shipyard still needed to increase its workforce to fulfill the wartime contracts. In November of 1918, the shipyard placed advertisements in local newspapers: “Men Wanted TO BUILD WOODEN SHIPS FOR GOVERNMENT—BEST WAGES PAID.” The wages offered were generous for rural Calvert County. First-class carpenters earned \$0.70 per hour; second-class carpenters earned \$0.65 per hour; third-class carpenters earned \$0.55 per hour; and fourth-class carpenters earned \$0.42 ½ per hour. Laborers earned \$0.30 to \$0.35 per hour. The work day was ten hours, but the shipyard paid time-and-a-half for overtime exceeding eight hours.⁶⁰



Workmen caulking seams of tug hull, 1918. (P-07879)

Among the workforce at the shipyard were 18 office workers⁶¹ who handled company management, construction inspections, payroll, bookkeeping, correspondence, and the mountain of paperwork associated with government contracts. Advertisements were placed in local newspapers and in *The Sun* to attract experienced office staff.⁶² A lack of adequate local housing for the growing staff was a persistent concern,⁶³ but, in late 1918, the shipyard refurbished and furnished a building at Solomons “to make the house a very comfortable and attractive home for the members of the office workforce of the shipyard.”⁶⁴

After launching the hull of the *Artisan* on October 12, 1918, the carpenters completed its superstructure before the tug was towed to Baltimore to have its steam engine, boilers, fittings, and machinery installed.⁶⁵ The steam propulsion system, consisting of a 1,000-horsepower, triple-expansion steam engine with two 600-horsepower, coal-fired, Scotch marine boilers, was manufactured by Bay State Iron Works Corporation at Erie, Pennsylvania. The machinery and auxiliary equipment were installed at H. E. Crook Company, Inc.,

at its Baltimore shipyard.⁶⁶ Moses, Pope, and Trainer, the engineering firm that had formed the corporation with Davis, oversaw the installation of the propulsion systems at the Crook plant. At 133 feet in length with a 29-foot beam and a 12-foot draft, these seagoing tugs were massive. Each had a single propeller that measured eleven-feet, six-inches, in diameter that was designed to drive the tug at twelve knots.⁶⁷



Tug *Artisan* on launch day, October 12, 1918 (P-01938)

On November 11, 1918, only a month after the *Artisan* was launched, the Armistice ending the World War was signed. Peace did not have an immediate impact on shipbuilding activities.⁶⁸ At the Davis yard, keels of five more tugs had already been laid and two more would follow.⁶⁹ Construction of EFC contracted vessels was continued across the nation to replace lost shipping tonnage and rebuild the Allies' diminished merchant marine fleets that had suffered tremendous losses during the war.⁷⁰

The productivity of the shipyard is evidenced in a December, 1918, issue of *International Marine Engineering* that stated the Davis yard had already launched seventeen vessels in 1918 and currently had six building ways with eight vessels under construction. (It is

presumed that the seventeen vessels included *Northern No. 11*, *Progress*, *Artisan*, and the fourteen U.S. Army lighters.) The publication also reported on the EFC contract to build twelve tugs in addition to the original eight vessels that had been secured by the yard several months earlier.⁷¹



View of Davis yard showing several tugs under construction. (P-01046)

A February 5, 1919, blueprint depicting the layout of the Davis shipyard, housed at the National Archives, shows the various buildings and the arrangement of the ship-building ways. At that time, five numbered hulls are shown that represent EFC tugs under construction. A large unidentified barge is also shown under construction.⁷² No U.S. Army Quartermaster Department lighters are shown in the shipyard plan, suggesting that contract had been completed. Davis worker J. Barnes Lusby recalled working on these 100-foot lighters prior to being drafted into the Army in August of 1918. By the time he returned to the shipyard in April of 1919, the lighters were finished, but the government tugs were still being built.⁷³

On February 27, 1919, the *Artisan* made a successful ten-hour test run in the Chesapeake Bay to try out her new engine.⁷⁴ On March 25, officials of the EFC and Capt. C. E. Wright, representing the Board of the U.S. Steamboat Inspectors, boarded the tug for another trial run. With Capt. W. S. Zinkland at the helm and Chief Engineer Battersby in charge of the power plant, the vessel made up to 14 knots and was judged to perform to contract specifications.⁷⁵ The *Artisan* was delivered to the EFC on April 1, 1919, nearly six months after being launched. Meanwhile, three more Davis-built tugs had been launched⁷⁶ and two were already at H. E. Crook being fitted with engines and machinery.⁷⁷

Newspapers reported on several successful launches of tugs at Davis in 1919.⁷⁸ In March of 1919, a local newspaper commented on the "successful and interesting launching" of a tug "which had been built unusually high upon the



Tug hull under construction at Davis yard, 1919. (P-07878)

land." To accommodate all of the vessels being constructed under the tight schedule, its building site was farther from the waterfront than was normal, but the tug "gracefully left its skids and touched water in the smoothest manner possible."⁷⁹ In June of 1919, the Davis yard was reported to have nine shipbuilding ways.⁸⁰

With the end of the war, the EFC began suspending and canceling contracts for

new vessel construction.⁸¹ These cancellations included the second contract for the additional twelve tugs scheduled to be built at the Davis yard. The EFC also began liquidating its surplus vessels. A notice placed in newspapers by the USSB in April of 1919 requested the submission of sealed bids for several tugboats, including the new Davis-built wooden tug *Craftsman*.⁸²

In August of 1919, *The Sun* reported that the tug *Guardsman*, the fourth EFC tugboat launched by Davis, had its engine installed and was having its compasses adjusted prior to trials in the bay. The article reported that the *Artisan*, *Craftsman*, *Woodman*, and *Guardsman* had been completed and the *Custodian*, *Marksman*, *Workman*, and *Watchman* were nearing completion at the Davis yard.⁸³ Over the course of the EFC contract, the cost per ship had increased by \$6,100, bringing the price per tug to \$221,100.⁸⁴

With their hulls still under construction, the contract for the last three EFC tugs, including the *Watchman*, *Marksman*, and *Workman*, was suspended.⁸⁵ The *Nautical Gazette* reported that on August 8, 1919, the eighth and last of the EFC contracted tugs, the *Watchman*, was launched at the Davis yard.⁸⁶ In a 1930 letter, Clarence Davis stated that after the contract was cancelled, the last three hulls "were turned over to the government when they were about 85% completed." He did not see the hulls after they were delivered to the government and did not know what became of them.⁸⁷

The *Custodian*, launched on April 19, 1919, was delivered to the EFC on September 9, 1919.⁸⁸ On September 24, the *Guardsman* and *Custodian* left Baltimore under tow to be delivered to the EFC fleet in New York.⁸⁹ Only five of the EFC seagoing tugs were fully completed and placed in commission. Department of Commerce applications for official registration show that none of the tugs built by M. M. Davis & Son, Inc., were placed into service until well after the war ended.⁹⁰



Tugboat hull on launching ways. (P-07880)



Tug *Guardsman*, right, with two other tugs under construction, 1919. (P-01937)

M. M. Davis & Company After the Great War

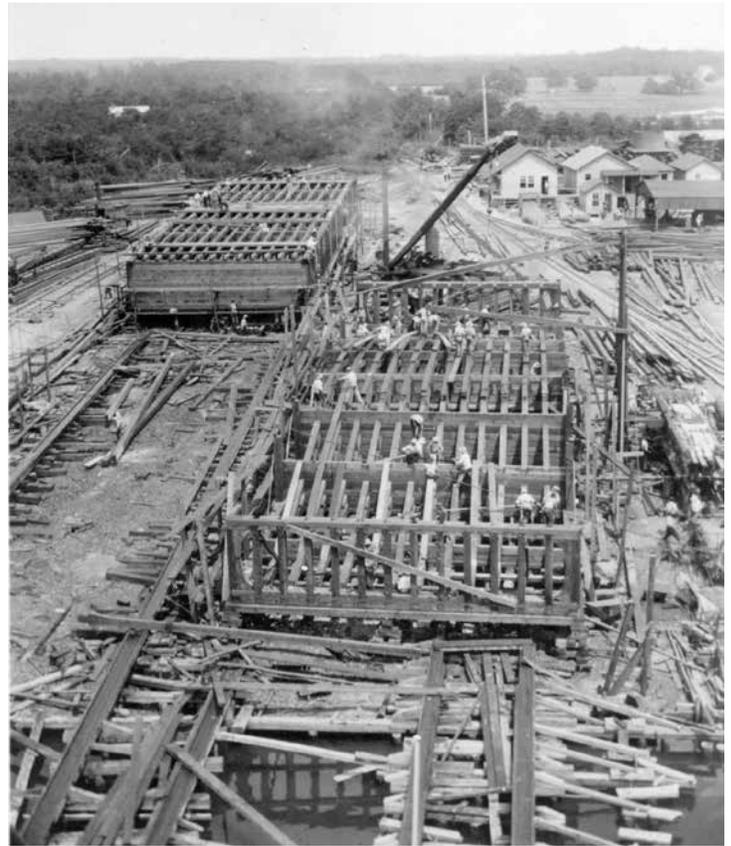
The shipyard stayed busy after the wartime government contracts ended. In October of 1919, a local newspaper reported the yard was completing a 600-yard mud scow for Sanford & Brooks Company; rebuilding the steamer *O. M. Clark* that had burned in Norfolk; building a 17,000-ton seagoing barge for itself; constructing a new marine railway with a deadweight capacity of approximately 500-tons; and installing a modern machine shop. In addition, Davis also landed a contract to build a series of ten 1,000-ton pontoons for a drydock for the Fore River plant of the Bethlehem Shipbuilding Corporation.⁹¹

To keep pace with the workload, the shipyard advertised for carpenters and laborers, offering “good wages” and “steady work” in April of 1920.⁹² A 1920 article states that M. M. Davis & Son, Inc., had set an Atlantic Coast record for wooden shipbuilding, having built, launched, and delivered 35 boats between January 1, 1918, and November 1, 1920. This averaged one launching every month.⁹³

In the years following the war, the USSB’s EFC continued disposing of its surplus ships. As of August 1, 1920, only two of the Davis-built tugs, *Custodian* and *Guardsman*, were still listed in its register of ships. Rated at 1,000-horsepower, they had the most powerful engines of the 40 tugs in its fleet.⁹⁴ A depression in the shipping business took hold in the early 1920s and from July 1, 1920, to June 30, 1921, the USSB disposed of 37 tugs and 41 uncompleted wooden hulls.⁹⁵ The *Custodian* and *Guardsman* were sold and delivered to private purchasers by November of 1921.⁹⁶ The following year, the EFC advertised the competitive sales of notes and securities it still held on a number of ships, including the Davis-built tugs *Craftsman*⁹⁷, *Artisan*, *Woodman*, and *Guardsman*.⁹⁸

Under the term of its Articles of Incorporation, the five-year span of M. M. Davis & Son, Inc., was scheduled to expire in 1921.⁹⁹ On December 31, 1920, its Board of Directors approved a plan to liquidate and dissolve the corporation. On January 1, 1921, a new partnership agreement to take over the business conducted by the former corporation was established between Marcellus and Clarence Davis under the name M. M. Davis & Son.¹⁰⁰ In March of 1922, a deed between the corporation and the partnership formalized the transfer of machinery and other physical property pertaining to the shipyard and specified other assets belonging to the corporation. The corporation retained ownership of some equipment, machinery, and the recently completed barge *No. 15*.¹⁰¹

Already expanding its shipbuilding capabilities prior to the U.S. involvement in the World War, M. M. Davis & Son succeeded in growing its business by capitalizing



Barges under construction at Davis shipyard. (P-01112)

on lucrative government contracts during the war. Its prewar initiatives placed it in a strategic position to engage in the home front war effort. During this period, the shipyard employed hundreds of workmen at good wages, bolstering the local economy. The workmen gained training and experience in shipyard construction, providing them an alternative to the traditional opportunities available in agriculture and the seafood industry.

The success of the Davis shipyard during the World War period was summed up by Clarence E. Davis in a 1925 letter:

*In our business, ten years ago, we thought that \$30,000.00 was a good year, the year 1918, we did one-million and a half, of course, that was during the war but our business now runs from \$100,000.00 to \$150,000.00 per year.*¹⁰²

In the decade following the war, the Davis yard continued to prosper, albeit at a smaller scale than during the war effort. Upon the death of its founder in 1925, Clarence Davis assumed ownership of the company. In addition to performing repair work, the yard continued to construct commercial craft, was awarded small government contracts to build vessels for the U.S. Coast Guard, USSB, and U.S. Navy, and began building custom designed yachts.¹⁰³

- ¹ Geoffrey Footner, *The Last Generation*, (Calvert Marine Museum Press, Solomons, 1991): 21.
- ² Calvert County Circuit Court (Land Records) TBT-1, 205-206, 10/28/1892.
- ³ Geoffrey Footner, *The Last Generation*, (Calvert Marine Museum Press, Solomons, 1991): 21-28.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*: 30-33.
- ⁵ Calvert County Circuit Court (Land Records) GWD 4, 553-556, 07/05/1904.
- ⁶ Calvert County Circuit Court (Land Records) GWD 11, 124-125, 09/19/1910.
- ⁷ Geoffrey Footner, *The Last Generation*, (Calvert Marine Museum Press, Solomons, 1991): 36.
- ⁸ *International Marine Engineering*, May 1919: 363.
- ⁹ Geoffrey Footner, *The Last Generation*, (Calvert Marine Museum Press, Solomons, 1991): 35-36.
- ¹⁰ Orem Elliott interview transcript, 1976, Calvert Marine Museum.
- ¹¹ J. Barnes Lusby to Mrs. Kennedy correspondence (undated letter relating Lusby's recollections of his early days at M. M. Davis shipyard, CMM MS 025 Box 1, Folder 1).
- ¹² *Calvert Journal*, 02/20/1917: 1.
- ¹³ *Calvert Journal*, 12/11/1915: 1.
- ¹⁴ *Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships*, Vol. VII: 207; *Calvert Gazette*, 05/13/1916: 1.
- ¹⁵ *The Sun*, 05/06/1916: 6.
- ¹⁶ *Calvert Journal*, 06/24/1916: 1.
- ¹⁷ Calvert County Circuit Court (Land Records) AAH 1, 255, 02/22/1916; AAH 1, 254, 05/25/1916.
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