

THE CONFEDERATE NAVAL WORKS OF GOOSE CREEK

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"From a casual glance at the map of Texas, a stranger might assume that the state was blessed with navigable streams. Such, of course, is not the case. Even though a number of southerly flowing rivers virtually span the state, none are navigable, except for short distances. The streams of North Texas have never influenced either transportation or development, nor have these watercourses been followed by immigrants or settlers" (Thrall 241). Furthermore, the long coastline of the state lacks a good natural harbor. Galveston and other towns, located along coastal waters too shallow to accommodate ocean-going vessels, saw no change until vast sums were spent for the dredging of channels and removal of sand bars. Even then, most ports served local territories only. Overcoming these combined negative elements, the Confederate States Naval Works at Goose Creek, Texas, and its owners, Thomas and John Chubb, proved significant in their support of the Confederate States naval war effort and became the embryo of the present day Texas shipping industry (Spratt).

Until completion of an adequate railroad system, the great majority of Texas settlements remained isolated, and necessity compelled them to satisfy needs locally or do without. The shipbuilding industry in Texas made its appearance due, in part, to the immediate problems of insufficient supply lines to early towns and settlements. Records do exist of a firm's having built craft for river navigation as early as 1845. In 1850, the Galveston and Brazos Navigation Company, among other companies of the same nature, became chartered for the primary purpose of opening canals and inland waterways from Galveston Bay eastward to Sabine Pass and westward to Matagorda Bay. On August 13, 1856, the Texas State Legislature passed the "River and Loan Bill" for the purpose of removing obstructions in navigable streams. "A total of \$300,000 was provided for improvement of the rivers and bays of Texas, and an engineer was assigned to assess the work and to receive bids from the contractors. The state was committed to a program of inland navigation . . . " (Winfield 20).

From these early starts, the Texas shipping industry remained quite modest. However, during the Civil War, the Confederate government encouraged Texans to engage in any kind of manufacturing venture that would contribute to military needs. This encouragement accounts for the increase in the number of industrial establishments and the rise in shipbuilding as an industry. Directly consequential to this new emphasis on industry, and the potential profits available to the astute entrepreneur, various shipyards began to develop in the northern Galveston Bay area. Out of these yards grew the Goose Creek operation, known as the Confederate Naval Works.

In the early 1850's, two brothers named Chubb purchased approximately 56 acres on the east bank at the mouth of Goose Creek from Mary Jones, wife of President Anson Jones. Jones' widow had received ownership upon her husband's death, following a long line of transactions dating back to the original Spanish land grants of William Scott. (Deed Records; Harris County, Texas). Although none of the original or early documents of this facility have surfaced to date, evidence reveals

that the Chubbs owned the property and built the shipyard during this period, following a natural progression of events in support of the Chubbs' investments in local marine business.

Originally from Charlestown, Massachusetts, Captain Thomas Henry Chubb and his brother John Chubb were pioneer residents of Galveston and early mariners of the Gulf Coast. The two brothers not only owned, built, and operated the Goose Creek yard, but probably impacted the young maritime history of Texas more than any other individuals. Second mate Thomas Chubb, of the federal brig *Silica*, made his first appearance in the state in 1830, landing in Galveston at age nineteen. John Chubb arrived in 1839. Satisfied enough with Galveston to make it his home, Thomas Chubb quickly identified himself with the shipping interest of the city, and for a period of more than fifty years, built, owned, or commanded various small craft, and engaged in coastal trade in this vicinity.

Captain Thomas Chubb breathed life into the early years of local and state shipping. Chubb, obtaining the rank of Commodore prior to his death in 1890, lived a very colorful and eventful life. At a very early age and against his father's wishes, Thomas rejected succession to his father's rope making trade, instead opting for a sailor's life. After running away from home, Thomas enlisted in the marine service, served on the United States cruiser *Constitution*, and thus embarked upon a career destined with honor and wealth for him. He also served in the United States Navy in 1827 as coxswain on the *USS Java*. Sailing around most of the world, Chubb ran slaves from the African gold coast to the West Indies, Boston, and New York, gaining great personal wealth in the process. At one time in his career, he even owned and managed the largest road circus of his time. Chubb built the Federal Street Theatre in Boston, opening with Fannie Esler (the world famous dancer), whom he personally brought over from London. He also built an elegant church edifice and presented it to the Baptist denomination of his native city. (History of Texas: The Lone Star State. Rosenberg Library. Galveston).

Chubb's exploits on the "high seas" during his war years brought greater recognition to the fledgling Texas shipping industry. Fighting in the Texas Revolution, Chubb became a close friend of General Sam Houston, who later appointed Thomas as Admiral of the Texas Navy. Thomas reciprocated by building a ship for the Confederacy and naming it the *Sam Houston* in honor of his friend. He enlisted in the Confederate States Army, Texas Marine Division, and received appointment in September of 1861 as Assistant Superintendent of Coastal Defenses of Texas. During the Civil War, Captain Thomas Chubb first commanded the Confederate gunboat *Liverpool*, which, armed with small mounted guns and carrying a crew of nine men, effectively worked in local harbor defense. Captured by the union after a gallant battle involving his second command, the *Royal Yacht*, Captain Chubb, condemned to be executed, was saved from this fate only by the intervention of Confederate President Jefferson Davis, who notified Federal authorities that he would "retaliate ten fold if the judgment was carried into execution." Later, Captain Chubb returned to Texas and became superintendent of the Confederate Naval Works at Goose Creek, Harris County, where he served at the close of the war (History of Texas: The Lone Star State).

The Goose Creek yards grew as a response to the war effort. As the southern states seceded, they confiscated northern ships in their harbors and, in some cases, bought and paid for ships belonging to northern as well as southern owners. A few guns were put aboard them, and with these makeshift vessels a Southern fleet readied for action even before the Confederate Navy began operating. Some of the

states encouraged privateering for a short while (the cause for which Captain Thomas Chubb nearly hanged), but state-owned ships should not be confused with privateers, which were privately owned vessels cruising under national authorization. The story of the state naval ships which operated for a short time early in 1861 remains an unwritten chapter in Confederate history. No complete list of them exists, for they had such brief careers and changed name and ownership so often that they are difficult to trace. Soon after the start of the Civil War a Confederate purchasing agent, dispatched to the Galveston Bay area for the purpose of funding and supporting the construction of new naval facilities and war ships, also incorporated existing shipyards into service for "the cause."

Copies of the register of seventeen vessels, constructed in the northern Galveston Bay area for the Confederate States Navy appear at the end of this essay. Although originally built in Leonville, Maryland, in the year 1855, the *Royal Yacht* also deserves inclusion in these papers due to the rebuilding and refitting of this vessel at Goose Creek. Although not nearly all inclusive, this evidence begins to suggest the significance of these shipbuilding facilities (Confederate States of America, Register of Vessels). All these ships and shipyards warrant individual investigation and recognition; however, of the known ships involved at the Goose Creek location, the *Royal Yacht*, *Henrietta*, *Marguereta*, and finally the *Bagdad*, no record of registration exists to date. Two additional schooners built by Thomas Chubb prior to the start of the Civil War, the *Altha Brooks* and the *Phoebe* (named after his first wife), received registration in the Confederate States Navy on March 28, 1863, and November 28, 1864, respectively (Confederate Register). Although these last two vessels were recorded as built in Galveston Bay, Harris County, the assumption of construction at Goose Creek seems valid since no records appear of the Chubbs' involvement in any other shipbuilding facilities (Official Records).

Various referred to as patrol boats, shallow-draught schooners, cotton-clad gun boats, or sloops, these vessels played an important part of the defense of coastal waterways and figured heavily in the Confederate strategy of blockade running. Captain Samuel F. Dupont, U.S.N., Union Blockade Strategy Board Chairman, later promoted to rank of Rear Admiral, commented: "They (the Confederates) seem to forget, so far as their rights and international interests are concerned, we have only to blockade the ports of entry, from the Chesapeake to Galveston . . ." (Civil War Naval Chronology). Obviously, he grossly underestimated the success of the blockade runners due, in part, to the incredible bravery exhibited by the ill-equipped, outnumbered Texas Marines. The ships ". . . were manned by adventurous skippers and crews who drove their little craft with cheerful recklessness" (Cochran 202).

The history of the Texas Marine Department during the Civil War is a colorful episode involving the combination of talent and improvisation to meet unrealistic demands. As President Lincoln dispatched a consort of blockaders to the Texas coast in 1861, a handful of engineers and carpenters huddled over drawing boards to discuss the outfitting of a Texas Navy. Preparations began to meet the heavily armed Union convoys that hovered at prominent ports along the Texas coast. The Texas Marine Department accepted a key role in the defense of the state during the war. Even though registered in the Confederate States Navy, all ships constructed in Texas during the Civil War, and those bought, confiscated or obtained through various other means, became inducted into and fell under the command of the Marines. The Marine Department, a division of the Confederate States Army, acting and operating independently of the Confederate States Navy, received their orders sole-

ly from the Secretary of the Navy, who, in turn, received instructions directly from Confederate President Jefferson Davis.

Approximately 385 miles of coastline, extending southward from the Louisiana border to the mouth of the Rio Grande, presented a maze of obstacles for the officers and men of the department. In the summer of 1861, Commander William W. Hunter, after reporting to the War Department on orders of the Secretary of the Navy, went to Texas to take charge of the naval defenses of Galveston. His subordination in this position came under Brigadier General Paul O. Hebert, commander of the Military Department of Texas. For more than a year Hunter worked with the Army in building up the fortifications of Galveston, establishing and training Texas Marines, and forming the Texas Navy (W.W. Hunter papers).

The design and structure of the vessels constructed at Goose Creek and other local shipyards was an integral part of the Texas Navy's effectiveness. Engineers and laborers toiled day and night at these local shipyards to provide a motley fleet of tramp vessels. The following description is typical of the vessels produced in these shipyards during the Civil War era:

Aside from their shallow draught, centerboard schooners had other advantages that made them suitable for blockade running in Gulf waters. They were generally very weatherly, and were good sailers to windward, for they could come about quickly and in a small circle, having so little keel. The short centerboard acted as a pivot on which they turned. When they were sailing free or off the wind, the center board was partly drawn up which lessened the friction. But the principal utility of the small craft was in crossing shallow areas where a deep draught vessel could not go. When the center board was drawn up, the draught of the schooner was reduced to suit the depth of the water and then let down again when the water deepened. (Cochran 202).

These fast, center board schooners, because of their shallow draught, could easily pass over the bars and shoals that lay at the entrances of many inlets and rivers of the Gulf States. Union cruisers, mostly deep-water vessels, could not get close enough to prevent the entrance or exit of light sailing craft. Once in open waters, these small ships, if sighted, faced the ever-present dangers of severe weather and overhauling by a Union man-of-war.

Two of the known ships recorded at Goose Creek, the *Royal Yacht* and the *Henrietta*, engaged in battles with superior Union naval forces. The most famous of these battles involved the CSS *Royal Yacht*, the US frigate *Santee*, and the US bark *William G. Anderson*. On November 8, 1861, about 2:30 a.m., the *Yacht*, surprised at anchor outside the Bolivar Point Lighthouse, was set afire by two launches from the USS *Santee*, "after a desperate encounter." Total casualties listed two Union dead and seven wounded, two Confederate dead or missing, and thirteen Confederate prisoners. Thomas Chubb and John Davidson (who later became Captain of the ship *Henrietta*, also built at Goose Creek) were both among the prisoners captured. Union officials thought the *Royal Yacht* totally destroyed; however, the CSS *Bayou City* had rescued the vessel, extinguishing the flames "minutes before the magazine would certainly have exploded" (Civil War Naval Chronology). The *Yacht*, immediately taken to the Goose Creek shipyard, remained there from November 11, 1861, until the end of October, 1862, receiving as many arms and equipment necessary to re-fit the schooner for harbor service. Acting as a blockade runner, the *Royal Yacht*, on April 15, 1863, fought and overhauled by the US bark *William G. Anderson* once again, finally received condemnation by the Key West prize court, along

with 97 bales of "her best cotton." The original log of the *Royal Yacht* survived and remains intact today (Official Records).

Few records exist of the sloop *CSS Henrietta* after its construction at Goose Creek and registration in Galveston; however, this vessel became involved in a skirmish on July 1, 1864. The *USS Merrimac* with Acting Lieutenant W. Budd, captured the blockade runner at sea, west of Tampa, Florida, with a cargo of cotton. All six crew members, including Captain John Davidson, were taken prisoner.

The schooners *Marguereta*, *Bagdad*, *Altha Brooks* and *Phoebe* participated in the struggle against the Union Navy in much the same way as the *Royal Yacht* and the *Henrietta*. Additional significant records regarding these vessels do not appear, except for the accounts of their construction at Goose Creek. Since no other record of a ship under the same name surfaced during research, a report on what seems the *Bagdad* of Goose Creek, left Liverpool, England, for Matamoros, Mexico, on February 3, 1864. The precise purpose of this vessel on such a voyage remains a mystery because these non ocean-going vessels would have encountered many problems while crossing the Atlantic Ocean (Official Records).

No listing of Confederate ships or shipbuilding facilities can be considered definitive because the histories of many remain incomplete statistically and operationally. Exhaustive research produces meager returns or at best conflicting data. Great difficulties arise in attempts to find totally reliable information; records have been destroyed, or those dispersed among museums and private individuals, often distort and hide crucial facts.

After the War Between the States, Thomas Chubb returned to Galveston and served as Harbor Master until shortly before his death. He continued operations at the Goose Creek shipyard with his brother John, building ships for the federal government and private marine industry until 1869. Thomas Chubb married Mrs. Martha Sturgis in 1869. Apparently, his wedding led him to decide to concentrate his energies on the duties of Harbor Master at Galveston, foregoing the business at the Goose Creek shipyard. One example of problems often encountered in historical research surfaced here when conflicting documents reported Chubb building his last vessel in 1891; his obituary appeared in 1890. The last ship built by the Chubbs, the *Coquette* in 1891, was probably built by John Chubb since evidence indicates that Thomas disassociated himself from the shipbuilding industry around the year 1869 (construction of the *Coquette*, at Goose Creek, remains unverifiable). The *Galveston Daily News* interviewed an aging master carpenter near the turn of the century, supplying an interesting account of life and work at the Goose Creek shipyard at that time (Ben Stewart's Scrapbook).

Details seem extremely sketchy concerning the eventual demise of the Goose Creek shipyard; nonetheless, evidence of competition in the shipping industry, along with continually rising expenses in keeping inland waterways navigable, created a need for deeper draught vessels to carry increasingly heavier payloads. Record depths of vessels passing over the sand bars of Galveston Bay, reported almost daily by The *Galveston Daily News*, helped create a fervor in Galveston residents after the war that ultimately aided the Port of Galveston in becoming a major deep water port. Apparently, these combined factors contributed to the downfall of all local inland shipping.

Following the gradual termination of operations at the Goose Creek shipyard beginning in 1869, "... the Gaillard family settled on the East bank of Goose Creek, near its mouth, and began acquiring considerable land holdings." These purchases included the property of the shipyard location. "A shipping point, known as

Gaillard's Landing, established at this point, served the shipping industry for many years. The Gaillard homesite was only a short distance east of the Landing" (Historical Sites and Markers). The Gaillard property eventually became the center of oil activity in the area, later known as the Goose Creek Oil Field. The Busch Landing later appeared on the east bank of Goose Creek, approximately one mile north of the Gaillard Landing. After the completion of a bridge on the West Main, a ferry carried people, equipment and traffic between the oil field and the Humble Refinery site until it was abandoned.

Confusion, discrepancies, incongruities and contradictions raise numerous questions and leave them disappointingly unanswered or unanswerable. Although a wealth of information on this particular subject has surfaced, necessity dictates speculations, conclusions, and the "piece-milling" of scattered materials, due directly to regrettable shortages of historical details and documentation. Valuable lessons learned here are much more than history instruction. The need for frequent recordings, especially accurate and unbiased (if possible), becomes "heir apparent" should people ever begin to experience their heritage rather than remain partially interested observers. The responsibility of preserving history should not rest solely with the scholarly few, but should fall upon the shoulders of the individual who helps recreate that history, lending superior aid to future generations of historically inquisitive minds.

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Looking at East Bank of mouth of Goose Creek. 1-27-90.



en & where Surrendered

CONFEDERATE STATES OF AMERICA.

REGISTER OF VESSELS.

In Pursuance of existing Laws and an Act of the CONGRESS of the Confederate States of America, entitled "an act to provide for the Registration of Vessels owned in whole or in part by the Citizens of the Confederate States."

Thos. A. Chubb of Galveston County, Texas

having taken or subscribed the Oath required by Law and having

he is the

Register.

No. 34

only owner of the Ship or Vessel called the Phaeton of Galveston whereof Thos. A. Chubb is at present Master and is a citizen of the Confederate States.

and that the said Ship or Vessel was built in Harris County Texas -

And F. Farnham

having certified that the said Ship or Vessel Phaeton has one deck and two masts and that her length is fifty feet two inches her breadth eight feet two inches her depth four feet two inches and that she measures forty tons, that she is a steamer has no gallery and no head.

A. B. Butler
Deputy Coll.

And the said Thos. A. Chubb having agreed to the description and admeasurement above specified, and sufficient security having been given according to Law, the said Phaeton has been duly registered at the Port of Galveston.

Given under my Hand and Seal at the Port of Galveston this 28th day of November One Thousand Eight Hundred and Eighty Five.