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A NAVAL
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VINCENNES



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A NAVAL HISTORY *of*
VINCENNES, INDIANA

By
Curtis G. Shake

Published by the Citizens Committee on the Participation of the City of Vincennes in the Launching of the Cruiser Vincennes, at Quincy, Massachusetts, May 21, 1936. A Limited Edition of 2000 Copies.



1936



DEDICATION

The CITY OF VINCENNES takes pride in dedicating this booklet to the memory of her sons who have served with honor to themselves and with credit to her in the Navy of the United States.



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PREFACE

THE READER into whose hands this booklet may chance to fall will no doubt be struck with surprise to learn that a city with a population of less than 20,000, located 500 miles from the sea, should have a naval history worthy of mention. However, the writer has no apology for the title selected, though the use of the materials available leaves much to be desired.

Vincennes has the unique distinction of having furnished to the United States navy a vice admiral, a rear admiral and a number of other officers of lesser rank. The city also takes pardonable pride in the fact that the government has twice honored it by giving its name to a warship. One of these, the sloop Vincennes, was, in its prime, the fastest sailing ship in the navy. It was also the first American naval vessel to circumnavigate the globe, the flagship of the expedition that resulted in the discovery of the Antarctic continent, and one of the first two United States naval vessels to enter a Japanese port. The other ship named for the City of Vincennes, is a heavy cruiser now (1936) under construction at Quincy, Mass.

The writer offers as his excuse for this publication the fact that it constitutes the first attempt that has been made, so far as he has been able to learn, to record the facts pertaining to this interesting phase of the history of Vincennes.

THE AUTHOR.

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THE VISIT OF THE WILLING

THE ONLY ship of war to actually visit Vincennes was in connection with the celebrated campaign of Col. George Rogers Clark, during the war of the Revolution.

Clark took the town of Kaskaskia on the Mississippi River by surprise and captured it from the British without an engagement on July 4, 1778. The reduction of Vincennes was not so simple a matter, however. Fort Sackville had, in the meantime, been re-built and amply garrisoned under the personal command of Gen. Henry Hamilton, Governor of the Detroit district. Worse yet, between Kaskaskia and Vincennes lay 150 miles of flooded wilderness that had to be crossed by Clark and his little army in winter.

To accomplish his purposes Col. Clark planned a naval as well as a military campaign against Vincennes. He purchased a large Mississippi river boat at Kaskaskia and converted it into a galley or batteau. This boat was named the *Willing*, in honor of John Willing of Pennsylvania, who was agent of the United States in the lower Mississippi valley, and placed under the command of John Rogers, a cousin of Col. Clark's.

Manned with a crew of forty-six and armed with four large swivels and two four-pounders, the *Willing* left Kaskaskia in advance of Clark's little army, with instructions to proceed down the Mississippi and up the Ohio and Wabash rivers to a point ten leagues below Vincennes, where it was to stand-by until the arrival of the land forces. It was then to move up to Vincennes and bombard Fort Sackville from the river simultaneously with the military attack.

Due to the swift currents of the Ohio and Wabash rivers, which were at flood stage, the *Willing* did not make the speed anticipated. When, finally, on February 27, 1779, it arrived at Vincennes, the members of its crew learned, much to their mortification, that Fort Sackville had surrendered two days before.

Had Clark's plans worked out as he conceived them, the capture of Vincennes would have been recorded in history as a naval as well as a military victory.



THE SLOOP-OF-WAR VINCENNES

The sloop-of-war Vincennes, launched at New York in 1826, well deserves to be listed among the famous ships of the United States navy. Put to sea after the War of 1812 and practically obsolete by the time of the Civil War, she never had an opportunity to prove her worth as a fighting craft. Her contribution to the nation's maritime history was, for the most part, confined to the pursuits of peace, but her service in that regard was noteworthy and distinguished.

The Vincennes was a three-masted sailing vessel with a capacity of 700 tons and a complement of 170 officers and men. Her length was 127 feet and her beam measured 33.9 feet. Her maximum draft was 16.5 feet and her rated speed 18 knots per hour. She was, in her prime, the fastest sailing vessel in the American navy. Her cost was \$119,175—a small sum in comparison with the cost of a modern steel cruiser.

During 1829-1830 the Vincennes circumnavigated the globe, the first U. S. naval vessel to accomplish that feat. In 1835 she visited the island of Guam, now an important American naval base, the first naval vessel to call there.

Perhaps the most important service rendered by the sloop Vincennes was as flagship of Commodore Charles Wilkes' famous exploring expedition. This history-making voyage was authorized by an Act of Congress in 1836. Commodore Wilkes was equipped with two sloops-of-war, a brig, a storeship, and two tenders. In the crew were naturalists, botanists, taxidermists, a mineralogist, and a philologist. The expedition got under way off Hampton Roads, Virginia, August 18th, 1838, after President Van Buren and his cabinet had been entertained aboard the Vincennes.

For four long and eventful years the Vincennes and her sister ships sailed the great deep, visiting strange islands in the South Seas and discovering many that were theretofore unknown to civilized nations. A distinguished American naval officer of high rank recently remarked that "if the officers of the Vincennes had emulated the absent minded and philanthropic British naval officers and hoisted a few flags on loose places we might have had some more naval bases to let slip at disarmament conferences."

The outstanding accomplishment of the Wilkes expedition took place, however, on January 19th, 1840, when it discovered the existence of the Antarctic continent. This occurred just one day before the continent was sighted by Dumont d'Urville, a French explorer, at another point 400 miles away. The significance attached to the discovery of the new continent



and the part played in that achievement by the sloop Vincennes is well illustrated by a song written by a member of the crew and sung on the homeward cruise:

Huzza, my boys! The ship Vincennes
Comes proudly o'er the wave;
Bold Captain Wilkes in her command,
Two hundred seamen brave.

With joyful hearts and hopes all bright
These Yankee sailors come,
And glorious, full, meridian light
Shines on the passage home.

"These are my sons," bright Freedom cries,
"From the Antarctic sea."
And proudly from our mizzen flies
The stars of Liberty.

"These are the tars that dared explore
The new Antarctic world,
And nobly on the frozen shore
Columbia's flag unfurled."

Let England boast her Cook and Ross,
And other chiefs of fame;
They all must stand like mounds of dross
Beside our captain's name.

On Fame's broad pillar, hand in hand,
Shall stand in bold relief
O'er all the rest of all the land,
Columbus and our chief.

Then speed thee on, our gallant ship,
And homeward bear thy tars;
While proudly glitters from thy peak
Columbia's flag of stars.

The scientific specimens gathered by the Wilkes expedition formed the basis for the magnificent collection of the Smithsonian Institution at Washington.

Another historic episode in which the Vincennes played an important part occurred in 1846. For many years the United States had sought in vain to establish trade relations with the Japanese Empire. From time immemorial the government of the Rising Sun had stubbornly refused all commercial intercourse with the outside world. Repeated attempts on the part of European nations, as well as the United States, to penetrate this trade barrier had met with stern rebuffs. Finally, in 1846, Captain James

Biddle, in command of the men-of-war Vincennes and Columbus, was dispatched to Japan with specific instructions to press claims for American recognition but under no circumstances to resort to force. The convoy reached Jeddo, or Yeddo, bay, now known to the world as Tokio, on July 20th, 1846. For nine days Captain Biddle sought in vain to establish amicable relations but the Japanese, though extremely polite, refused to permit the unwelcome visitors to land. On the 29th, the Vincennes and Columbus, the first American naval vessels ever to enter a Japanese port, departed. Eight years later Commodore Matthew C. Perry succeeded in negotiating a treaty that allowed American vessels to enter certain Japanese ports for trade and thus began the rapid development of Japan as a world power.

From 1849 to 1852 the Vincennes was assigned to the exploration of the Pacific Ocean. During this service she was 586 days at sea and sailed 62,520 miles. Speaking of this service her commanding officer reported that she behaved well under all circumstances and added that "in a head sea, and in a strong breeze, she can compete with any vessel."

In 1854 the Vincennes figured prominently in one of the unsolved mysteries of the sea. On September 12th of that year she set sail from Hong Kong in company with the two-masted brig, U. S. S. Porpoise, for a survey of the South Seas Islands. On September 21st, the two ships became separated in a dense fog in mid-channel between China and Formosa. The Porpoise, carrying a crew of 69 men under command of Lieut. William King Bridge, was never heard from again. Several warships spent nearly a year in searching for her, but no trace of the ill-fated vessel was ever found. In 1855 the Vincennes, under command of Commander John Rodgers, headed an official expedition into the Arctic regions, penetrating further north in the direction of Wrangel Land than white men had ever done before.

In 1856 the Vincennes completed her second circumnavigation of the globe.

By the time of the Civil War the Vincennes was approaching the end of her usefulness. Sailships were rapidly giving way to steam-propelled vessels.

On October 12th, 1861, the Vincennes was attacked at the mouth of the Mississippi by the Confederate ship *Manassas*, grounded, and was abandoned by her crew. A slow match was set to her magazine but it failed to explode. The next day the crew returned aboard and succeeded in floating her, after throwing over all her guns and shot. The last active

service of the old sloop was with the West Gulf Blockading Squadron.

On August 28th, 1865, the Vincennes was ordered placed in ordinary at Boston, and on October 5th, 1867 she was sold at public sale for \$8,600 by Messrs. Harris & Phinney, auctioneers for the navy department.

Thus, after forty years of useful and eventful service, came to an end the official career of the U. S. Sloop-of-War Vincennes. Who acquired her or to what use she was put is unknown to the writer. Perhaps she was converted into a fishing smack or a tramp freighter, and most likely she sleeps somewhere in Davy Jones' locker, beneath the restless waves she once so proudly rode.

The sloop Vincennes occupies an interesting place in the traditions, literature and art pertaining to the United States Navy. It seems proper to make mention of some of the more important items of this memorabilia in connection with this sketch.

In 1833 C. S. Stewart, A. M., a chaplain in the naval service, published at New York two volumes of travels under the title, "A Visit to the South Seas in the U. States Ship Vincennes, During the Years 1829 and 1830."

The official narrative of the U. S. exploring expedition under Commodore Charles Wilkes was published under that title in five volumes and an atlas at Philadelphia in 1845. Volume two of this work contains an excellent engraving of the Vincennes by C. A. Jewett. Another book relating to the same subject, by John S. Jenkins, was published at Peoria, Illinois, in 1852.

In 1890 Charles Erskine, who, as a mere lad, had been a member of the crew of the Vincennes during the Wilkes expedition, published, "Twenty Years Before the Mast." This is a thrilling story of sea adventure, much enjoyed by young men and boys of a generation ago.

In the Peabody Museum at Salem, Massachusetts, hangs an oil painting by an unknown artist showing the Vincennes surrounded by icebergs as she stood by in Disappointment Bay, at the discovery of the Antarctic Continent in 1840.

N. Currier, who styled himself "print maker to the American people," and whose works are much sought after by collectors, published a beautiful color lithograph over the title, "The U. S. Sloop-of-War Vincennes, 20 Guns," in 1846.

In 1846 Wagner & McGingan of Philadelphia published two prints after sketches drawn by John Eastley, showing the U. S. S. Vincennes and Columbus at anchor in and departing from Jeddo Bay. These pictures are extremely interesting for the opportunity they afford of comparing American ships of the period with the crude craft of the Japanese.



VINCENNES NAVAL OFFICERS

CONSIDERING its size and location the City of Vincennes has furnished to the nation an unusually large number of naval officers. The list that follows is probably incomplete.

The underlying reason, if there is any, for the large number of young Vincennes men who have chosen naval careers would make an interesting sociological study, but this is beyond the scope of what the writer has undertaken to do. That field is left, undisturbed, for someone else to pursue.



VICE ADMIRAL ALBERT PARKER NIBLACK.

Born at Vincennes July 25, 1859. Son of William E. Niblack, member of Congress and Judge of the Supreme Court of Indiana. Educated at Vincennes University and United States Naval Academy, graduating from latter in 1880. From 1884-'88, engaged in survey and exploration in Alaska. Flag Lieutenant, North Atlantic Squadron, 1893-'94. Inspector of naval militia, 1895-'96. Writer and lecturer at Naval War College, 1893-'96. Served as naval attache at Berlin, Rome and Vienna, also in Argentina, Brazil and Chile. Participated in Spanish-American War, Filipino Insurrection and Boxer campaign. Commanded U. S. S. Iroquois, 1904-'06, the U. S. S. Tacoma, 1910, and the U. S. S. Michigan, 1914. Graduated from Naval War College, 1916. Promoted to commander 1907, rear admiral, 1917, and vice admiral, 1921. In command of U. S. naval forces based at Gibraltar, 1917, and in the Mediterranean in 1919. Director of Naval Intelligence, 1919-'20. Commander U. S. naval forces in Europe, 1920-'21. Author of "The Coast Indians of Alaska and Northern British Columbia," 1889, "Why Wars Come," 1922. Awarded U. S. Distinguished Service Medal; Commander of the Royal Victorian Order, Companion of St. Michael and St. George, and Knight Commander of St. Michael and St. George by Great Britain; Commander of the Legion of Honor by France; Grand Officer of the Avis by Portugal; Commander of St. Maurice and St. Lazarus by Italy; White Eagle, Second Class (Military) and White Eagle, First Class (Civil) by Serbia; Order of the Sacred Treasure by Japan; Grand Officer Ouissam Alonite by the Sultan of Morocco; and Grand Officer of Niftar Ichitar by the Bey of Tunis. Retired 1923. Died August 20, 1929. Buried at Arlington.





REAR ADMIRAL NATHANIEL REILLY USHER

Born at Vincennes, Indiana, April 7, 1855. Preliminary education under Dr. R. M. Chapman, president of Vincennes University. Appointed to United States Naval Academy and graduated in 1875. Commissioned an ensign in 1876, and through the grades to rear admiral in 1911. Commanded the U. S. S. Ericsson in the Spanish-American War. With the General Board of the Navy Department, 1903-'04 and the Bureau of Navigation, 1904-'06. Commanded the U. S. S. St. Louis, 1906-'08. President of the Naval Examining and Retiring Boards, 1911-'12. Commanded the 4th Division of the Atlantic fleet, 1912, the 2nd Division, 1912-'13, the 3rd Division, 1913-'14. Commanded the New York Navy Yard, 1914-'18. Retired 1919. Awarded the Navy Cross for services during World War; Commander of the Legion of Honor of France. Died January 8, 1931. Buried at Arlington National Cemetery.

CAPTAIN RICHARD L. LAW

Born at Vincennes, December 12, 1824. Appointed to the Navy February 17, 1841. Promoted to Midshipman, 1847; Lieutenant, 1855; Lieutenant Commander, 1862; Commander, 1866; Captain, 1877. Retired, 1886. Commanded the "Clifton" during the Civil War. Died June 8, 1891.

COMMANDER FRANK CAREY McCORD

Born in Vincennes, August 2, 1890. Appointed to Naval Academy, 1907, graduated, 1911. Commissioned Ensign, 1912; Lieutenant, 1917; Lieutenant Commander, 1921; Commander, 1931. Assigned to the command of the dirigible, U. S. S. Akron, 1932. Died at sea off the coast of New Jersey, in the crash of the Akron, April 4, 1933. Buried at Arlington. His last command to his crew to "Stand by for a crash!" will long be remembered as indicative of the cool courage of the men in the naval air service.

LIEUTENANT COMMANDER ALBERT GALLATIN CALDWELL

Born at Vincennes. Appointed to Naval Academy, 1861. Promoted to Master, 1866; Lieutenant, 1868; Lieutenant Commander, 1868. Died (Date Unknown).

PAYMASTER EDWARD C. DORAN

Born in Pennsylvania, December 25, 1820. Appointed to U. S. Navy from Vincennes, 1845. With Perry's Expedition to Japan, 1851-'54. Fleet paymaster, North Pacific Squadron, 1868-'69. On special duty at Paris Exposition, 1878. Died October 30, 1883.



LIEUTENANT COMMANDER FRANCIS EMERSON GREENE

Born in Louisville, Kentucky, July 1, 1853. Appointed a midshipman from Vincennes, on recommendation of Hon. W. E. Niblack, 1867. Graduated from Naval Academy, 1871; Promoted to Ensign 1872; Master, 1876; Lieutenant, 1882; Lieutenant Commander, 1899. Died on board U. S. S. Montgomery at Montevideo, Uruguay, January 10, 1900.

LIEUTENANT ALLEN TINDOLPH AGNEW

Born in Vincennes, July 8, 1891. Appointed Lieutenant (junior grade) Medical Corps, U. S. Naval Reserve, April 11, 1917; discharged, September 5, 1917. Reappointed, with rank of Lieutenant, February 1, 1918. Resigned October 29, 1919. Died September 28, 1935.

LIEUTENANT OLIVER EDWARD WHITE

Born at Vincennes December 12, 1908. Graduated from local high school, 1925. Spent one year at Rose Polytechnic Institute, and appointed to Naval Academy, 1926. Graduated and commissioned a Lieutenant, 1931. Killed in plane accident off Point Loma, Calif., March 17, 1936. Body lost at sea.

Vincennes is represented at the present time by three commissioned officers in the active service of the United States Navy. These young men, alumni of the local high school, are likewise graduates of the Naval Academy at Annapolis. Sketches of their careers follow:

LIEUTENANT COMMANDER FRANCIS MARLIN MAILE

Born in Vincennes, January 1, 1892. Appointed Midshipman to Naval Academy, 1911. Commissioned Ensign, 1915; Lieutenant, junior grade, 1918; Lieutenant, 1920; Lieutenant Commander, 1926. Detailed as Assistant Naval Attache, American Embassy, Berlin, Germany, 1936.

LIEUTENANT MORRIS JAMES WESTFALL

Born in Vincennes, April 17, 1897. Appointed Midshipman to Naval Academy, 1917. Commissioned Ensign, 1921; Lieutenant, junior grade, 1924; Lieutenant, 1927. Attached to Post Graduate School, Naval Academy, Annapolis, Md., since 1933.

LIEUTENANT NICHOLAS AUGUST DRAIM

Born in Vincennes, January 18, 1901. Appointed Midshipman to Naval Academy, 1918. Commissioned Ensign, 1922; Lieutenant, junior grade, 1925; Lieutenant, 1928. On aeronautical engineering duty, Navy Department, Washington, 1936.



THE CRUISER VINCENNES

The heavy cruiser Vincennes, (CA44) the second U. S. naval vessel to carry that name, is one of nine ships of the same class authorized by an Act of Congress, June 16, 1933. The contract for her construction was awarded to the Bethlehem Shipbuilding Corporation, Ltd., August 3, 1933. Her keel was laid at the Fore River Yard, Quincy, Mass., January 2, 1934.

The cruiser will cost \$11,720,000. Her displacement will be 10,000 tons, and her designed speed 32.5 knots per hour. She will carry nine 8-inch and eight 5-inch guns.

Mr. Harry E. Gould, General Manager of the Bethlehem Shipbuilding Corporation, has taken a special interest in keeping the people of Vincennes informed as to the progress of the construction of the new cruiser.

On February 25, 1936, Miss Harriet Virginia Kimmell, the charming daughter of Hon. Joseph W. Kimmell, Mayor of Vincennes, was officially designated by the Acting Secretary of the Navy as sponsor of the new Vincennes, the launching of which is scheduled to take place on May 21, 1936. For this traditional ceremony Miss Kimmell will make use of a bottle of rare champagne sent to America for that specific purpose by Monsieur Leon Bonvoisin, Chevalier de la Legion d'Honneur, Mayor of Vincennes, France.

The citizens of Vincennes are also taking steps to present an appropriate sterling silver tea service for the Captain's quarters of the new cruiser. The presentation of this gift will take place when the ship is commissioned. In addition, a number of radios will be supplied for the use of the crew, and the school children of the city will present to the ship a fine American flag.

The Vincennes is scheduled for completion January 2, 1937. She will bear an honored name and will, no doubt, play an important part in our nation's "first line of defense."



“SWEETHEARTS AND WIVES”

For many years it has been a tradition for the men in the naval service of the United States, wherever they may be assembled on New Year's day, to sing “Sweethearts and Wives,” as a toast to their loved ones at home. This beautiful song was written by “Hub” Smith, a native son of old Vincennes.

Hubbard Taylor Smith was born March 29th, 1853. Upon graduating from Vincennes University, he went to Washington, D. C., where he became private secretary to John W. Foster, Secretary of State, in 1892. Later, he entered the diplomatic service and held many important posts in various parts of the world. He distinguished himself during the Boxer uprising in China. His career was cut short by his death which occurred at Genoa on February 10, 1903.

“Hub” Smith will be best remembered, however, as the composer of a number of delightful songs. Among these are, “Listen to My Tale of Woe,” “Swinging on the Grape Vine Swing,” “Johnny Jones and His Sister Sue,” and “Sweethearts and Wives.” The words of the last mentioned follow:

“Now, comrades, fill your glasses and cease each merry jest.
Let every one among you think of her whom he loves best.
From Maine to California, in lands far off and near,
God bless the girls who love us, the girls our hearts hold dear.

CHORUS

“Sweethearts and wives, wherever we may roam,
Back fly our thoughts to you and home.
Sweethearts and wives, fond hearts and true,
With tear dimmed eyes we drink to you.

“Make it a bumper, comrades, and each one standing here
Can whisper above his glass, the name he holds most dear.
While as we drink in silence, across the ocean foam,
Our loving greetings fly tonight, we drink to those at home.”



A LOCAL NAVAL TRADITION

Due to the unusual interest in matters pertaining to the United States Navy in Vincennes, it has been a custom there for many years to carry out a distinctive program in honor of the city's sailor dead on each Memorial Day (May 30th). These ceremonies usually embrace patriotic music reminiscent of the nation's naval history, an appropriate address emphasizing the part played by the sons of Vincennes in naval achievements of the past, and the casting of flowers into the historic Wabash as a silent tribute in memoriam.

In the past these ceremonies were held on the crude bridge that spanned the river at Vincennes. However, the completion of the imposing George Rogers Clark Memorial and Lincoln Memorial Bridge, adjacent thereto, now provide a beautiful and impressive setting. To one who is fortunate enough to attend one of these ceremonies on a May afternoon, when the setting sun is casting flickering shadows on the rippling waters of the Wabash, there is presented a picture long to be remembered.



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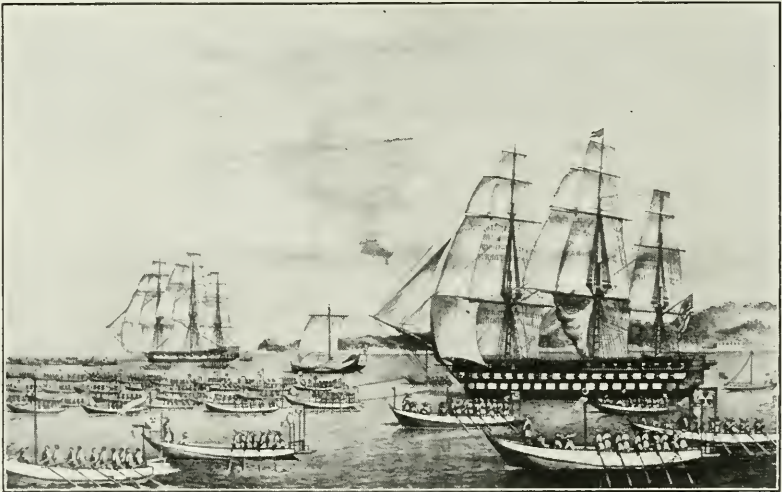


The Sloop Vincennes in Disappointment Bay, at the Discovery of the Antarctic Continent, January 19, 1840.

(From an oil painting by an unknown artist, in the Peabody Museum, Salem, Mass.)



The U. S. S. Columbus and Vincennes in Japan



*Departure of the U. S. S. Columbus and Vincennes from Jeddo Bay,
July 19, 1846.*

(From lithographs after sketches drawn by John Eastley, published by Wagner & McGingon, Philadelphia, 1846.)



(Copyright Harris & Ewing)

Vice Admiral Albert Parker Niblack
(1859 - 1929)

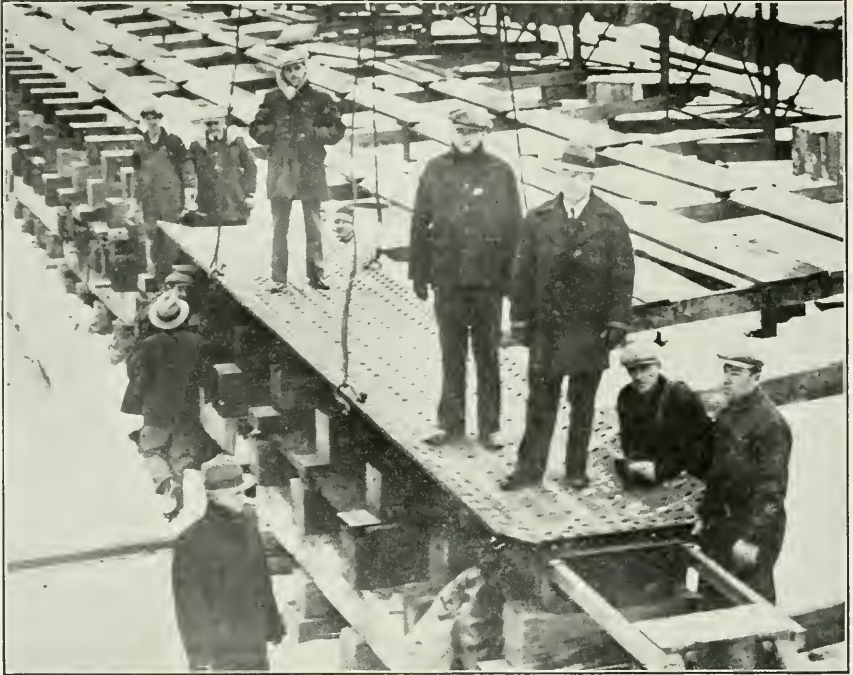


*Rear Admiral Nathaniel Reilly Usher
(1855 - 1931)*



(Copyright Harris & Ewing)

Commander Frank Carey McCord
(1890 - 1933)



*Laying the Keel of the U. S. Cruiser Vincennes, at Fore River Plant
of the Bethlehem Shipbuilding Corporation, Ltd., Quincy, Mass.,
January 2, 1934*



*Miss Harriet Virginia Kimmell
Sponsor of the Cruiser Vincennes*



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