



Engraving of RADM Shubrick from an 1876 edition of *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*.

By George Worthylake

CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD RADM WILLIAM SHUBRICK



William Branford Shubrick was born in 1790 on the Belvedere plantation on Bull Island, SC. He was the ninth child of a family of sixteen. The island derived its name from Governor Bull. At the time of Shubrick's birth, the island was owned by his father, Colonel Thomas Shubrick, who had distinguished himself during the Revolutionary War. Belvedere plantation grew the prized "sea island" cotton of South Carolina. In 1852, as the first Chairman of the Lighthouse Board, William Shubrick authorized the construction of a lighthouse on Bull Island known as the Bull's Bay Light Station.

In 1806, at the age of 16, William Shubrick received his warrant as a midshipman and was assigned to the Navy vessel *Wasp*, under the command of Captain Smith. The *Wasp* was a beautiful sloop of 18 guns.

During this era of the 19th century, our

fledgling country was entering a period of rapid expansion. Settlers were starting to migrate to the midwest and the merchant fleet was growing by leaps and bounds. It had already reached 1,200,000 tons. Vessels plied our waterways and began trading aboard. Sadly, the American Navy left a lot to be desired. In 1806, America didn't possess a single ship of the line – substantial warships that carried at least 60 guns. The government had developed a policy of trying to defend our vast coast of bays, harbors and rivers with small gunboats. Our only foreign naval station consisted of a squadron of two or three cruisers protecting our merchant ships from pirates along the Barbary Coast of the Mediterranean. Both the French and British sailed their vessels along the mouths of our harbors, and the British boarded our ships and pressed our seamen into their service. This action would eventually result in the War of 1812.

Still, even with the lack of support of our government, the spirit of our population was

decidedly maritime. The life of the sailor was a strong attraction to the youth of the country. Young men signed on with merchantmen, whaling ships and some elected to join our rag-tag Navy. The success of the recently ended, four-year war with Tripoli attracted many to the Navy.

On June 10, 1807, the *Wasp* sailed for England bearing dispatches. Shortly after entering British waters the *Wasp* received the news that the American vessel *Chesapeake* had surrendered to the British ship *Leopard*. This insult to our flag incensed American sailors and immediate steps were taken to make ready for war, although it would be five more years before war was declared between American and England.

In October of 1807 the American squadron returned to Boston. Most Navy vessels, including *Wasp*, engaged in enforcing the embargo. During this period crews were constantly trained in navigation and weapons. The extensive training and preparedness would later

serve our Navy well during the War of 1812. In later years Shubrick wrote, "Not only the commander, Captain Lawrence, but all the officers were of high character, and of such a school and at such a time our young aspirant was on the way to learn his duty."

At the outbreak of the War of 1812, England had 1,060 registered vessels and was the most powerful naval force in the world. England actually had more vessels than all the navies of Europe combined. America had but seventeen vessels of war to protect our merchant ships and guard over 2,000 miles of coastline. Nine of these vessels were smaller than the frigate class. There were also many gunboats, but they were certainly no match for a British ship of the line.

After war was declared, Shubrick sailed on the *Homet* and witnessed the engagement between the American frigate *Constitution* and the British ship *Belvidera*, which eventually escaped. In January 1813, Shubrick was promoted to Lieutenant and transferred to the *Constellation*, which was being fitted out at Washington. Once ready for sea, the ship sailed to Craney Island, in lower Chesapeake Bay, to protect the fortifications being constructed at that point.

The British maintained a blockade of twenty ships of the line in Chesapeake Bay to the east of Hampton Roads. On January 18, three British vessels entered the Roads. One, the *Junon*, destroyed several small American vessels. On the 20th, a flotilla of 15 gunboats, one under LT Shubrick, attacked the *Junon*, firing numerous shells at the ship before fire was returned. The flotilla was close to capturing the British vessel when two other British vessels came to her rescue. The American vessels were signaled to withdraw, but Shubrick responded slowly to the order and continued to blaze away at the enemy. Finally, a specific signal was sent for him to withdraw and to take a disabled gunboat in tow.

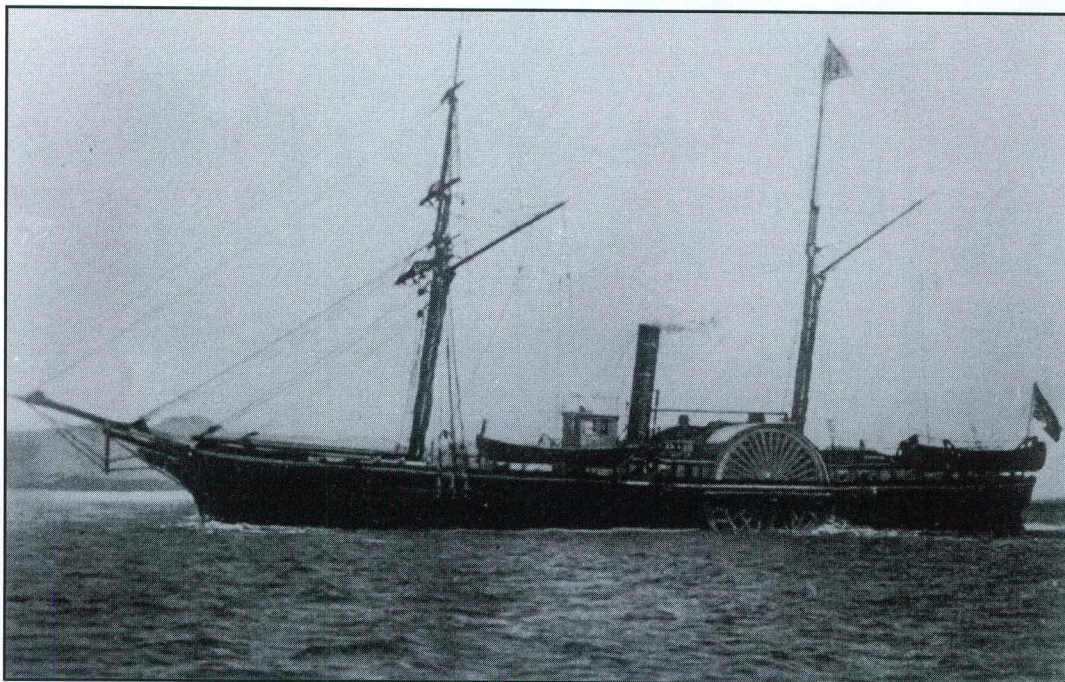
On the next flood tide, the British sent 14 vessels into Hampton Roads and to the mouth of the James River and prepared to send a large contingent of boats up the river. Shubrick and two other lieutenants, and 100 seamen, were ordered to the fortifications of Craney Island. Manning the guns, the Americans repulsed the British attack. But the *Constellation* remained blockaded for the duration of the war. Shubrick, eager for action, requested a transfer and was sent to Boston where he was assigned to the *Constitution*,

which, by now, was affectionately known as "Old Ironsides."

In February 1815, the *Constitution* was cruising between Portugal and the Cape Verde Islands when she became engaged with two British vessels, the *Cyane* and *Levant*. Employing outstanding seamanship, Old Ironsides' commander, Captain Stewart, skillfully maneuvered between the two ships and delivered devastating broadsides that led to both British ships surrendering. Lieutenant Shubrick was sent to the *Levant* to take possession.

In September 1815, Shubrick married Harriet Wethered; their union would last 58 years.

He remained in the Navy during the years of peace following the War of 1812. He sailed to the Mediterranean as flag LT to Commodore Hull. In 1820 he received his commission as commander. In 1829 he was assigned command of the vessel *Lexington* and ordered to cruise the coast of Labrador to protect American fishing vessels. At the close of the fishing season he was directed to sail to the West Indies and bring home the body of Commodore Perry. William Shubrick was promoted to captain in 1831.



The vessel *Shubrick* was a handsome side-wheel ship. In addition to the three guns on board, she was rigged with a hot water cannon to fend off boarding attempts by hostile Indians. Three furnaces heated a boiler 12 feet long and 11 feet in diameter that powered a single-expansion steam engine. Rated at 284 horsepower, the *Shubrick* could turn her 19-foot paddle wheels at 20 revolutions per minute, fast enough to make eight knots. In calm water and with good trim, she was reported to have made 12 knots on occasion.

During the 1830s he served in various shore commands (such as the ordinance department) with such distinction that he was promoted to commodore in 1839 and assigned to command the West India squadron. In 1844, he was assigned Commander of the Navy Yard at Norfolk.

May 13, 1846, war was declared on Mexico and Shubrick offered his services. He was assigned to the Pacific Coast. The Secretary of the Navy wrote, "Commodore – You will hold yourself in readiness to proceed in the United States ship *Independence* to the Pacific, for the command of the United States naval forces on that station."

There was some confusion with orders as the Secretary of Navy also assigned Commodore Biddle to command the Pacific forces. As Biddle was senior to Shubrick, he assumed command, and Shubrick sailed immediately from Valparaiso, Chili. He arrived at Monterey, California in just eight days. In fact, he had brought the *Independence* from Boston, around Cape Horn, to California in a remarkable 148 days. Commodore Biddle relinquished command shortly after Shubrick arrived. After assuming command of the Pacific forces, Shubrick sailed to Mexico aboard the *Independence* in company with the vessels *Congress*, *Portsmouth* and *Cyane*.

At Mazatlan, Mexico, Shubrick successfully directed landing operation and captured the fort and town, along with several other ports in the area. The gains were held by his forces until peace was declared. In July 1848 he sailed home aboard *Independence* and was again appointed to the ordinance department.

An Act approved by Congress on March 3, 1851 made appropriations for lighthouses, light vessels and buoys, etc. and "... the Secretary of the Treasury is authorized and required to cause a board to be convened at as early a day as may be practicable ... to be composed of two officers of the navy of high rank, two officers of engineers of the army, and such civil officer of high scientific attainment as may be under the orders or at the disposition of the Treasury Department and a junior officer of the navy to act as secretary to said board, whose duty it shall be, under instructions from the Treasury Department, to inquire into the condition of the light-house establishment of the United States, and make a general detailed report and programme to guide legislation in extending and improving our present system of construction, illumina-

tion, inspection and superintendence."

Treasury Secretary Thomas Corwin wrote to Congress, "... Having been advised that the board has met, as directed by the department, [they have elected] Commodore William Shubrick as president..."

As a result of the above act and the investigation of this ad hoc committee or board (with a report dated January 30, 1852), Congress formally established the Lighthouse Board in August 1852, continuing William B. Shubrick as chairman. His fellow board members consisted of Commander S.F. Dupont, USN, Brigadier General Joseph Totten, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, LCOL James Kearney, U.S. Topographical Engineers, Professor A.D. Bache, LLD, Superintendent of the Coast Survey and LT Thornton Jenkins, USN (secretary).

William Shubrick was chairman of the Lighthouse Board for 19 years, although his service was interrupted several times. As early as the summer of 1853 he was ordered to the *Princeton* and directed to sail north to attend a fisheries conference at Halifax. Again, in 1858, he was ordered afloat to resolve difficulties with Paraguay. Aboard the vessel *Sabine*, Shubrick led a flotilla of 19 vessels, sporting 200 guns and a detachment of 2,500 men. Earlier, the U.S. vessel *Water Witch* was fired upon from a fortification when she sailed into the Paraguay River to deliver a treaty between our countries. Shubrick was ordered to show a force in Paraguayan waters. However, his fleet ran into a hurricane and his ship was damaged to the extent that he put into Bermuda for repairs. Upon completion of the repairs, he successfully led his fleet to Paraguay and effected a peaceful resolution to the difficulties.

The outbreak of the Civil War was an especially difficult time for Shubrick. His home state of South Carolina was the first to fire upon U. S. forces and secede from the Union. The firing on Fort Sumter was close to his Belvedere plantation home. Then, too, he knew and was friends with many of his fellow plantation owners and the movers and shakers of the state. Several high-ranking men in South Carolina urged him to join their efforts to secede, but Shubrick resisted and remained in Washington. He volunteered his services for the war effort, but was past the age (65) and years of service (45) to legally serve. Congress did pass an exception, which allowed him to remain as Chairman of the Lighthouse Board,

serving ten more years, until he retired in 1871.

One of the honors bestowed on Chairman Shubrick was the naming of the first vessel constructed especially for the Lighthouse Service. Launched and christened in 1857, the 140-foot-long *Shubrick* had a wooden hull and was outfitted with steam-powered paddle wheels as well as sails on two masts. She was the only Lighthouse Service vessel with armament (2 Dahlgren guns and a 24-pounder). USLHS tender *Shubrick* was assigned to the west coast where she served the Lighthouse Service delivering supplies, protecting keepers from Indian attacks, working buoys and, during the Civil War, was assigned to the Revenue Cutter Service and stationed in Alaska. She was placed out of service in 1885.

RADM William B. Shubrick died at his home on May 24, 1874 just short of his 84th birthday.

Professor Joseph Henry followed Shubrick as Chairman of the Lighthouse Board, serving from 1871 to 1877. Henry was also superintendent of the Smithsonian Institution and responsible for many experiments of lighthouse equipment, most notably fog signals.

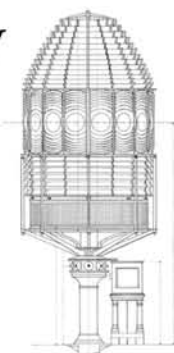
Other chairs of the Lighthouse Board were:

1878–1882	RADM Rodgers
1882–1883	RADM Robert Wyman
1883–1889	RADM Stephen Rowan
1889–1891	RADM David Harmony
1891–1895	Commodore James Greer
1895–1897	RADM John Walker
1897–1898	RADM Winfield Schlep
1898–1899	Commodore Frederick McNair
1899–1901	RADM Francis Higgins on
1901–1902	RADM Norman Fuqua
1902–1904	RADM George Ramey
1904–1905	RADM Robles Evans
1905–1906	RADM Benjamin Lumberton
1906–1908	RADM George Reiter
1908–1910	Captain Adolph Matrix

In 1910 the Lighthouse Board was established and the Bureau of Lighthouses was established.



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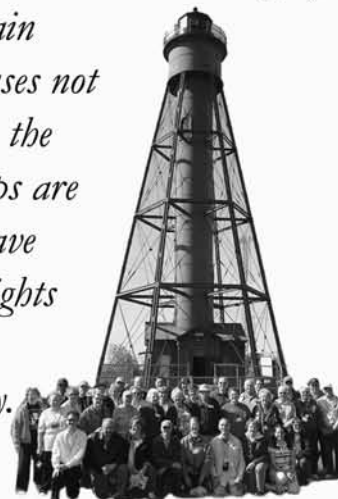
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winning publication as a benefit of membership.

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