



Corey Thornton

Portsmouth Naval Shipyard Museum

My name is James C. Thornton but I prefer my middle name – “Corey.” I am a lifelong resident of Norfolk, VA. After graduating from Norview High School, I earned my A.S. in Education from Tidewater Community College (1998), my B.A. in History at Old Dominion University (2000) and an M.A. in History (2005), also from ODU. I am the Curator at the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard Museum and the Lightship *Portsmouth* Museum – these museums comprise the history division of Portsmouth Museums. As Curator, I have researched and wrote the material for the exhibits installed in the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard Museum since 2004 (a total of five). In 2004, I presented “Life & Light: An Age of American Lightships,” in collaboration with the Coast Guard Historian’s Office, at the Seventh Maritime Heritage conference (Norfolk, VA). I also curated *Place, Setting & Time: Early Tidewater Silver* at our sister museum, the Courthouse Galleries in 2005. Other activities include constant ongoing historical research with intention to publish in the near future, ranging from the topics of the American Civil War, maritime related and early 20th technological history. I am married, have one child (a six year old) and thank God daily that I am fortunate enough to “do-history” for a living!

Contact Information:

Portsmouth Naval Shipyard Museum
2 High Street
Portsmouth, VA 23704
thorntonc@portsmouthva.gov

Portsmouth Museums

The Portsmouth Naval Shipyard Museum and the Lightship *Portsmouth* Museum comprise the history division of the Portsmouth Museums, a department of the City of Portsmouth. The mission of the Portsmouth Museums is to provide the citizens of Portsmouth, the Hampton Roads, and the Commonwealth of Virginia and beyond with high quality educational and cultural experiences in the arts, humanities and the sciences through the use of exhibitions, programs and collections.

Portsmouth Naval Shipyard Museum

Mission Statement: The Portsmouth Naval Shipyard Museum researches, preserves and promotes the history of the City of Portsmouth, Norfolk Naval Shipyard, and the armed forces in Hampton Roads. The museum accomplishes its mission by offering exhibitions, publications, lectures and educational programs.

The Portsmouth Naval Shipyard Museum began its life as the Norfolk Naval Shipyard Museum as part of (and located inside) the Norfolk Naval Shipyard. Through the efforts of the Shipyard Commander Rear Admiral Homer N. Wallin and Marshall W. Butt, the shipyard’s technical librarian and the museum’s first curator, the museum opened in 1949. Later it was determined to move the museum into the City of Portsmouth so that the general public could have access to its offerings. The museum was re-located to its current location at 2 High Street, re-designated the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard Museum and opened on January 1st, 1963.

We use a variety of items to tell the story of the historical relationship between Portsmouth and the shipyard. The museum maintains a collection of approximately 8,000 objects, 5,000 of which belong to the City of Portsmouth and 3,000 of which are loan to the museum from the Naval Historical Center in Washington, D.C. Among the objects in the collection and on exhibit are artifacts, ship models, uniforms, flags, photographs and documents. Included in the museum’s facilities on our second floor is the Marshall W. Butt Library, a rich historic archive of books and documents relating to the city and the shipyard. Many researchers have utilized the library to produce their historical works.

Lightship *Portsmouth* Museum

Mission Statement: The Lightship *Portsmouth* tells the story of those who served in the Lightship Service, their dedication to life aboard the vessel and service to the navigation of mariners through preservation, educational programs and exhibition of the lightship.

Before becoming the Portsmouth, the lightship was designated Lighthouse Service Vessel #101, or LV 101, because before 1939 lightships were a part of the Lighthouse Service. When the United States Coast Guard was given command of the lightships in 1939, LV 101 was given another official designation of WAL 524. Over the course of its lifespan lightship service continued the tradition of designating lightships according to the name of their nearby station of locality. Because LV 101/WAL 524 came to Portsmouth, Virginia in 1967, it was named Portsmouth to continue the traditional lightship system of designation.

LV 101 was built in 1915 by Pusey & Jones Company in Wilmington, Delaware for the contracted price of \$108, 507. In 1916 the ship’s first station was at Smith Island Shoals, near Cape Charles, Virginia where it was designated Charles.

From 1925-1926 the ship served as an inactive relief ship on the Virginia coast. In 1926 the ship was stationed in the Delaware Bay where it was renamed Overfalls due to the hazardous breakwater at the outer end of the bay. In 1951 the ship became a temporary relief ship for the *Nantucket* lightship and was stationed twenty-five miles out to sea. Later in 1951, the ship was stationed at Stonehorse Shoal near Cape Cod, Massachusetts where it stood duty for the next ten years as the *Stonehorse*.

In 1963 the ship’s last station was again off Cape Cod, Massachusetts, this time as a relief ship at Cross Rip Shoal in the Nantucket Sound. En route to Boston in 1964 the ship broke down and shortly after it was retired from service after having served a long and faithful duty. In 1964 the lightship was donated to the City of Portsmouth and by April 24, 1967 the ship opened its doors as the Lightship *Portsmouth* Museum.