

Vessels were christened the SS Rock Hill and the SS Winthrop

When we think of the role of the U.S. Navy during World War II we immediately think of ships designed for combat - battleships, airplane carriers, landing craft, PT boats, etc. Shipyards on both coasts were operating at a furious pace.

But there also were craft, just as desperately needed, to transport troops and materials to the battlefields and to supply our allies with needed goods. Thus, "victory ships" came into being.

The first victory ship, named SS United Victory, was launched in February 1944. The next 34 victory ships were named for each of our allied nations. Following those were 218 victory ships named for American cities. Then, 150 were named for educational institutions and then came more whose names are listed under the category "miscellaneous."

The SS Rock Hill Victory was completed in only 50 days at the Baltimore shipyard in April 1945. It was a carbon copy of other victory ships - 455 feet long and 62 feet wide and powered by a steam-turbine engine. Laura Jean Rauch, daughter of the Rock Hill city manager, broke the traditional bottle on the bow.

In 1947, after the war, the S.S. Rock Hill Victory was sold to a company in Argentina and renamed the Entre Rios. It was junked in June 1978.

The SS Winthrop Victory was built by the California Shipbuilding Corporation in Wilmington, Calif. It was launched May 12, 1945. There were 33 Winthrop graduates living in California at the time. All were invited and seven were present at the launching.

Hascal Vaughan Stewart, a distinguished graduate of the class of 1919, had the honor of smashing the bottle on the bow. (Stewart wrote Winthrop's longtime alma mater song, "Fairest Flower of the South Land." As the years went by, the title was corrupted into "Fairest Flowers of the South Land," leading people to think that the "Fairest Flowers" were Winthrop students. Stewart always insisted that the "Flower"

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referred to the college.)

At the request of the Navy for reading matter, Winthrop furnished the ship's library with 159 books, each with a Winthrop nameplate.

The SS Winthrop's first sailing included a stop at Pearl Harbor and Yokahama, Japan. The ship entered Tokyo Bay on Aug. 28 1945, four days before the Japanese surrender on the deck of the aircraft carrier, the SS Missouri. In a stroke of luck, the SS Winthrop was the first ship to enter Tokyo Bay and lay near the Missouri, when the surrender ceremony took place.

There also was the S.S. David B. Johnson Victory, which fell into the miscellaneous category. David Bancroft Johnson was the founder of Winthrop and was its first president, serving for 42 years.

S.S. David B. Johnson was launched at Savannah, Ga., and made its first trip to Southampton, England. Then it was back to Portland, Maine, on to Boston, and then it took its cargo to London. From London it returned to New York and then headed for four Russian ports. In Russia the "Old David B." loaded lumber and took the lumber to Cardiff, Wales, before returning to Boston.

The Winthrop University Archives has several letters written by Gilbert Sherman, the chief engineer of the SS David B. Johnson. In one letter Sherman wrote: "We have enjoyed looking over the college yearbook that was presented to us at the ship launching. The sailors took a vote on the two girls they would like to be on a desert with. Don't know how the girls will feel about it, but they are Nancy Ann Jones of Batesburg and Winkie Ross, steno. in the office of the Dean."

Sherman's letter was printed in the college newspaper, The Johnsonian. President Henry Sims sent Sherman the next edition of the yearbook, the Tatler. Sherman thanked Sims but did not report the sailors' vote, if there was one.

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Victory ships carried troops and local names

