

# **A Memorial Tribute to John Costello, Vice-President and Historian of the Sun Ship Historical Society-A great friend and memories of our time together**

**By: Dave Kavanagh, Sun Ship Historical Society**

It is with great sadness that I have to inform the SSSH Community that John Costello, Vice-President and Historian of the Sun Ship Historical Society has passed away due to complications from Parkinson's disease. John has been with the SSSH since 2004 and in addition to being a great friend, he has been an irreplaceable asset to the society and we would not be the historical resource of Sun Ship history that we are without his contribution of time and knowledge. The following memorial tribute to John highlights some of his contributions to the SSSH over the past 16 years.

Please visit the Sun Ship Historical Society's website at [www.sunship.org](http://www.sunship.org) for more information that includes John's 'Sun Shipbuilding and Dry Dock Co. 1916-1982 – A Short History'.

## **Facebook Obituary-2020.05.30:**

**I thought you would appreciate knowing more about John and therefore I included his Facebook Obituary.**

John Edward Costello, III (1947-2020)

John was born on December 14 1947 at the Ft. Crook Post Hospital (now Offut AFB) near Omaha, NE. He died at home in Prospect Park, PA on Thursday May 28, 2020 of complications from Parkinson's Disease. John was 72 years of age.

John traveled the world as a young man following his father's career in the US Air Force. He saw the coronation of Elizabeth II in England, played football in Turkey, New Hampshire and Texas and competed on Chester High's championship 1966 Scott's HI-Q team. He graduated from PMC College (now Widener Univ) where he was the editor of The Dome. College was paid for by working as a shipfitter in the Sun Shipyards. He married his successor at the Dome and his love, Mary Kathryn FitzPatrick in 1974.

Graduation began nine years of service as a teacher in Philadelphia Public Schools where he also gained a Master's Degree from Temple University and a Principal's Certificate from Cheney University.

In 1980, he began a distinguished 20-year career as a travel industry executive with Starr Tours where he served as President of the American Bus Association and board member of the American Tour Association. For his work, he was honored by the states of Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Alaska and Nebraska as well as the Provinces of Nova Scotia and Newfoundland. After his private career ended, he reentered teaching and was a teacher and vice principal at the Toby Farms School in Upland, PA.

A belief in service to his community and his fellow Americans lead to four decades in public service. John served as Mayor of Prospect Park, PA (1981-85), member and President of the Interboro School Board as well as many tours coaching T-Ball and Soccer. A love of history and volunteerism led to a second act as board member and later Executive Director of the Delaware County Historical Society from 2008-2011. He also spent many years as a researcher with the Sun Ship Historical Society. His last years were spent at home with his family and loyal dog, Ollie.

He is survived by his wife and love of his life for 46 years, Mary Kathryn Fitzpatrick (MK); his son, daughter in law and grandson, John E. IV, Meghan and Sean of Milltown, NJ; his beloved daughter, Maureen Ann of Glenolden, PA. and his in-laws, Edward & Margaret FitzPatrick of East Fallowfield, PA, Teresa Anderson of Ridley Park, PA, Jerome (Jerry) & Nancy FitzPatrick of Oviedo, FL and nephews and nieces: Jason & Jackie FitzPatrick, Eric & Courtney Dewees, Edward & Suzanne FitzPatrick Jr., Emily Costello, and Timothy & Courtney FitzPatrick.

He is preceded by his Mom and Dad, Emily (nee Zwizanski) & John C. Costello, Capt. USAF (ret'd); his best friend and brother; Billy Costello and his nephews; Michael and Danny FitzPatrick.

Kavanaugh's Funeral Home will hold a private memorial service, with limited attendance, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. When restrictions are lifted, the Costello Family will reach out to loved ones with details requesting their presence for a celebration of John's life. In lieu of flowers, please donate to a cause near to John's heart

## **John Costello and the SSSH**

I initially met John at the 'Old Chester Days' annual reunion in 2004 where SSSH had set up our first exhibit. John came over and told me about his time at Sun Ship as a Shipfitters Helper during the summers of 1966 to 1968, during his college years.

It did not take long before our common interests developed into a friendship that would last for almost 16 years.



#### 4: Sun Ship's Historic Marker-October 6, 2007

John Costello was a significant factor in the success of having our historical marker erected at the Harrah's site including correspondence with the City of Chester, Harrah's Casino and the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission.

John Costello and Charles O'Hala, Director of Facilities at Harrah's, at the future marker site, reviewing the location on PA Route 291 in Chester.



#### Marker Dedication Ceremony

John Costello addressing the audience. Please review John's 'Summing Up' remarks at the dedication  
SSHS: 707 09 023a



#### The Summing Up Remarks by John Costello Dedication of Sun Ship Historical Marker 10.6.2007

“Sun Shipbuilding and Dry Dock Company opened its doors in late 1916 and closed them in Feb. of 1982

Sixty – six years and in those sixty-six years Sun Ship employed over 100,000 men and women.

For most of those years Sun Ship employed between 2500 to 6000 people per year.

But during the war years 1939 to 1945 Sun Ship average about 25,000 employees. Sun's all-time employee high was reached on Aug. 14, 1943 with 35,633 men and women. Of the 35, 633 employees 12,000 were African American – of which 9,000 worked in 4 Yard. 4 Yard was an initiative of the Pew Family that employed almost solely African- Americans. It was the single largest industrial enterprise in history conducted, manned and operated by Blacks.

Women at the yard also made their war contribution – 2,800 women were represented in almost all skill categories during the war.

Over 18,000 men and women who were employed at SS served in the armed forces. 380 of them were to die in combat. One who left Sun and returned was my father John C. Costello, 45 Dept., from Sun he was commissioned in the Army Corps of Engineers and returned in 1946 to be greeted personally, as many returning servicemen were by John G. Pew, Jr. in his office at his famous roll top desk.

One of the soldiers who enlisted from Sun who did not get to meet Mr. Pew was 19-year-old painter's helper Eddie Messersmidt. Despite his German name, Eddie was All-American. Eddie was awarded posthumously the Congressional Medal of Honor for Valor in combat in Northern Italy.

#### Marker Installation Team:

With John Costello in the forefront and 'the younger generation', L/R: John Costello Jr. (#60), Ed McCarron (behind the marker) and Chris Kavanagh (at the right of the marker). It was the responsibility of SSHS to install the marker pole and marker at the site.

SSHS: P1010062a



43 shipyard men were killed in industrial accidents during the war years, a further 12 men and one woman in the years preceding the war and post-1945 also died in work related incidents.”

Sun built ships.... 615 ships in 66 years, yes tankers, but also cargo ships, troop transports, minesweepers, hospital ships, container ships, ro-ros, ice-breakers, and one deep sea mining ship.

Sun also repaired ships, many ships. Total numbers are hard to come by just dry dock number 2 in 35 years of operation serviced 5,500 ships. In some years ship repair accounted for 25% percent of the yard’s revenue. And it was very profitable.

Sun Ship was just not ships; they built the Boeing wind tunnel just a mile north of here. Most of the steel fabrication for Sun Oil’s refinery just 4 miles south was manufactured here in Sun’s yards by shipyard workers. In the 1960’s rocket casings were designed and constructed for NASA and the anchoring supports for the Verrazano Bridge – all done by Sun Ship.

So that’s it, the summing up just...450 words for 66 years. God Bless Sun Shipbuilding and Dry Dock. America thanks you. Well done.

**Post-Christening Photo at the Marker with:**

The Pew Family including Derek Pew, grandson of John G Pew, Rep. Kirkland, Representatives of the Pennsylvania Museum and Historical Commission, John Costello and Dave Kavanagh  
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**John and Mary Kathryn Costello and John Costello Jr. at the Marker Dedication**

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**Marker Reception and Exhibit at DCHS**

Derek Pew’s Aunt, Mrs. Tracey Pew and John and Mary Kathryn Costello.  
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## 5: SSSH's Trip to San Francisco, 2008

John Costello helped to arrange the San Francisco trip to visit the Maritime Administration's Suisun Bay Reserve Fleet, which at that time had a number of Sun Ship vessels in reserve. His communications with the Maritime Administration resulted in arranging a guided tour of our ships at Suisun Bay, a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for shipbuilding historians. John's experience in the tour guide business reaped great benefits on this trip. In addition to the Suisun Bay Tour, John also arranged side-trips to; the WWII Liberty Ship SS **Jeremiah O'Brien** and the Muir Woods National Monument. What made this trip even more memorable was that we were able share this experience with our sons; John Costello Jr. and Chris Kavanagh.

### Maritime Administration's Suisun Bay:

While on the Suisun Bay tour we were able to tour the following Sun Ship vessels; **American Reliance** (H-631), USNS **Comet** T-AK-269 (H-601), **American Racer** (H-629), USNS Mispillion T-AO-105 (H-526) and the USNS **Shoshone** T-AO-151 (H-600) During this tour, we were able to take over 400 photos of our vessels, that when selectively posted on our website, will show our SSSH Community and visitors, areas of our ships that are not normally viewed.

John C. on 'water-taxi' **MS Debbie** on our way to visit Sun's ships at Suisun Bay.

SSHS: 443 27 0327a



Taking a break on the main deck of our **American Reliance** (H-631).

L/R: John Costello, John Costello, Jr., Chris Kavanagh and our outstanding 'Tour Guide' (sadly I cannot find his name in our records)

SSHS#: 443 27 0386a



John Costello and Dave Kavanagh posing in front of the Suisun Bay Reserve Fleet sign. A little side story, when we went to the office of Mr. Pecoraro (Manger of the reserve fleet site) to give him our grateful thanks, he gave me one 'Suisun Bay Reserve Fleet' cap and I asked him if he could give us a second hat. He said he was sorry but they only gave out one hat to a group. I handed it to John C. and we left. When outside, John asked me to wait a minute saying "I forgot something" and he turned around and went back in to the office and he came out with a second cap. That was our John C. SSSH#: 443 27 0743



**6: Jaffee and S.S. Jeremiah O'Brien Tour**

**Date: 2008.02.26**

John Costello arranged for a meeting and tour of the Jeremiah O'Brien, a WWII Liberty Ship, with author of the 'Last Liberty Ship-The Biography of the SS Jeremiah O'Brien', Walter W. Jaffee

L/R: John Costello, Walter Jaffee and Dave Kavanagh at the bow of the SS Jeremiah O'Brien.



L/R: John Costello, John Costello Jr. and Walter W. Jaffee on tour of ship



L/R: John Jr. and John Costello at the bow of the SS Jeremiah O'Brien.

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**7: Side-trip to Muir Woods**

**Date: 2008.02.26**

During the San Francisco trip, John C had arranged our trip to the Muir Woods National Monument  
L/R: John Costello Jr. and John Costello  
SSHS: 20080226 207a



**8: SSHS being awarded the Thirtieth Annual Historic Preservation Award from the Heritage Commission of Delaware County**

**Date: 2008.05.06**

L/R: John Costello, Dave Kavanagh and Linda Houldin (Executive Director of DCHS from 2004-2017). John Costello had submitted the SSHS for the award.

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## 9: Pat Cooper's No. 4 Yard Visit:

**Date:2009.04.16**

John established contact with Patricia Ann Cooper Associate Professor, Department of History, University of Kentucky concerning her work on the history of Sun Ship's No.4 Yard. Pat shared some of her research which is now in the SSSH archives. John made all the arrangements for Pat to visit us and then to take a tour of some of the buildings that remain of 4 Yard in Eddystone, PA.

Note: Please visit the SSSH website for more information on our No.4 Yard-dmk

L/R: Dave Kavanagh, Pat Cooper and John Costello  
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Photo of one of the buildings in No.4 Yard taken during Pat's tour of the facility.'

SSHS: 2009.04.16\_950a



## 10: John Costello-SSHS Historian

With John Costello's dedication to the SSSH and his research prowess, many subjects pertinent to Sun Ship history were high-lighted by John's detailed research efforts. Among these were; the Pew Family, Yard poetry and art, WWI and WWII history, Navy Hospital Ships,

employee training at Sun Ship, Yard Management, T-2 Tankers and our No.4 Yard.

John's goal on this research was to create an in-depth history of Sun Ship for later publication. Included in his efforts were; a bibliography, index and drafts of chapters on major topics. John transferred all of his efforts to SSSH and that consisted of 71 individual files at 118mb of data from 2007 to 2016. In addition, he donated his collections of hospital ship and tanker post card acquisitions to SSSH. Following are, what I consider, to be highlights of John's efforts.

Note: In addition to the aforementioned, John introduced me to a number of historic repositories that included; National Archives in Philadelphia and the Penn State's Labor Archives through which our many hours of our research, greatly expanded our Sun Ship history.

### Employee Poetry

John's research into 'Employee' Poetry' was primarily through his review of the 'Our Yard' magazine archives from 1941 through 1945 and consists of 37 typed pages and over 15,000 words. He would often email me selected poems that he felt showed the great pride of Sun Ship employees towards the Yard and fellow shipbuilders. We are currently working on placing this documentation onto the website.

### Cover page of John's research into 'Employee Poetry'

#### **Sun Shipbuilding and Dry Dock Co. Employee Poetry 1941-1945**

John E. Costello

Sun Ship Historical Society



Here is one of the poems that John transcribed from the Our Yard September, 1944 issue.

### **Till Victory**

When my working day is finished  
And I'm walking homeward bound,  
somehow I feel contented  
as I start to look around.  
As I see those dirty faces  
black with dirt and grime and grease,  
They too seem quite contented'  
knowing they helped bring peace.

No, we're not in the army,  
but this is still our affair,  
We have to keep on building ships  
For all our boys out there.  
So, let's work a little harder  
till Victory we have won.  
Then we'll always be contented  
When our working day is done.

*Samuel Tennant, 57-2911  
Mold Loft*

### **Training**

John Costello did a detailed analysis of Sun Ship's WW2 training programs which included, a listing of the training manuals published by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's Department of Public Instruction in cooperation with Sun Ship and school districts of Chester and Philadelphia. These shipbuilding training manuals were prepared by Sun Ship personnel that were distributed throughout shipyards in the United States and Canada. Copies of these manuals were acquired by John and the SSHS, and some reflected ownership by Sun Ship employees including; Frank M. Hoot and John Petchel.

Cover page of Bulleting 345-C



### **Oral Histories**

Another area of John's expertise was the preparation and assistance with taking oral histories of past employees. One of our greatest opportunities was being able to interview Ann Tanelli, who participated in Sun Ship's efforts during WWII. The oral history was with Ann and her husband Bruno. Prior to marrying her husband Bruno, Ann Merlitti worked at the Bond Department in the North Yard during WWII and we learned volumes as to how the department and individual Yards (South Yard, Central Yard, North Yard and 4 Yard) functioned. Ann Merletti and her sister Rose were members of the quartet 'Sun Seranaders' that sang in Sun Ship productions such as 'Sun's Fun' and on the radio.

L/R: Ann Merlitti, Rose Merlitti, Elaine Swantek and Freda Wilkinson.

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### **A Short History of Sun Ship**

John Costello and I collaborated on the 'A Short History of Sun Ship' which can be viewed on our website.

### **11: John Costello-Volunteer**

I volunteered with John at the following two locations and I was constantly amazed at his widely diversified historical knowledge;

### **Hagley Museum and Library**

John and I volunteered at Hagley, cataloging and digitizing their records from the Sun Ship archives as well as John reviewing Hagley's collection of 16mm films about the Yard.

## Independence Seaport Museum

John Costello volunteered at the ISM, joining me, in 2016. As with Hagley, we were cataloging and digitizing the Sun Ship archives.

ISM Henderson Library and Archives with; Craig Bruns-ISM Chief Curator and Terry Potter-ISM Director of Library and Archives and volunteers on 12/26/2016.

Back row L/R: Steve Rochford, Craig Bruns, Jim, John Costello, Dave Boone and Larry Brownell  
Front Row L/R: Sally Brownell, Terry Potter and Dave Kavanagh



John Costello and Dave Kavanagh on the decorated 'freight' elevator during an ISM holiday celebration.  
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## **TFG-The Friday Guys**

There were four of us that volunteered on Fridays at ISM. Henceforth the 'handle' of *The Friday Guys* was born!

The members of the Friday Guys were; John Costello, Dave Boone, Steve Rochford and Dave Kavanagh. One of the volunteer duties that John and I were assigned was working on the Sun Ship Archives. What a great time we had together! The Friday Guys, weather permitting, would go out to the Penn's Landing River Front and have our lunch with a great view of the Delaware River and the Camden waterfront.

The Friday Guys; John Costello, Dave Boone and Steve Rochford-Sharing lunch on the river with sparrows  
SSHS: 10082017a



John researching at ISM-2017



Borrowing a few words from John Costello's 'Summing Up' from the historic marker dedication ceremony:

So that's it, the summing up just over...3,000 words for our 16 years of collaboration and friendship, SSHS and I thank you John- well done. Dave Kavanagh