



## Sun Ship Historical Society's Yard's History Page

Site: [www.sunship.org](http://www.sunship.org)

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Subj: Mrs. Rachel M. Stevenson

(Badge: 93-20)

Date: 2022.02.14

SSHS No: 93-20\_1

We hope you enjoy this 'Yard's History Page'. As always, if you have any additional information, suggestions or corrections, please let me know.

Note 1: While due diligence has been applied in the research of this information, responsibility for any errors is the ultimate responsibility of the end-user.

Note 2: Information has been obtained from various sources to enhance the history of Sun Ship and our employees, where possible, sources have been identified

Note 3: Sun Ship has a history of having the 'first, fastest and largest' accomplishments in; shipbuilding, ship-repair, ship-conversion and industrial product endeavors. Rachel Stevenson was chosen as our second representative of the **'Employee of the Year'** web page due to her; dedication and her contribution to 'a significant first' in our Sun Ship history. We believe her 35-Year Service Award speaks to her dedication to the Yard and her being chosen to launch the first ship in Sun Ship's '4-Yard' as one of the significant 'Firsts'. We hope that you will enjoy this short history of our Rachel Stevenson. Rachel's Yard badge number was 93-20, where '93' is the department and '20' is the employee number. Department 93 is the 'Mail Messenger & Custodian' department.

Thank You,  
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## Our Rachel Stevenson

Rachel was born to her parents, Charles H. Thomas and Rebecca Byard Thomas on August 19, 1882 in Salem County, New Jersey. She was the fifth of eleven children, six boys and five girls. She was about seven years old when her parents came to Chester and ten when her family moved to 319 Edwards Street, which will become her home for the next 90 years.

Rachel was about twenty-three when she married Harry Stevenson.

She began working at Sun Ship as a 'helper' in 1920 when she would have been thirty-eight years old, and later worked for twenty-two years on Sun Ship's Matron Staff, where she maintained the office-suite of John G. Pew Sr., president of Sun Ship. She transferred to the plant's Cafeteria Staff, c: 1943, from where she retired in April of 1957 with 35 years of service.

Mrs. Rachel M. Stevenson  
at Sun Ship 1941  
SSHS: 705\_4110\_013c



In 1942 Sun Ship was requested to build 20 C-4 cargo ships for the war effort and that required

the building of the fourth ship-building site at Sun Ship. Appropriately named '4-Yard', which was located in Eddystone, it was planned to be staffed by approximately 9,000 black ship-builders.

The **Marine Eagle**, Sun Ship's Hull 340, the first ship to be built in '4-Yard' and the first ocean-going vessel of that size, to be built completely by black shipbuilders. The ship was scheduled to launch on May 10, 1943 and to be christened by Rachel Stevenson.

The ladies who christen U.S. Maritime Ships at the Sun yard receive the company gift of a \$1,000 War Bond, but Mrs. Stevenson says that it is the honor that pleases her and not the bond.

Launching Day: Mrs. Stevenson's work day at the office ends at 3 p.m. but today she plans to leave for home "a little early so I can collect myself. It's going to be a big day for me." She said.

A Sun Ship car will call for Mrs. Stevenson at her little home on Edwards Street, and following the launching she will be driven with her honors; her bond and a big bouquet of American beauty roses.

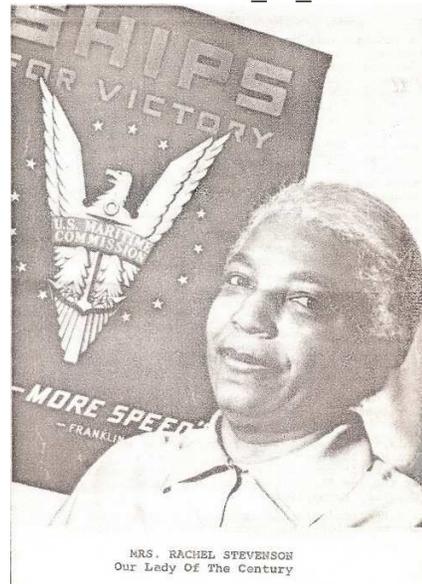
Mrs. Rachel Stevenson, standing with John G. Pew Sr. at the bow of the Marine Eagle and holding a bottle of champagne.

(Courtesy of Temple Archives)  
 May 10, 1943  
 SSHS: 500\_340\_001a



Rachel Stevenson standing beside the Maritime Commission 'Ships for Victory' flag.

(Courtesy: The John Costello Collection)  
 SSHS: 93-20\_89\_03



Cafeteria Employees-L/R: Rachel Stevenson, 24 years-service, Joseph Harris, 26 years, Ned Johnson, 21 years, Edward Dutton, 27 years.

Aug, 1944  
 SSHS: 705\_4409\_23



**Mrs. Rachel Stevenson's**

### Service Pin Awards

“Controller Charles H. Doyle congratulates Mrs. Rachel Stevenson, 93-20 as he hands her the 30-Year Service Pin”

C: Nov. 1950  
SSHS: 705 5012 004



30-Year Service Pin  
SSHS: 041\_30\_1a



“Vice-President John G. Pew, Jr. congratulates Mrs. Rachel Stevenson, 93-20, on receipt of her 35-year Service Pin.”

C: Nov. 1955  
SSHS: 705 5512 011



35-Year Service Pin

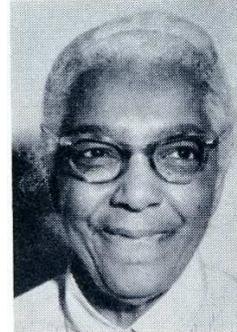
SSHS:  
SSHS: 041\_35\_1a



### Mrs. Rachel Stevenson's Nov. 1959 'GAR'

Our Yard magazine Staff Member, Clarence Duke interviews retired employee in a column called 'Gossip After Retirement' and here is Rachel's interview from Nov. 1959.

SSHS: 705\_5911\_002\_4r



“I went to work at the Sun Shipyard about 1921 and put in 36 years, 7 months service before retiring in April, 1957.

What do I do? Well, I have my home here, and while I live alone and have the use of but one eye, I have good health in general and can see a lot of things and people yet with that one eye. The only thing I do on the outside is belong to a Woman's Club (The Thread and Needle Club-dmk).

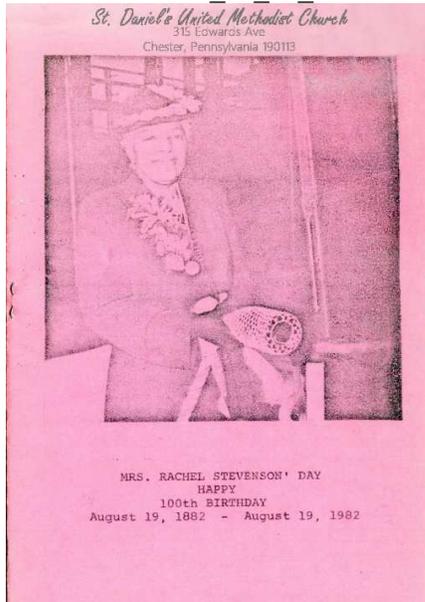
I spent many happy days in the yard and everyone was very good to me. I sponsored a ship in #4 yard, the "Marine Eagle" which was launched May 10, 1943. I want to be remembered to all of those good people who are still there or wherever they may now be.”

## Mrs. Rachel Stevenson's 100<sup>th</sup> Birthday

Courtesy: John Costello Collection

August 19, 1982

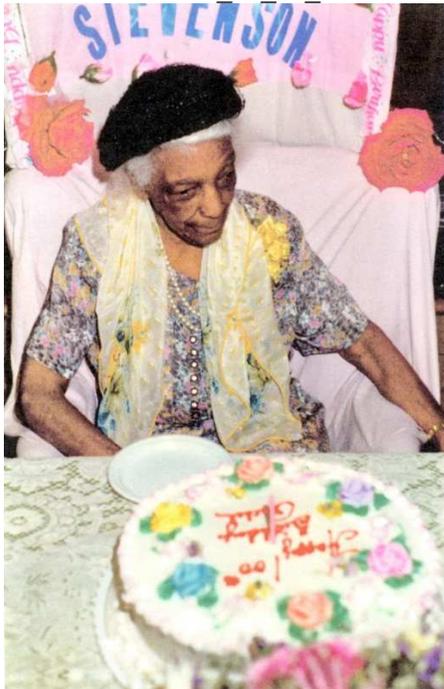
SSHS: 93\_20\_01\_03



Rachel Stevenson's 100 birthday celebration was held at St. Daniel's United Methodist Church, Chester

Courtesy: John Costello Collection

SSHS: 93\_20\_01\_04



Following is a transcription of the text on Rachel Stevenson's 100<sup>th</sup> birthday booklet:

### 'Mrs. Rachel Stevenson' Day'

"A Lil Girl was born on August 19, 1882 in Salem County, New Jersey to Charles H. Thomas and Rebecca Byard Thomas. Her parents named her Rachel, after her maternal grandmother. Rachel was the 5<sup>th</sup> of eleven children, six sons and five daughters. There were five of the children born during the month of August. Ten of the children were born in Salem County, and one son, the youngest was born in Chester. She was about seven when her parents came to Chester: and about ten when the family moved into the house which is her present home on Edwards Street.

Rachel Thomas was about twenty-three when she was united in holy wedlock to Harry Stevenson.

Mrs. Stevenson began working as a "helper" in the Sun Ship yards about 1917, and later worked for twenty-two years on the Matron Staff where she maintained the office-suite of John G. Pew, Sr.

In May 1942, John G. Pew announced that the Sun Ship would open Yard 4 for the exclusive employment of black men. In less than two years Mr. Pew was presented and award by the Association of Negroes in Industry, where he announced that 12,000 of the 33,000 employees were black men. He also announced that all employees would receive equal pay for equal work.

This story made headlines around the world: "On May 10, 1943, the "Marine Eagle", the first ship built completely by Negroes, was launched at the Sun Shipbuilding and Dry Dock Company. Chester, Pennsylvania.

The Philadelphia Inquirer gave a whole page to the news story, one account reads as follows: "John G. Pew, Jr. called for Mrs. Stevenson, and asked her to crack-the champagne bottle on the "Eagle's" bow. She said her knees shook and she trembled when he made the request and, "I Said, No" – but he said "Yes", so I said, "I'll do it"

Mrs. Stevenson therefore becomes the first black woman ever to launch a ship of the specifications of the "Marine Eagle". The "Eagle" was a Maritime Commission ship built for special war transport missions."

**Celebration and Honor**

On next Sunday, August 15<sup>th</sup> during the 9 AM Worship Services and following benediction, we shall process to the F. D. Jones Community Center, the members and friends of St. Daniel's Church will honor Mrs. Stevenson as we celebrate her 100<sup>th</sup> birthday: August 19, 1882 – August 19, 1982.

**Expressions**

Mrs. Rachel Stevenson  
Our Lady Of The Century

Mrs. Rachel Stevenson's 100<sup>th</sup> birthday will be honored in the following ways:

- Letters from notable persons like Bishop Herbert Skeete, Resident Bishop of Eastern Pennsylvania Conference; President Ronald Reagan, President of the United States; the Governor of the State of Pennsylvania; Mayor of the City of Chester Pennsylvania; State Assemblyman; Attorney Robert Wright Jr. and others.
- A "Book of Remembrance" will be presented.
- Prayers of thanksgiving will be offered.
- Cake and punch will be served.
- Congratulations and good wishes will Be extended

**PLEASE NOTE:** Every member and friend is asked to bring a greeting card and present it in person to "Mrs. Rachel Stevenson – Our Lady Of The Century"

**Rachel Stevenson's Obituary**

Date: July 15, 1985  
Courtesy of the Chester/Delco Times  
SSHS:329\_19850715\_17

**Rachel Stevenson, 102, retired Sun Ship Matron.**



Rachel Stevenson, 102, of Chester, died on Friday at Sacred Heart Medical Center, Chester.

Born in Salem, N.J., she was a resident of Chester for 80 years.

She worked as a matron at Sun Ship Co. for 35 years.

She was a member of St. Daniel's United Methodist Church.

Services will be at 8 p.m. Wednesday at the St. Daniels United Methodist Church, 4<sup>th</sup> and Edward Sts., Chester.

Burial will be in Greenlawn Cemetery, Chester Township.

Calling hours will be from 6 to 8 p.m. Wednesday at the church.