WORKING WATERFRONTS

PAINTINGS BY

PETER K. EAGLETON

GALLERY GUIDE

PETER K. EAGLETON (1937-2005)

Born in Yonkers, New York, Mr. Eagleton was an accomplished artist and marine historian. He worked for over 36 years in the steamship business as a shipbroker in New York and Scandinavia. He also served on a panel for the U.S. government negotiating trade rates with Asia. His memberships included the Salmagundi Club, The American Society of Marine Artists, the National Maritime Historical Society of America and the Edward Hopper Foundation, as well as an Official U.S. Coast Guard Artist. Mr. Eagleton also served for six years as a sergeant in the National Guard. His work was recognized by the Coast Guard's George Gray Award for outstanding artistic achievement and his paintings appear in a number of significant marine art collections, including the National Coast Guard Museum, the American Merchant Marine Museum, the Mystic Seaport Museum, and the Intrepid Museum.

Peter Eagleton's paintings focus on the sometimes-unglamorous work boats of New York Harbor and the Hudson River: tugboats, barges, tankers, and ferries, all working to transport cargo and people from place to place. In the spirit of American Realism, the movement that began in literature in the late 19th century and in visual arts in the early 20th century, Eagleton chooses these everyday images of working waterfronts as the unconventional subjects of his art, finding beauty amidst the rust.

1

US COAST GUARD CUTTER MOHAWK IN BATTLE OF THE ATLANTIC COLORS

The U.S. Coast Guard Cutter *Mohawk*, launched in 1934, was originally stationed in Cape May, New Jersey and operated as an icebreaker and patrol vessel on the Hudson and Delaware Rivers. After the outbreak of World War II, she was assigned to North Atlantic escort operations and served from 1941 until the conclusion of the war in the Battle of the Atlantic, the longest continuous military campaign in WWII.

The color scheme depicted on the *Mohawk* is her most striking feature. This camouflage is known as “Dazzle” and would break up the surface of the vessel into angular shapes that make it difficult to visually identify at a distance. Opponents are not the only forces who may misidentify a ship bearing the “Dazzle” paint job; indeed, *Mohawk* endured damage from friendly fire shot by British planes that had misidentified her while she was on patrol near Iceland. *Mohawk* sustained damage on the main deck and returned to Boston for emergency repairs.

Shortly after the war, *Mohawk* was ordered to be decommissioned and placed in storage at the Coast Guard Yard just south of Baltimore, Maryland and declared “surplus to needs of CG." She was sold in 1948 to the Delaware Bay and River Pilots' Association, and was used as a pilot boat on the Delaware River for more than 30 years.

In 1984, the *Mohawk* was acquired by an individual, and a group of volunteers restored her and began the USCG *Mohawk* Cutter Museum in Delaware, an attempt at preservation that unfortunately failed in the 1990s. No longer a museum, the *Mohawk* was moved to Staten Island, and it is here that she appears in Peter Eagleton’s painting.

When *Mohawk* was found at a Staten Island scrap yard after rusting for fifteen years, the ship was towed to Miami, Florida for repairs and on to Key West, where she was berthed at the Truman Waterfront and became USS Mohawk CGC Memorial Museum. In 2012, the museum was reluctantly forced to either scrap Mohawk or sink her as an artificial reef due to a lack of funds necessary to recover her from her state of disrepair. It was ultimately decided that the most honorable fate was to give her a final duty serving as a veteran's memorial reef in lieu of the scrap yard, where she would have been melted down and sold.

2

PETER MAERSK

The *Peter Maersk* was a 1964 chemical/oil tanker operated by the Maersk Line, a Danish international shipping company. The ship's sky blue paint turns suddenly red at the ship's waterline; vessels are painted with antifouling bottom paint along the portions of the hull that are submerged to prevent the growth of marine life like barnacles. When a commercial ship is fully loaded with cargo, very little of the waterline shows above the surface; when the ship is empty and awaiting the next load, the waterline will stand much higher above the surface. Compare Eagleton's painting with a photograph of the empty *Peter Maersk* out of service in Sønderborg, Denmark.

3

STEVEN MCALLISTER

The tugboat *Steven McAllister* was built in 1949 for the Erie Railroad Company of Jersey City and originally named *Paterson*. She was renamed when she was later acquired by McAllister Brothers Towing Company of New York. In 2000, the *Steven McAllister* was intentionally sunk as part of the Shark River Reef, one of New Jersey's fourteen artificial reefs managed by the Division of Fish and Wildlife to create habitat for fish, shellfish, and crustaceans.

Eagleton portrays the rust and wear on *Steven McAllister*'s hull, indicating that the tug was likely out of service at the time this painting was completed. Although Eagleton's work is undated, the gray skies seem to foreshadow the tug's imminent and intentional demise.

4

TUGBOAT JUNCTION

In *Tugboat Junction*, Eagleton creates a tableau from the jumbled arrangement of tugboats at dock. The midship of a Moran Towing Company tugboat between the hulls of two unidentified tugs in the foreground creates a fascinating fragmentation of each of the three vessels. The reflection on the still surface of the water creates an illusion that the boats are multiplied, intensifying the feeling of a busy “junction.”

Moran Towing, in operation since 1860, is headquartered in New Canaan, Connecticut and provides towing services, bulk marine transportation, liquefied natural gas support operations, and environmental recovery services throughout the East and Gulf Coasts. The company’s vessels are easily identified by the large “M” printed on the tug boats’ stacks.

5

OUTWARD BOUND

Three large cargo vessels line the docks of New York Harbor while awaiting departure into international waters. Each ship sails under a different international flag, highlighting the Port of New York and New Jersey's importance as a center of global commerce: the *Anne Maersk*, blue vessel in the foreground, sails under the flag of Denmark, the *Rio Doce* sails under the flag of Brazil, and the *Fundacion* sails under the flag of Spain. In 2022, $271 billion worth of goods moved through the Port of New York and New Jersey, making it the largest port on the East Coast and the second largest port in the USA (just behind the Port of Los Angeles).

6

OLD CANAL TANKER

The Standard Oil Company of New York commissioned a fleet of oil tankers in the 1920s and 30s for service between East Coast ports and Great Lakes ports via the New York State Barge Canal. The vessel pictured here was constructed in 1924 as part of the fleet and originally named the *Amsterdam Socony*.

The New York State Barge Canal was the early-20th century improvement of the Erie, Oswego, Champlain, and Cayuga and Seneca Canals. The project enlarged the canal channel to accommodate self-powered vessels much larger than the original, mule-towed canal barges of the 19th century. The Barge Canal's route also took advantage of rivers (including the Mohawk, Oswego, Seneca, Genesee, and Clyde Rivers) that the original Erie Canal builders had avoided. Tankers like the one in Eagleton's painting transported oil from terminals in New York Harbor up the Hudson River to just north of Albany, west across the state of New York using the Barge Canal, and then throughout the Great Lakes.

The *Amsterdam Socony* was sold in 1950 to the Reinauer Transportation Company of Staten Island, New York, where she operated as the *JoAnne Reinauer*. In 1956, she was again sold, this time to the Poling Bros. Transportation Company, where she was renamed *Poling Bros. No. 8* as pictured here. She was decommissioned in 1996 at Mariners Harbor on Staten Island and was eventually scrapped sometime after 2000.

7

STATEN ISLAND STICKBOATS

Two tugboats rest against a “dolphin,” the name for the cluster of wooden pilings that rises above the surface of the water and can serve as berthing, mooring, or guiding for ships within ports. One of the tugs bears the name *George Frank*, a possible connection to the powerful and notorious Frank family who owned a network of marine transport companies in New York and New Jersey. The Franks’ companies specialized in hauling and processing waste, and they faced a series of charges and convictions for serious pollution throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Like many other marine transport companies, many of the Franks’ vessels were named for family members (for example, the *Peter Frank*, the *Lindsey Frank II*, and the *Sarah Frank*).

The Frank family was well known throughout the Port of New York and New Jersey. Evelyn Berman Frank inherited the family business from her father, who founded it in 1920, and for decades she commanded the family's tugboats and barges by shortwave radio from her Staten Island home. She earned the nickname “Dragon Lady” since her sharp tongue and short temper could be heard by anyone with a receiving radio who operated vessels on New York Harbor’s waterways. Evelyn Berman Frank’s daughter, Susan Frank, served as New York City's Commissioner of Ports and Terminals from 1983 to 1985.

Numerous charges and citations were brought against the Franks by federal and state regulators before the demise of their companies. In 1990, Evelyn Berman Frank pleaded guilty to illegal dumping of 500,000 gallons of sewage sludge. Charges brought against the family in 1993 included claims that their companies illegally disposed of sewage sludge and oil from barges and mishandled waste that included carcinogenic polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs). Finally, after one of the family’s oil barges ran aground and caused a spill in San Juan, Puerto Rico in January 1994, three firms owned by the Franks were convicted and heavily fined. All of the family’s marine transport companies ceased operations in the 1990s.

8

GRAVEL TOW OFF YONKERS

A tugboat pushing barges filled with gravel passes the prominent Palisades, the cliff formation along the western shore of the Hudson River in New Jersey and southern New York. “Bulk” cargo refers to goods that are shipped unpackaged and in large quantities, such as gravel, sand, charcoal, or iron ore, and contrasts with cargo that is packed into shipping containers.

Bulk cargo was historically shipped on the Hudson River by wind-powered sloops and schooners and aboard barges powered by steam-powered tows and tugs, all of which carried coal, bricks, bluestone, natural cement, and other goods. Today, bulk cargo like gravel is still frequently seen carried on barges up and down the Hudson River, with river ports such as Coeymans, south of Albany, specializing in the transfer of bulk materials.

9

RAILROAD BARGE AT EDGEWATER

A red railroad barge lies against a deteriorating wooden pier outside of Edgewater, New Jersey, located just south of the George Washington Bridge. This type of vessel is known as a “lighter,” a flat-bottomed barge that transfers goods between moored ships in the harbor and a railroad terminus on shore. There were as many as 1000 of these covered barges operating in New York Harbor by 1950, and they were referred to collectively as the “Railroad Navy” since most were owned by the railroad companies with terminals in the greater New York area.

Vessels like this one collected along Edgewater Flats, muddy shoals just north of the town, as waterfront industry declined in the second half of the 20th century. From 1994 through 1995, the Army Corps of Engineers engaged in a large project to clear more than 100 decommissioned and abandoned barges from the flats. Although the vessels may not have been operational, some were still used for a variety of purposes. The Knickerbocker Canoe Club, established in 1880, held monthly meetings aboard a steel barge on the flats and used two wooden barge hulks to store their gear. The New York Motorboat Club used two other barges nearby. Similarly, the barge pictured here has outlived its heyday as a working vessel, but smoke emanates from the chimney, indicating that someone still benefits from the warmth of the stove inside.

The huge majority of these barges were surrendered and scrapped when the Army Corps of Engineers ordered the users to either refloat or lose the vessels. Two prominent examples of covered railroad barges have survived into the 21st century: *Lehigh Valley No. 79* (1914), which now serves as the Waterfront Museum in Red Hook, Brooklyn, and the *Pennsylvania Railroad No. 399* (1942), privately owned here on the Rondout Creek in Kingston.

10

PEGASUS

The tug *Pegasus* was built in 1907 as the *Standard Oil Co. No. 16* and served waterside refineries and terminals of Standard Oil. When McAllister acquired her in 1953, her original steam engine was replaced with diesel. Pamela Hepburn of Hepburn Marine Incorporated bought her in 1987 to tow oil barges and railroad car-floats, along with other transport work, and it was then that she was renamed *Pegasus*. Retired in 1997 after a 90-year career, she underwent extensive restoration work to serve as a training vessel and museum, and it is from this time period (c. 2000) that she is depicted in Eagleton's painting. Although *Pegasus* was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2001 as part of a preservation initiative, she was unfortunately scrapped in 2021.

11

VULCAN III

A bright red tug, previously known as *Bethtug III*, travels through the icy winter waters of the Hudson River. Originally owned and operated by the Bethlehem Steel Corporation of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, she was used for jobs that required a smaller and more nimble vessel to navigate the labyrinth of tight reaches that characterized many harbors.

Much of the Bethlehem Steel Corporation's steel would go on to be used in large industrial and commercial construction projects, including the Chrysler Building, Empire State Building, and Madison Square Garden. Prominent bridges using Bethlehem steel include the George Washington Bridge and Verrazano-Narrows Bridge in New York City. It would be projects like those named above that put Bethlehem steel company on the map and earned it the status as one of the largest steel-producing and shipbuilding companies until its closure in 2003.

After being acquired by Derrick Marine Incorporated of Perth Amboy, New Jersey, this vessel was renamed the *Vulcan III*. In 1996, her captain Butch Kitchell described her as the "busiest tug in the Harbor." *Vulcan III* was ordinarily tasked with setting piles, putting in docks and fenders, or laying riprap on marine construction jobs for companies like New York Waterways, New York Water Taxi, and the U.S. Coast Guard.

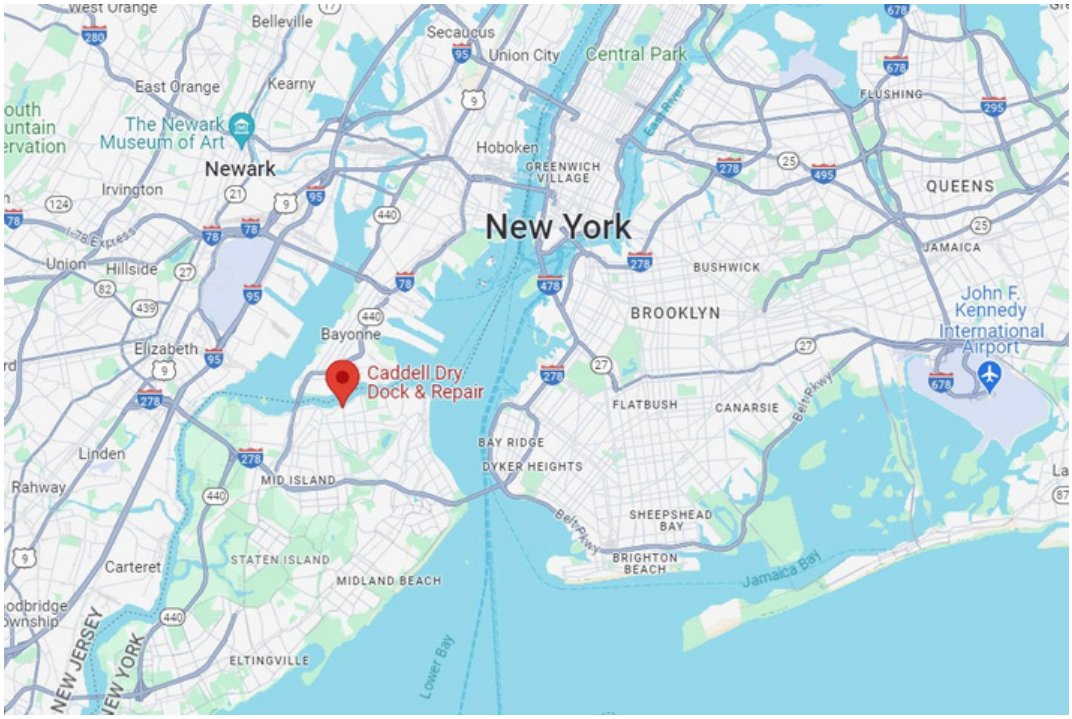
12

POLING BROTHERS NO. 8

This painting depicts the *Poling Bros. No. 8* from the stern, or from the back of the vessel. This vessel is the same as the one in Eagleton's *Old Canal Tanker*, where it is seen from the bow, or the front. The imposing perceived height of the vessel as viewed in *Old Canal Tanker* is much reduced in this depiction, and the rust and wear of the paint job appears more obvious. The tanker was "laid up," or taken out of service, in Staten Island in 1996, and scrapped in the years following 2000.

Poling-Cutler Marine Transportation Company's vessels are based out of the piers at Caddell Dry Dock and Repair Company on the north shore of Staten Island. One floating dry dock is visible in the background, waiting to take in the next vessel for repair and maintenance. Caddell services over 300 vessels annually.

LOCATION OF CADDELL DRY DOCK AND REPAIR COMPANY:



13

CORAL QUEEN

This oil tanker plied the waters of New York Harbor from 1920 until 2011. Built by the Bethlehem Shipbuilding Corporation of Staten Island, she originally operated as the *Buffalo Socony* for the Standard Oil Company. Over the following decades, she took on numerous names as she operated for various companies and finally acquired the name *Coral Queen* in 2003, when she was acquired by the Poling-Cutler Marine Transportation Company of Freehold, New Jersey.

14

RELIABLE II - LAID UP

Many of Eagleton's paintings raise the question of what happens to a ship after it has served its purpose as a working vessel. *Reliable II* enters into this conversation by portraying two ships "laid up," or taken out of service, in the waters of the Kill Van Kull, the tidal strait that separates Staten Island from Bayonne, New Jersey.
The boat on the left is the *Joseph F. Merrell*, a Staten Island Ferry boat that began its operations in 1951. The Merrell-class of ferry boats were steam-powered and were quickly outdated with the introduction of more powerful diesel engines. In 1987, the *Joseph F. Merrell* was taken out of ferry service and sent to Rikers Island as a temporary solution to alleviate the overpopulation of the prison while more prison facilities were being constructed. By 2003, she was purchased by a Bayonne company for scrap, brought to the waters of the Kill Van Kull, and placed alongside a pier.

The tanker *Reliable II*, built by the RTC Shipbuilding Company in Camden, New Jersey in 1943, is rafted up to the side of the Joseph F. Merrell. She was originally built as the *Geo. Whitlock II* for the Spentonbush Fuel Transport Service located in Brooklyn and eventually acquired by the Eklof Marine Corporation of Staten Island, New York where she was renamed to the *Reliable II*. She was taken out of service in 2004 because she is a "single-skinned" vessel, a ship whose hull has only one layer of steel in which to hold its cargo of oil. Single-hulled or "single-skinned" vessels began to be phased out after the passage of the Oil Pollution Act of 1990, which was in part a response to the tragic 1989 Exxon Valdez oil spill in the Prince Williams Sound, which was the largest marine oil spill in history at the time.

Both of these vessels were scrapped in 2005.

15

CHANGING OF THE GUARD

The rusty hull of a ship in dry dock sits stationary in the foreground while the bright orange Staten Island Ferry motors away in the background. Floating dry docks, like the one depicted here, submerge underwater when they are “ballasted,” or when their hollow steel walls are filled with water. A ship in need of repair below the waterline can then be brought into the submerged structure. The dry dock is subsequently “deballasted,” the water pumped out of its hollow steel walls so that the ship is raised out of the water for maintenance.

Ships can look a bit worse for wear when they first arrive in a dry dock, but by the time repairs have finished, they look as bright and new as the flashy colors on display on the Staten Island Ferry. When one vessel is finished, it’s time for work to begin on the next.